

Donald Trump's Executive Order Regarding The Johnson Amendment

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Last Thursday, President Donald Trump signed an executive order (EO) that ostensibly relaxes enforcement of the Johnson Amendment--a 1954 amendment to the 501c3 Internal Revenue Code (IRC) that places churches under the regulations of non-profit organizations, thereby restricting their political speech and activity. For over sixty years, pastors and churches have labored under the threat of the loss of tax exemption should they run afoul of the 501c3 tax law. Trump said his EO is designed to give pastors and churches more liberty to exercise their freedom of speech without risking the wrath of the IRS. Obviously, it would take congressional action to actually remove or overturn the Johnson Amendment.

I personally think Trump's EO is a step in the right direction--as far as it goes.

Of course, obvious Republican shills such as Tony Perkins are gushing all over Donald Trump for his decision. Perkins said, "No longer will the IRS muzzle the speech of pastors and non-profit organizations and the Department of Justice will address the host of other anti-religious policies and actions launched by the previous administration by issuing guidelines for all federal agencies. The guidelines will ensure religious beliefs and actions are respected and protected."

"The open season on Christians and other people of faith is coming to a close in America"

Like too many Christians and conservatives, Perkins is just another toady for Trump--and a man consumed with the phony left/right paradigm. Republican presidents have been as culpable in the escalation of Big Government and the evisceration of constitutional government as Democrat presidents. And Trump himself has already committed many grave sins against the Constitution--sins to which Perkins is blind.

And predictable liberal lackeys were quick to denounce the decision. The ACLU put out this statement: "The actions taken today are a broadside to our country's long-standing commitment to the separation of church and state."

Of course, the ACLU version of the First Amendment is anathema to everything America was founded upon and to everything the First Amendment was intended to protect.

Most readers know that the phrase "separation of church and state" is contained in NO founding document: not the Declaration of Independence; not the Constitution; and not the Bill of Rights. The phrase is taken from a personal letter that Thomas Jefferson wrote to some Baptist folks in Danbury, Connecticut. The letter simply acknowledged the People's right to freedom of religion and that, under the U.S. Constitution, the state had no authority to abridge that right.

The religious freedom clause of the First Amendment states, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." In other words, there can be NO STATE CHURCH in America as there was in Great Britain and in several of the colonies in America previous to our War for Independence.

And actually, by putting churches under the 501c3 non-profit organization status, our country has come full circle. It is no hyperbole to say that 501c3 churches are, in fact, STATE CHURCHES. And it's getting worse.

Now, the Supreme Court is about to rule in favor of churches receiving tax dollars directly from the state. G.W. Bush started this with his "faith-based initiative" programs, whereby churches and religious organizations would receive funding from the government. And with the kind of scriptural and constitutional ignorance displayed in most churches today, pastors and church leaders were only too eager to stick out their hands to get a piece of the pie. The soon coming SCOTUS decision will serve to forever overturn the First Amendment and further place the church under the dominion of the state. Like I said, the country has come full circle.

Here is the story about the Supreme Court decision soon to come:

SCOTUS To Decide If Churches Can Receive Taxpayer Dollars

I will deal with this subject in more depth in a future column.

But many conservatives are quick to point out that Trump's EO is much ado about nothing.

"Today's executive order is woefully inadequate," writes the Heritage Foundation's Ryan Anderson at the Daily Signal.

The Heritage senior research fellow explains:

"In reality, what Trump issued today is rather weak. All it includes is general language about the importance of religious liberty, saying the executive branch 'will honor and enforce' existing laws and instructing the Department of Justice to 'issue guidance' on existing law; directives to the Department of the Treasury to be lenient in the enforcement of the Johnson Amendment; and directives to the secretaries of the Treasury, Labor, and Health and Human Services (HHS) to 'consider issuing amended regulations' to 'address conscience-based objections' to the HHS contraception mandate.

"But the federal government should be honoring and enforcing our religious liberty laws anyway . . ." (Source: Breitbart.com)

But this statement by a Virginia pastor is probably the most telling. After all, it comes from one who falls directly under the auspices of an IRS-created 501c3 non-profit organization:

"Daniel Glaze, senior pastor at Richmond, Virginia's River Road Church, told [Wall Street Journal writer Ian] Lovett:

"Practically speaking, churches with any diversity in the congregation need to stay away from this business--it's just dangerous to church fellowship. Building a church is hard enough these days. This is adding a whole 'nother can of worms."

See the report:

Will Johnson Amendment Repeal Put Politics In The Pulpit?

Yeah. This command of God to His prophets to "cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression" (Isaiah 58:1) is just adding another can of worms. The responsibility pastors have to "preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort" (II Timothy 4:2) is just adding another can of worms. And herein lies the REAL problem.

The REAL problem is most churches don't want to hear the truth; and most pastors don't want to tell the truth. The Johnson Amendment is just a convenient cover pastors and churches have to hide behind.

Let me ask you: How many of you noticed any extra boldness in your pastor to speak out on the issues last Sunday (the first Sunday following Trump's EO) than you did in all of the previous Sundays? I suspect for the vast majority of pastors and churches, there wasn't a bit of difference.

Here is what I said last Sunday in my pulpit regarding this matter:

Message Highlight - Pastors Use 501c3 Law To Cover Their Cowardice. Now What Will They Use?

I noted in this column three weeks ago that nearly 100 religious organizations--from Baptists to Catholics to Episcopalians to Hindus to Muslims to Jews--are coming together to urge Congress to NOT repeal the Johnson Amendment. In that column I said:

As soon as I heard Mr. Trump broach the idea of eliminating the Johnson Amendment, I KNEW that the biggest opposition to that idea would come from within the religious community itself. And it has. If the Johnson Amendment were eliminated, pastors would have no covering for their cowardice, so thousands of them are uniting with even pagan religions in an attempt to convince Congress to KEEP the Johnson Amendment intact.

I also said this:

Most pastors today are no more outside the political establishment than the political establishment itself. In fact, most pastors are PART of the political establishment. Most pulpits NEVER speak truth to power. Why? Because they are providing cover for the power elite via their silence. And nothing provides more incentive for this covert collaboration than

the non-profit organization tax status provided in the 501c3 section of the IRC put in place by the ultra-liberal senator (and later president), Lyndon Johnson.

See the column here:

Baptists And Muslims Are Uniting

REAL men of God would never surrender the content of their preaching to the IRS any more than they would to the mayor, city council, county commission, deacon board, trustee committee, denominational brass, or the church congregation itself. REAL men of God preach so as to please but one: GOD.

The famed minister and author A. W. Tozer (1897 - 1963) summarized the heart and soul of this matter by saying:

Again, the pastor, when facing his congregation on Sunday morning, dare not think of the effect his sermon may have on his job, his salary, or his future relation to the church. Let him but worry about tomorrow and he becomes a hireling and no true shepherd of the sheep. No man is a good preacher who is not willing to lay his future on the line every time he expounds the Word. He must let his job and his reputation ride on each and every sermon or he has no right to think that he stands in the prophetic tradition.

The bottom line is this: the Johnson Amendment is a horrific abridgment of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. And churches in 1954 and forward should have never accepted it. But they not only accepted it, they enthusiastically embraced it; and now many of them are fighting fiercely to retain it.

And for most churches, Donald Trump's EO will have ZERO impact on the pastor's preaching. Pastors not only shy away from taking a stand on Biblical Natural Law principles of liberty because they fear they might offend the IRS but they also shy away from taking a stand on Biblical Natural Law principles of liberty because they fear they might offend their own congregations.

So in the end, it doesn't come down to having Donald Trump in the White House; it comes down to having a REAL man of God and REAL people of God in the church house.

P.S. We continue to sell out of the fantastic book "Judaism's Strange Gods" by Christian scholar Michael Hoffman. We have ordered--and sold out of--shipment after shipment. But we have more books on the way, so I encourage you to order NOW before the supply runs out--AGAIN.

In "Judaism's Strange Gods," Christian scholar Michael Hoffman documents his provocative thesis that Judaism is not the religion of the Old Testament, but the newly formalized belief system of the Pharisees, which arose in Babylon with the commitment of the formerly oral "tradition of the elders" to writing, in the wake of the crucifixion of Israel's Messiah and the destruction of the Temple.

Basing his findings on authoritative Judaic sources, Hoffman demonstrates that Judaism is a man-made religion of tradition and superstition, which represents the institutionalized nullification of Biblical law and doctrine.

Liberating the reader from the accumulated shackles of decades of misinformation, this book shows that Judaism's god is not the God of Israel, but the strange gods of Talmud and Kabbalah, and the racial self-worship they inculcate.

Christian bookstores are packed with tomes purporting to unmask the religion of Islam, but not one slim volume will be found delving into the depravities of Orthodox Judaism. "Judaism's Strange Gods" corrects that imbalance with its fidelity to Biblical truth and the historic witness of the Church.

If you don't read any other book besides the Bible this year, read this book. It is must-reading! Plus, I sincerely believe that the understanding of the truths presented in this book is essential to freedom. I really do! And don't wait to order.