

Is there Religious Discrimination & Double Standards towards Conservative Christians in 21st Century America?

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“Discrimination against people of faith, particularly Christians, has become an epidemic in this country.”

— M. Staver, (founder of *Liberty Counsel*)

My research brief focuses on issues surrounding religious freedoms, double standards regarding our religious rights and whether or not Christians are being discriminated against in the United States. Why extend the analysis of everyday discrimination to a group not typically thought of as disadvantaged when 80% of Americans identify as part of the broad category label of “Christian” and an estimated one-third of Americans identify with several conservative Christian beliefs (Gallup, 2004, 2007; O’Keefe, 2005)? From a theoretical standpoint, casting a wider net to include understudied groups better enhances our understanding of prejudice and discrimination in general (Swim, Hyers, Cohen & Ferguson, 2001). Every religion is discriminated at some point and by different types of people, stations, races and cultures. Is it right for these types of discriminations to be upheld by our government in a country where our religious rights and beliefs are supposed to be protected by our constitutional freedoms?

The First Amendment in our Constitution states, *Our Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances* (Cornell University Law School, 2012), yet we see citizens, educational systems, and politicians trying to oppose the system. At present, House Minority Leader, Nancy Pelosi is trying to *“Amend the First Amendment”* (Jeffrey, 2012). Pelosi endorsed an announcement, made by other congressional Democrats April 18, 2012, to ratify the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution that would allow Congress to regulate political speech. Our Amendments were written by our founding fathers for a reason and if we start changing things to suit our own agendas it will most certainly result in our downfall as a nation. Abraham Lincoln stated that, “America will never be destroyed from the outside. If we

falter and lose our freedoms, it will be because we destroyed ourselves” (My Favorite Quotes Founding Fathers and Presidents, n.d.).

The conservative Christian perspective is increasingly at odds with what some see as an ever-secularizing, ever-liberalizing contemporary culture (Niebuhr, 1935, 1960; Wuthow, 2005). Fundamentalist Christian groups, people who believe in all aspects of the Bible, are stereotyped as being conservative, intolerant, ignorant, and culturally backwards (Bolce and De Maio 1999, 2008; Kerr 2003; Tuntiya 2005), yet if those who are discriminating against Christians for their religious beliefs and freedoms are conducting themselves in intolerant and ignorant ways, wouldn't that make them culturally backwards as well? Wouldn't we consider that a double standard? Why is it ok for one group to discriminate against another and get away with it just because they are statistically the minority? The answer is that it is not ok. We all have the right to our own opinions and expression of our faiths in America despite the opinions of others.

Individuals with anti-fundamentalist animosity are more likely to be highly educated and more politically progressive than the general population (Yancey, 2010). It is quite plausible that animosity directed at traditional Christian groups, such as fundamentalists, emerges from non-Christian groups that retain other characteristics associated with animosity toward out-groups (Yancey, 2010). Even though Yancey may be correct about non-Christian groups having animosity towards Christians, they are not the only groups that discriminate. In surrounding communities in my state we deal with religious discrimination from other religious groups. Dearborn MI, a city just outside of Detroit, holds the second densest Arab community outside of the Middle East (Zieve, 2007). The YouTube video, Islamic Bigotry against Christians: Christian Racism Rampant in Dearborn, MI (Campbell, 2011) tells the story of just one man's experience with anti-Christian animosity. The gentleman being interviewed came to this country with hopes and anticipation for a happy and successful life and was met with anger, hate and ridicule. Jobs were hard to come by because of his religion and his word was often disregarded for being a Christian. Not all Muslims in his community met him with disrespect and animosity, about 30% were friendly and unbiased, but he stated that the other 70% did.

In Juliet, Tennessee, the words 'God Bless the USA' and 'In God We Trust' were forced to be covered up on student-made posters in the hallway (NAACD: Conservative Christian Clashes, 2009). Administrators at Lakeview Elementary School in Mr. Juliet, Tenn., told parents that the posters, promoting the See You at the Pole student prayer event, mentioned 'God' and are therefore precluded by school board policy and prohibited in the always as inappropriate. 'Christian students shouldn't be censored for expressing their beliefs,' said ADF Senior Counsel Nate Kellum in a statement. 'It's ridiculous as well as unconstitutional to cover up these references to God and prayer—one of which is the national motto' (WorldNetDaily. 3/3/09) (NAACD: Conservative Christian Clashes, 2009).

The examples given above along with many others are substantial and in abundance. There are many groups and nonprofit organizations like American Center for Law & Justice (ACLJ), and National Alliance Against Christian Discrimination (NAACD) that are available to help educate, inform, and fight the ongoing battle of religious discrimination and deprivation for the right of free speech in America.

My beliefs are deeply rooted in these discussions and debates. Personally as a Christian I feel like our religious rights, freedoms and voices are being eliminated and it is a terrifying and very frustrating issue to reflect on. Anti-Christian bigotry, any type of bigotry is wrong. To lash out at someone verbally, politically, culturally, religiously or physically based on opposed differences is crossing the line. We were brought to this earth to be evangelists for God; not people who force our thoughts and opinions upon others against their free will. As a Christian you will not always think or believe the same as others, but we all must agree to disagree at some point and still maintain peace. All we can do is share our message with others. If they chose to listen and agree or not agree that is their God given right. No one has ever entered the kingdom of Heaven through force. The way I see it, it is our responsibility as children of Christ to press on and remain steadfast to our convictions never wavering from our stand to sustain and fight for what we believe to be just and true.

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(Direct link to YouTube video:

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