

Testimony in Favor of the Ohio Pastor Protection Bill

Fr. Boniface Endorf, OP

2/8/17

Chairman Ginter, Vice Chair Conditt and ranking member Boyd, thank you for the opportunity to address you in committee today.

As Americans we rightly celebrate the many freedoms our country protects. Central to this freedom is our individual right to answer the ultimate questions of life, to have the freedom of conscience to determine by our own lights the meaning of life and the deepest truths of our existence. In the United States, the state does not compel us to believe a specific state ideology or religious position. That is why the American colonies were filled with those seeking conscience rights—those fleeing state churches that compelled specific answers to ultimate questions. In America we have always welcomed a diversity of opinions concerning these ultimate questions and we have successfully managed to live out that diversity together.

This freedom takes vigilance and determination. We must constantly strive to protect the fundamental dignity of people to answer these ultimate questions by their own conscience. There always exists a risk of compelling free citizens to believe whatever is ascendant in popular opinion. Our system of government affords minorities many protections that embody the constant need to protect minorities from what politically powerful factions demand. These protections are essential to our basic freedoms.

What marriage means has become a major issue in American politics. This issue is about more than just marriage: it contrasts whole world-views. Marriage touches upon the most intimate elements of our humanity and concerns what it is to be human and what it is to flourish. Many Christians believe that our humanity is revealed most clearly through God's revelation, in the Bible. We base our answers to the ultimate questions on what we believe that God has revealed to us, and upon a view of natural law rooted in traditional Western philosophy. These beliefs formed the basis of Western thought for thousands of years. However, they are no longer politically popular beliefs. The issue here is whether an American has the right to believe what all the Founders of this nation believed about marriage and the human condition, or not.

This bill protects pastors and churches who hold to what the West has believed from time immemorial. It protects a diversity of opinions about ultimate questions, and protects those in a

politically minority position. The risk to our freedoms is not that certain beliefs will be explicitly outlawed, but that those who hold those beliefs will suffer legal coercion to change their beliefs to match that of the politically strong. A society that allows people to believe a position only so long as they act as if they believed something else is not a free society. To say that people can believe what they will about marriage, but they must participate in marriages contrary to their conscience, is to say that one is free only so long as one is willing to be a hypocrite.

The Pastor Protection Bill is a safeguard to the freedoms America stands for. It protects pastors and churches from being coerced by the politically and financially powerful. If a pastor or church can be sued for acting according to its own religious beliefs, then those who disagree can use lawsuits to pressure churches into not exercising their own freedoms. They can use the courts to suppress the very freedoms on which this country was founded on. Beliefs held by all the Founders of this nation would be grounds for endless lawsuits if a pastor is so bold as to believe that in America he has the right to act on sincerely held religious beliefs. Safeguarding freedom always takes diligence and determination. This bill is one way that we can ensure that America remains truly free.

Thank you for your consideration.