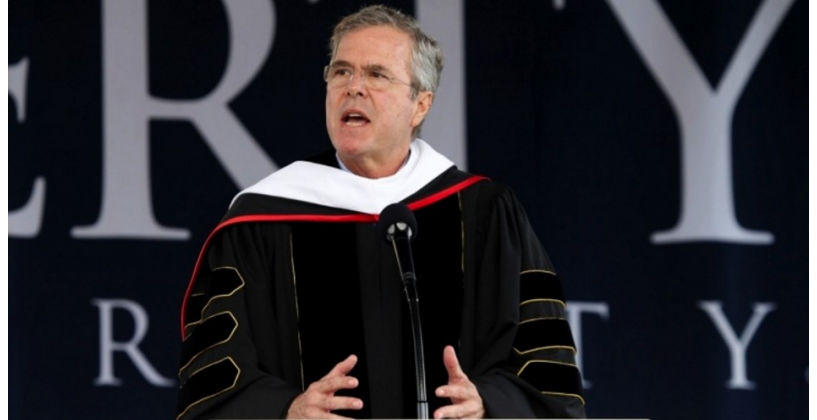




Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on May 12, 2015

Bush Mum on “Gay Rights” in His Defense of Religious Liberty

Jeb Bush (shown) offered an eloquent defense of Christianity under siege by a “progressive political agenda” in [the commencement address](#) he delivered Saturday at Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia. But the speech was at least as significant for what the former Florida governor and soon-to-be presidential candidate did not say as for the noble thoughts he expressed.



“Your generation is bringing the Christian voice to where it is always needed, and sometimes isn’t heard enough,” Bush told the graduating class at the conservative Baptist university. “So it is not only untrue, but also a little ungrateful, to dismiss the Christian faith as some obstacle to enlightened thought, some ancient, irrelevant creed wearing out its welcome in the modern world. Whether or not we acknowledge the source, Hebrew Scripture and the New Testament still provide the moral vocabulary we all use in America — and may it always be so.”

Citing notable 20th-century defenders of the Christian faith, Bush, a former Episcopalian who converted to the Catholic faith, quoted G.K. Chesterton (a Catholic), the Anglican C.S. Lewis, and Baptist civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr. in making the case for “moral principles that are knowable to reason as well as by faith.” He denied the “false narrative that casts religious Americans as intolerant scolds, running around trying to impose their views on everyone.”

“The stories vary, year after year, but the storyline is getting familiar,” Bush said. “The progressive political agenda is ready for its next great leap forward, and religious people or churches are getting in the way. Our friends on the Left like to view themselves as the agents of change and reform, and you and I are supposed to just get with the program.” Those who preach tolerance are often loath to practice it, he noted.

“So we find officials in a major city demanding that pastors turn over copies of their sermons. Or federal judges mistaking themselves for elected legislators, and imposing restrictions and rights that do not exist in the Constitution. Or an agency dictating to a Catholic charity, the Little Sisters of the Poor, what has to go in their health plan — and never mind objections of conscience.”

Describing a “choice between the Little Sisters of the Poor and Big Brother” government, Bush said, “I don’t know about you, but I’m betting that when it comes to doing the right and good thing, the Little Sisters of the Poor know better than the regulators at the Department of Health and Human Services.”

In describing the daily contributions men and women of faith make to the nation, Bush cited the numberless acts of charity that are such common occurrences that their immeasurable value is often overlooked and taken for granted.

Every day in the life of this nation, uncounted people are comforting the lonely, aiding the ill and discouraged, serving the weak and innocent, giving hope to the prisoner, and in every way they



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know, loving mercy and living with integrity. And all of that doesn't happen by chance either, or because anyone has ordered it, or because there's a federal program for it. The endless work of Christian charity in America is what free people do when they have good news to share. It's how free people live when they have a living faith. There are no blinders on the Christian conscience, try as the world might to make us look away from needs and wrongs, or make us too comfortable to care.

Yet there is at least one social wrong about which Bush appears to be wearing blinders of his own, if not in his Christian conscience then surely in his public utterances.

"I love those words," wrote Rod Dreher at [the American Conservative](#), but Bush "can't avoid forever the greatest threat to religious freedom in our present moment: the advance of gay rights. Even President Obama's solicitor general conceded in oral argument before the Supreme Court that the tax-exempt status of religious organizations that hold to Biblical (or Koranic) standards of sexual morality may well be at issue."

Indeed. Bush made no reference to the onslaught of "gay rights" in his discussion of threats to religious liberty, though perhaps one could, by stretching the point, find it between the lines in his reference to federal judges "imposing restrictions and rights that do not exist in the Constitution." He made no mention of the Christian bakers in Oregon facing a possible \$150,000 fine for refusing to bake a cake for a same-sex wedding because to do so would violate their Christian convictions. He was equally silent concerning the photographer in New Mexico found guilty of violating the state's public accommodation law in refusing to take pictures of a same-sex couple's commitment ceremony. The U.S. Supreme Court refused to hear the photographer's appeal.

Nor did Bush mention the tsunami of indignation that fell recently upon the governor and legislature of Indiana for enacting a religious-freedom law that would have protected the right of vendors to deny their services for same-sex weddings if doing so would impose a "substantial burden" on their religious freedom. The campaign against the law, including threats of boycotts, prompted the legislature and governor to effectively gut the law with a "clarifying" amendment.

Neither Jeb Bush nor any other Republican of note spoke up in defense of the Indiana law. Nor did they rally in support of similar legislation in Arizona last year. On the contrary, Republican leaders responded to the heated controversy over the Arizona measure by urging Republican Governor Jan Brewer to veto the bill, which she did.

"I know that Republican candidates get extremely squeamish when talking about anything to do with homosexuality," Dreher wrote, "but it is impossible to talk meaningfully about the politics of religious liberty without discussing the pink elephant in the room."

An [insightful article](#) in the *Christian Science Monitor* in January of this year raised the question of whether Bush is "evolving" on "gay rights" issues.

"Jeb Bush says he believes in 'traditional marriage,'" the *Monitor* noted. "But recent comments indicate a softening of his position on same-sex marriage, and the presidential team he's putting together includes prominent pro-gay-rights Republicans." Indeed the "evolution" appears to be progressing at a speed that might have amazed old Charles Darwin. In 2004, Governor Jeb Bush published an argument against "gay rights" legislation that could have been written by Pat Buchanan.

"The public policy question is whether homosexuals deserve special legal protection," Bush wrote in an op-ed appearing in the *Miami Herald*. "Or, to put it another way, should sodomy be elevated to the same



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constitutional status as race and religion? My answer is No. We have enough special categories, enough victims, without creating even more.” The Bush campaign today might like to “disappear” that article down a convenient memory hole.

“Gov. Bush believes that our society should have a culture of respect for all people, regardless of their differences, and that begins with preventing discrimination, including when it comes to sexual orientation,” according to a statement issued by Bush spokeswoman Kristy Campbell last December.

Bush may very well believe everything he said at Liberty University. But it is also clear that in choosing that venue and in making that speech, he was making a strong pitch for the evangelical Christian vote, especially in Iowa, where three out of every five Republicans participating in the Republican presidential caucuses in 2012 identified themselves as born-again or evangelical. But Bush is coming under fire from conservative talk-radio hosts for hiring top-level staffers who have voiced support for “gay rights,” Michael Bender [wrote](#) at Bloomberg.com.

“There has been a big red flag raised by a lot of conservatives that I associate with that a couple of staff he’s hired that just don’t disagree with our worldview, but have been very hostile to our worldview,” said Bob Vander Plaats, chief executive of the conservative Iowa Family Leader, told Bender. “It’s a bigger concern than he may realize at this time.”

Bush’s record as governor on social issues, particularly regarding the right to life, has been one that should appeal to religious conservatives. He signed into law one bill requiring parental notification when minors seek an abortion and another creating a “Choose Life” license plate to raise money for groups supporting pregnant women who choose not to have an abortion. He signed a ban on late-term abortions and sought legal protection for the unborn child of a woman raped in a state group home. He fought unsuccessfully to prevent the feeding tubes from being disconnected from Terri Schiavo at her husband’s request. He has earned the enmity of Planned Parenthood, a badge of honor to pro-life activists.

But his reluctance to confront the “gay rights” juggernaut brings to mind the Sherlock Holmes story of the dog that didn’t bark. Perhaps Bush has grown too friendly with “gay rights” advocates and too dependent on their support to sound the alarm about the threat they pose to those who reject the “progressive political agenda.”

Photo of Jeb Bush speaking at Liberty University: AP Images



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