

Religious Liberty: Our First Freedom

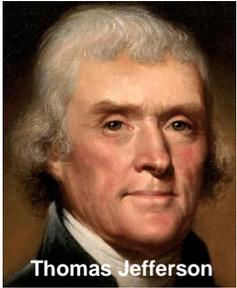
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“Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free”
Galatians 5:1a NKJV

America’s Founders considered religious liberty our “first freedom.” In their view, it was the foundation for all other freedoms. They understood that our freedom to believe and live according to those beliefs was vital to full participation as a citizen. A person whose religious faith is repressed might never become a loyal citizen, since the government is usurping his or her first allegiance to God, thus depriving the primary, or first freedom.

Thomas Jefferson drafted the Statute on Religious Freedom, which was enacted by the Virginia legislature on January 16, 1786. Among other things, the law protected the civil rights of people to express their religious beliefs without suffering discrimination. Members of the first Federal Congress, who drafted the Bill of Rights in 1789, built on Jefferson’s Statute (and George Mason’s Virginia Declaration of Rights in 1776) in establishing the First Amendment’s guarantee of religious freedom:



“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.”

Today, our first freedom is as precious as ever to most Americans. It is also under fierce assault. From wedding vendors and T-shirt makers to public servants and educators, people are seeing their religious freedom eroded at a frightening pace. More and more Americans are realizing that if we don’t use our freedom to defend our freedom, we may lose our freedom.



One way we can do this is to ask President Trump to sign an Executive Order reaffirming our First Freedom – the freedom to believe and live according to those beliefs. Soon after the Inauguration, a draft circulated but it was shelved. Recently, talk of an Executive Order on Religious Liberty has been revived. It is time to let our voices be heard. It is time to stand firm in our liberty!

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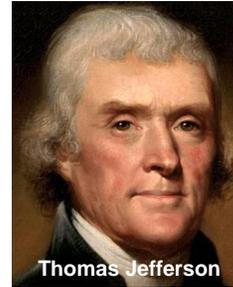
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**RELIGIOUS LIBERTY:
APPLICATION POINTS**
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1. Pray for Religious Freedom to be valued in Public Life:

Scripture commands that we are to pray for those in authority (1 Tim. 2:1-4). Ask God to help our leaders see that religious freedom is an unalienable right, a right that does not have to be forfeited when believers conduct business, engage in public speech, serve in office or teach in public schools. Pray for our leaders.

2. Promote Religious Freedom in your Community: We have a new pamphlet you can either download or order, titled: “Religious Liberty: An Introduction to Our Freedom to Believe” by Travis Weber, Director of FRC’s Center for Religious Liberty. It is a practical primer on Religious Liberty and its erosion in public life, answering such questions as: 1) what we mean by religious liberty, 2) who is affected, 3) why this is happening, 4) why you should care, and 5) what you can do about it. Use it to make the argument.

3. Prompt the President and Congress to protect Religious Freedom:

During the campaign, Donald Trump spoke about the need to remove the IRS muzzle on ministers by repealing the Johnson Amendment. Members of the House and Senate are sponsoring the Free Speech Fairness Act, which proposes to amend the Johnson amendment to allow non-profits (i.e., Pastors and Churches) to engage in limited political speech and activities. In addition, people need explicit and absolute protections from government discrimination in the context of their religious belief that marriage is the union of one man and one woman. We expect to see the federal First Amendment Defense Act introduced again soon, and Mississippi has codified and other states have introduced a Government Non-Discrimination Act or similar legislation to protect people like Fire Chief Kelvin Cochran, Dr. Eric Walsh, and Magistrate Judge Ruth Neely from government discrimination. Contact your elected representatives and urge them to support religious freedom legislation. Call (202) 224-3121 for your U.S. Representative and Senators or visit www.FRC.org, then click on Contact Officials.

In the meantime, there is a great need for President Trump to issue an Executive Order on Religious Liberty. Please contact the president through the Whitehouse’s “Get In Touch” page: www.whitehouse.gov/contact or use the Comment Line: 202-456-1111. Sign our petition at www.FRC.org/freedomEO. Let President Trump know how important this issue is to you and ask him to issue an Executive Order protecting religious liberty.

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