

Destroying Religious Freedom for Everyone
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Christians in Rutherford County, Tennessee, have battled for two years against the construction and opening of the Murfreesboro mosque. Not only are the “Christian” actions in Rutherford County unconstitutional, they are short-sighted. If they succeed in changing religious liberty protections for Muslims, they change them for everyone. They are sowing the wind, blithely unaware that when it is time to harvest, all people of faith will reap the whirlwind.

So far, issues have included county zoning laws, whether Islam can actually be defined as a religion (rather than as a political system), and most lately, protesting requests for accommodations for Muslim students to pray in public schools. Locals are concerned about a concept called “stealth jihad,” by which Muslims take over the culture by sheer weight of numbers, and they want to fight to keep the county Christian.

The activists have correctly identified some concerns. Islam is dangerous to the world because it is a political system as well as a religion, and thus claims absolute authority where it takes control. Stealth jihad, if defined as the effort to bring Shariah law to the West, is well documented as a problem in countries like Great Britain, where the political Islamic movement is a few years ahead of the United States.

Unfortunately, the attacks by Christian activists make sense only in a paradigm where it would be desirable or possible to impose a majority Christian religious view—in short, wedding Christianity to politics in a mirror image of Islam. First, this would not be desirable. When Christianity as a religion was an expression of the state, the West also had extensive religious violence, such as the Thirty Years War and Cromwell’s revolution. The great Western and primarily American experiment of separating the two has led to a vibrant Church and more religious freedom than the world has ever known.

Second, if it was ever possible to impose a majority Christian view, it is not now. In fact, committed Christians need to be clear that many secularists view them in exactly the same way they view Muslims—as wacky and potentially dangerous radicals. Of course, that view is completely illogical if you compare the worldwide activities of the heroes of the respective faiths. Mother Theresa was as radical as Osama bin Laden, but in a way as divergent as heaven and hell. But this view currently has strong mythic power, at least in the mainstream media, and must be taken into account.

Currently, Christians are fighting religious liberty battles all over the country. Many of these battles are precisely the kind surrounding the Murfreesboro mosque. They include zoning issues around the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act, how religion and freedom to practice it are defined, and whether students can meet and pray in public schools. If this group successfully sows the wind, all of us will reap the whirlwind in form of religious persecution.

The Becket Fund understands this, which is why it is defending the Murfreesboro Muslims. People of faith need to stand together and protect religious liberty. And what about relationships between Christians and Muslims? Precedent establishes that. Be kind to the stranger in your midst. Love your Muslim brothers and sisters. If they are interested, tell them about Jesus. You're allowed to do that here in America, where we have this wonderful concept called freedom of religion.