

Love Thy Neighbor?

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Abstract

As the Hate Crimes amendment to the Defense Funding Authorization is being debated in the Senate, it's funny hearing some of the arguments coming from those opposed to allowing the additional protections to sexual orientation and gender identity. Many of the callers advocating for killing the Hate Crimes amendment have taken liberty of saying it [...]

Article

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Nothing in the Hate Crimes bill (S. 1105), nor the amendment to the defense-spending bill with the exact same wording, makes any notation of hate speech. Nothing.

Yet still, the callers and advocates - specifically from the conservative religious groups - continue to equate this with being locked up for speaking their minds! Literal calls to senate offices have beseeched senate offices to not let the bill pass, and "don't let them lock up my preacher."

Hearing these arguments, the terms "specious" and "exaggerated" come to mind, but those descriptions fall way short of accuracy. Even hyper-exaggerated is inadequate. Their arguments are nothing short of absolute fabrication, pathologically so.

There's always the perennial argument as well: protecting people who made choices to be gay, to be transgendered. At least that argument had validity, to an extent. We could choose to repress who we are. But then, why?

Religion itself is a choice. Back in the day, when Ronald Reagan railed about the "evil empire" - then known more commonly as the Soviet Union, or U.S.S.R. - religious citizens of all stripes were choosing to repress who they were. The government back then would come down on Soviet citizens who chose to express their faith openly. There were consequences for their choice. And we correctly considered that a travesty of human rights.

Indeed, people can choose to be religious or not, or even choose to change their religious faith. Why would any of the religious faithful speak with anyone outside of their own sect about their faith if it weren't, at some level, to hope to draw others to their own religion? That's choice, and America officially embraces that to the point of protecting those from being attacked for their choice. With

the multitudes of various denominations, people should have the right to choose and not be condemned for it.

So why are so many opposed to what they see as choice of a different kind. (Yes, I'm aware of the studies on gender identity and sexuality that have pointed to biological underpinnings - that's an article for another time. For the sake of argument let's just agree to "choice" now and continue.)

To say that religion, or "the churches" are opposing hate crime expansion is inaccurately broad. Many progressive and humanitarian denominations support it. To my knowledge, we haven't heard one religious denomination officially come out and categorically oppose expansion of hate crimes for sexual orientation and gender identity. They will officially state they don't approve of the lifestyle choices. But opposing laws deterring hate violence against these expanded communities, as a denomination is a step beyond the pale. It states that that religion tacitly approves of hate-borne violence against gays, transgenders, etc. because of their choice.

Ultimately, this opposition for hate crime protection on GLBT people it has less to do with religion and nothing to do with Christ-like spirituality. It has everything to do with individuals leading congregations, or those using religious affiliation out of convenience and taking liberty to speak representatively in their behalf.

As we've seen, it's a wonderful shield against reproach for these opportunists. Nobody cares to be seen as taking on a religion, which can easily be flipped into an assault on God. This built-in irreproachability gives them automatic advantage, something they never lose sight of.

It also allows these opportunists the ability to weigh in on and indirectly influence others' choices by encouraging or protecting punitive reaction against them. Their ultimate hope is to effectively end choices made which these self-appointed arbiters deem wrong. Once they successfully deny protections against gay or lesbian, bisexual or transgender Americans, what do they do for an encore?

One glaring omission from the current hate crimes bill is the homeless. Will these same folks speak out, railing against protecting these people who they feel made the wrong decisions in life? Will they feel the homeless have chose to be too slothful or incorrigible to be protected, and that free speech - or wielding bats as seen on TV in Florida - should be what is protected?

And how about religion, the other choice mentioned earlier? We live in what we advertise as a pluralistic society, and that all are free to worship howsoever. But does everyone agree with such open tolerance toward those who choose religions that may contradict our own scripture?

Just last week during Senate prayer, a Hindu priest provided the opening invocation. Shortly after beginning his prayer, jeering yells like "abomination," "there is only one true God," and "we are Christians and Patriots" came down from above. No - not from heaven but from the gallery of visitors over the Senate Floor. Christians upset with a Hindu prayer, upset with a man who made different religious choices than they.

If precedence is given to those who would implicitly oppose any stoppage of hate violence to those who made "choices" they didn't agree with, then where does this leave others whose choices they don't agree with. Even though religion is a category currently covered by hate crimes law, what about those

whose religion is deemed by the prevalent faith to be what they consider “making the wrong choice?” How long before they begin turning a blind eye toward violence against them?

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