

Roots in Ripon

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Chuck Roots

19 June 2017

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Religious Liberty Rescued

Amidst all the hullabaloo over collusions with the Russians, a disgraced former FBI director, illegal immigration wars, ad nauseam, there are some really great things taking place in the first five months of the Trump Administration.

This is especially true for people of all faiths, but specifically Christians. Ever since the Johnson Amendment of 1954 (during the Eisenhower Administration) pastors, preachers and ministers have effectively had their hands tied, so to speak, when it came to discussing or preaching a particular viewpoint from the pulpit that may be construed as political influence. Then Senator Lyndon Baines Johnson (LBJ) of Texas introduced a bill into Congress that would make a provision in the U.S. Tax Code prohibiting "*all 501(c)(3) non-profit organizations from endorsing or opposing political candidates.*" These organizations "*range from charitable foundations to universities and churches.*"

Republicans and Conservatives for the past two decades have been working to overturn the Johnson Amendment. The good news is that President Trump has taken the first steps to reverse this law.

It has been disheartening for the last sixty-three years to see those who have been entrusted with proclaiming Jesus as the Savior in our churches silenced when it comes to speaking on what could be considered political issues and political candidates. Far too many ministers knuckled under to this law. Others ignored the law, realizing the IRS could remove their tax-exempt status if found guilty of violating the Johnson Amendment.

One of President Trump's campaign promises was to reverse the Johnson Amendment. "*We will not allow people of faith to be targeted, bullied or silenced anymore,*" the president declared. In an article in *Decision Magazine*, June 2017, Reverend Franklin Graham, director of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, (BGEA) wrote about the president signing an executive order to help protect our religious freedoms in a Rose Garden ceremony. Hallelujah!

Graham elaborates, "*The executive order counters the chilling effect on the speech of churches and charities. The president wants to protect the freedom of pastors and church leaders to address political issues and candidates.*" Graham added this important caveat, "*The order is also designed to help protect organizations from being forced to include abortion-inducing drugs in their health-care plans.*" You may recall the brouhaha over the Little Sisters of the Poor, a

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Catholic order of religious women who care for the elderly poor, being forced by the United States government to provide abortion services in their health-care plan. This all began in 2013, finding its way to the United States Supreme Court. The Little Sisters' case was eventually won three years later. President Trump signed his executive order just last May. In the order, he directed HHS (Health & Human Services) Secretary Tom Price "to protect the Little Sisters of the Poor and other religious ministries from the HHS Mandate." Price said that the HHS "will be taking action in short order." The executive order nullifies the HHS Mandate, stating that other federal agencies "must end their unnecessary legal fights against the Little Sisters and other ministries in courts around the country."

There is still much to do in reversing so much anti-religious laws and policies that have been allowed to become part of our national condition. One group that has been having its way against people of faith is the LGBTQ (Lesbian, Bisexual, Gay, Transgender, Queer) folks who intentionally target businesses owned and operated by people of faith, specifically Christians.

Another business owned and operated by a Christian came under attack from the LGBTQ. This was Chick-fil-A, the very popular fast-food fried chicken chain. In comments opposing same-sex marriage made by the COO (Chief Operating Officer) for Chick-fil-A, protests were staged attempting to force Chick-fil-A to change their tune or close their business. There was a huge reaction in support of Chick-fil-A, which effectively ended the protests.

It's this sort of bullying that has evoked the need for political action on the part of the president. As a nation, our core beliefs as Americans came directly from the Bible. Those beliefs were then modified into our system of laws, not the least of which is the Declaration of Independence (1776), the Constitution of the United States (1787), and the Bill of Rights (1791). If we choose to stray from these beliefs, we do so at our own personal and national peril.

For now, we have a president who is in strong support of protecting our religious freedoms by passing legislation to secure, once again, those freedoms which for a time had been lost to us.

May there ever be American patriots who burn with such moral rectitude and courage as to forever stand for the right. This I believe will always bring about God's willingness to bless America.