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"General diffusion of Christian knowledge hath a natural tendency to correct the morals of men, restrain their vices, and preserve the peace of society."
Patrick Henry

Court Rules in Favor of Religious Liberty for Wedding Videographers

The 8th Circuit Court of Appeals has ruled in favor of the religious liberty of wedding videographers who want to create wedding videos that celebrate marriage between a man and a woman. Carl and Angel Larsen state on their website that their business, Telescope Media Group, "exists to glorify God through top-quality media production." They develop videos or short films for a variety of events, and do not discriminate in who they work with when offering their services. In following their mission, they graciously decline projects that they believe would cause them to "contradict biblical truth; promote sexual immorality; support the destruction of unborn children; promote racism or racial division; incite violence; degrade women; or promote any conception of marriage other than as a lifelong institution between one man and one woman." When they decided to expand that business to include wedding videos, their goal was to create videos which celebrate the "sacrificial covenant between one man and one woman." However, the state of Minnesota informed them that, due to the Minnesota Human Rights Act, they would have to agree to create videos for same-sex couples, and that the videos for opposite-sex weddings and same-sex weddings would have to be presented in an "equally 'positive' light." Failure to comply would result in heavy fines or jailtime. Represented by Alliance Defending Freedom, the Larsens filed suit against the state, claiming their First Amendment rights were being violated. After the district court sided with the state, the 8th Circuit Court of Appeals then took up the case. The court found that, as the Larsens create their videos to tell a story or convey a message, "the videos themselves are, in a word, speech." In the majority opinion, Judge David Stras explained, "Even antidiscrimination laws, as critically important as they are must yield to the Constitution. And as compelling as the interest in preventing discriminatory conduct may be, speech is treated differently under the First Amendment." He further stated, "Regulating speech because it is discriminatory or offensive is not a compelling state interest, however hurtful the speech may be. It is a 'bedrock principle . . . that the government may not prohibit the expression of an idea simply because society finds the idea itself offensive or disagreeable.'" Judge Jane L. Kelly offered a dissent to the ruling, charging that the allowance for the Larsens would create a slippery slope that would lead to more discrimination of minority groups. However, National Review writer David French points out that, rather than creating more instances of discrimination, "it will protect a small minority of creative professionals who *do not discriminate* against any member of any protected class from being conscripted into saying things they do not believe." In celebrating the victory for religious liberty, Alliance Defending Freedom pointed out the importance of this case to all Americans: "If the government can force the Larsens to express messages that violate their beliefs, what's to stop it from forcing you to violate your beliefs? On the other hand, if the Larsens are free to live and work according to their beliefs, that guarantees your freedom to do the same."

National Education Association Announces Support for Abortion

During its summer convention, the National Education Association (NEA) passed a slew of radical new business items, including one that recognizes abortion as a fundamental human right. According to Business Item 56, "The NEA vigorously opposes all attacks on the right to choose and stands on the fundamental right to abortion under Roe v. Wade." This is a shift in rhetoric from the nation's largest teachers' union, that previously shied away from overtly pro-abortion rhetoric. Business Item 56 passed despite opposition from some assembly members who argued that taking a stand on such a controversial issue was divisive and had little to do with educating children. Indeed, the NEA even voted down Business Item 2, which states that "the National Education Association will re-dedicate itself to the pursuit of increased student learning . . . by putting a renewed emphasis on quality education." To accomplish this mission, NEA would approach every decision with the question, "How does the proposed action promote the development of students as lifelong reflective learners?" While the NEA defeated a proposal to refocus on the basics of teaching, they did approve other causes related to current societal issues. These included Business Item 11, which initiates a program to combat racism through trainings on "white fragility," and Business Item A, which declares the NEA's commitment to ending Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids and pledges to "partner with immigrant rights' organizations" to end the criminalization of illegal immigrants.

Christian Mission Sued for Not Hiring Gay Lawyer

In *Woods v. Seattle's Union Gospel Mission*, a Christian nonprofit organization is forced to defend its constitutional right to employ people based on their commitment to the organization's religious beliefs and mission. As one of Seattle's oldest and most respected charitable organizations, the Union Gospel Mission seeks to lead people to Jesus Christ through physical ministry to the downtrodden in a city rife with drug addiction and homelessness. When Matthew Woods applied for a full-time position as a staff lawyer at the Mission, he disclosed that he was in a homosexual relationship. The Mission, which requires its employees to abide by the Bible's teachings regarding marriage and sexuality, decided not to employ Woods. Washington state law protects religious nonprofits from nondiscrimination laws, and the Washington state constitution guarantees "absolute freedom of conscience." Additionally, Supreme Court precedent condemns actions by the government to parse which actions performed by a religious entity are religious and which are secular as an unconstitutional entanglement of the state in matters of religion. Nevertheless, Woods is arguing that the staff lawyer position is not religious in nature, and that he was unlawfully denied a job based on his sexuality. Woods has since accepted another job and stated that he does not seek monetary benefit from the case, but he hopes to use the force of the state to change Mission's policy. The AACS has joined an amicus brief in support of the Mission in this important religious liberty case.

In Case You Missed It:

Weekly Market Update provided by Jeff Beach of the AACS Investment Team at Merrill Lynch

College Board Nixes Plan for 'Adversity Score'

VA Lifts Ban on Bibles in Move to Support Religious Liberty

Judge Blocks Missouri Law Banning Abortions on Babies with Beating Heart

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