

Big-city bigotry arrives at Bozeman High School

By Matthew Monforton Guest columnist Bozeman Daily Chronicle. Nov. 19, 2019

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See two previous articles in the Bozeman paper as lead-ups to this [here](#) and [here](#).

Philadelphia Archbishop Charles Chaput once observed that “evil preaches tolerance until it is dominant, then it tries to silence good,” something Bozeman High School students in the Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA) are learning. The school superintendent ordered them last week to (1) change their group's name and disaffiliate from the FCA's national organization or (2) be demoted to an “unofficial” club.

FCA's statement of faith supposedly prompted this ultimatum. The statement declares, as the Bible does, that God ordained marriage to be between one man and one woman – a belief once shared by President Barack Obama and enshrined in the Montana Constitution. It also declares, as the Bible does, that homosexuality and fornication are sins.

As reported by NBCMontana, “The school district found the local club did not have any instances of discrimination against LGBTQ students, but it did see a problem with the umbrella organization's published statement of faith.”

In other words, FCA students didn't actually do anything discriminatory. Their activities have been open to all students, including gays and lesbians, ever since the clubs started in Montana high schools in the early 1970s.

But tolerance is no longer enough. Now, wrong religious expressions warrant sanctions. According to a report in the Bozeman Daily Chronicle, these would include FCA's announcements being banned from the school intercom and "its flyers posted around school would carry stickers labeling it as an unofficial organization."

Those labeling stickers might as well contain yellow crosses, lest anyone miss the point. Of course, it might be awkward for school authorities to allow the flyers near the European History classroom – where students learn about another religious group once labeled with yellow stars.

Obviously, none of this is legal. Congress outlawed discrimination against student religious clubs by enacting the Equal Access Act in 1984. A century earlier Congress enacted the Civil Rights Act of 1871. Both acts recognize that the most toxic effects of state-sponsored bigotry, whether based upon race or religion or creed or color, are not always physical. After all, the back seats of the bus carry passengers to Montgomery just as quickly as the front seats do. And the iPhones every high schooler seems to tote enable FCA students to Instagram other classmates when denied access to the school intercom.

But the ability of targets to endure government discrimination doesn't cure the stigma it causes, which is why the law prohibits it.

Bozeman is not only imposing government-based religious discrimination but demanding FCA students acquiesce to it. Doing so would legitimize the slander that the Gospel promotes oppression rather than hope for those ensnared by the LGBTQ movement. That's why FCA students will stand their ground despite the disdain of nearly all of Bozeman High School's faculty. And despite the apathy of Montana pastors who, as usual, stand silent as yet another group of their congregants are targeted by authorities.

Religious bigotry is not native to Montana, nor are its perpetrators. Many are from Seattle, San Francisco and other West Coast metropolitan wastelands that they created, then abandoned, and are now trying to

recreate here. They've chosen Bozeman for the same reason activists here recently demanded a "non-discrimination" ordinance targeting Christian businesses. Bozeman has become their beachhead thanks to a decades-long influx of out-of-state liberals – one that has transformed Gallatin into one of four Montana counties won by Hillary Clinton in 2016 in a state Donald Trump carried by 20 points. If they succeed here, they'll try elsewhere in Montana.

Three centuries ago we might have done what Roger Williams did when the Massachusetts Bay Colony persecuted him for spreading "erroneous" and "dangerous opinions:" pick up stakes and head south.

We're not going anywhere, however. That's partly because there are no more unsettled Rhode Islands offering religious sanctuary.

But it's mostly because we're right and they're wrong – both legally and morally. And because we were here before them. And because, beyond Bozeman's city limits, there are a lot more of us in Montana than there are of them.

Montana welcomes anyone willing to work hard and respect others. But those who've moved here seeking to shut down faith groups that have been around for decades should keep on moving. Because we're not letting them Seattleize our state, or silence our kids.

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