

Hate-crimes law infringes on 1st Amendment?

Group decries 'ethnic intimidation' charge against Philly Christians

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Note from Pastor Kevin Lea: It is becoming increasingly obvious that hate crime legislation is being passed with the specific intent to silence "fundamentalist" Christians.

I have written an article titled "Do we Worship the Same God" (<http://calvarypo.org/pages/hands/0054.htm>) which attempts to explain in a big picture way why this is so. How is it possible that the same judicial system that protects, in the name of free speech, the vile and filthy incitement to violence in much of today's music and porno industry can then turn around and arrest Christians quoting the Bible?

The answer is spiritual. We are at war with the lying forces of Satan. As salt and light we are to expose and tear down these lies. I have called the offices of Mark Cohen and Steven Mickol (mentioned below) and encourage you to do the same. I left a message encouraging them to repeal the hate crime law they supported since it has been used to remove the free speech rights of their citizens, something they promised would not occur when they were pushing for the law. I also mention that I am calling as a Washington State resident because their actions in Pennsylvania are being used to help draft legislation in Washington which will have the same effect. And if they repeal their bad law, it will help an equally bad law from being passed in our State.

A pro-family group in Pennsylvania is taking to task legislators who promised that adding "sexual orientation" to the state's hate-crimes law would not infringe upon the First Amendment rights of Christians. The American Family Association of Pennsylvania points to the arrest and charging of five Christian who evangelized at a Philadelphia homosexual event. One of the charges the protesters face is "ethnic intimidation," possible only because "sexual orientation" was added to the hate-crimes law in 2002.

As WorldNetDaily reported, on Oct. 10, a group of 11 Christians was

"preaching God's Word" to a crowd of people attending the Philadelphia "OutFest" event and displaying banners with biblical messages. After a confrontation with a group called the Pink Angels, described by protesters as "a militant mob of homosexuals," the Christians were arrested and spent a night in jail. Eight charges were filed: criminal conspiracy, possession of instruments of crime [bullhorns], reckless endangerment of another person, ethnic intimidation [saying homosexuality is a sin], riot [actually they are charged with inciting a riot, without a riot ever occurring, by reading from bible passages which state that homosexuality is a sin], failure to disperse, disorderly conduct and obstructing highways. None of the Pink Angels was cited or arrested.

After a preliminary hearing in December, Judge William Austin Meehan ordered four of the Christians to stand trial on three felony and five misdemeanor charges. If convicted, they could each get a maximum of 47 years in prison. One female teenage protester faces charges in the juvenile justice system. "Our prediction of the arrest of Christians under this law became true in October. We are now asking for an explanation from legislators who voted in favor of the bill. Secondly, for the protection of Pennsylvanians' free-speech rights, we are asking for a repeal of the law signed by Governor Mark Schweiker on Dec. 3, 2002," Diane Gramley, president of the pro-family group, said in a statement.

In November 2002, the Pennsylvania Legislature changed the hate-crimes law, adding "actual or perceived sexual orientation" and "gender or gender identity." AFA says legislators at the time assured concerned Pennsylvanians that the additions would not stifle the free-speech rights of Christians who criticize the homosexual lifestyle. At the time of the debate, legislators claimed the law would be used only in the case of physical harm.

Rep. Mark Cohen (717-787-4117 or 215-924-0895), a Democrat from Philadelphia County, state in 2002 said:



"Mr. Speaker, it seems to me that imaginations are running rather freely in this debate by opponents of this bill. This bill is not - is not - about calling names. This bill is about breaking bones and causing serious injury or death. This bill is not about what ministers or Sunday School teachers say. This bill is about what thugs, hooligans and murderers do. This bill is not

about jokes that are offensive or tasteless. This bill is about blood in the streets."

Referring to the charging of the Christians with ethnic intimidation, AFA now shoots back: "Where are the thugs, hooligans and murders? Where is the blood on the streets of Philadelphia?"

Another supporter of the bill during debate, Rep. Steven Nickol (717-633-1721 or 717-783-8898), a York County Republican, said,



"So I think it pretty well speaks to the fact that what we are doing here is not outlawing fighting words or outlawing ethnic slurs or doing anything of that nature. What we are dealing with here are actual crimes committed against someone, not words."

Commented Gramley: "[The protesters] were simply exercising their First Amendment rights. The only way to restore the freedom of speech for all Pennsylvanians is to repeal the hate-crimes law that was passed in November 2002. The assurances of those in favor of its passage have proven to be empty promises."

The Philadelphia Christians face an arraignment and bail hearing next week.

Heb 13:3 Remember the prisoners as if chained with them-- those who are mistreated-- since you yourselves are in the body also.