

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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November 10, 2022

SENT VIA EMAIL & U.S. MAIL: governoroffice@iq.ok.gov

The Honorable J. Kevin Stitt
Governor
State of Oklahoma
Oklahoma State Capitol
2300 N. Lincoln Blvd.
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73105

Re: Shocking and Inappropriate Christian Nationalist Prayer

Dear Governor Stitt:

We are writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) to object to your disturbing victory prayer advocating for Christian nationalism by claiming “every square inch . . . in the name of Jesus.” FFRF is a national nonprofit association with almost 40,000 members across the country, including many members in Oklahoma. FFRF protects the constitutional separation between state and church and educates about nontheism.

In a prayer rife with Christian nationalist rhetoric delivered after your re-election, you “claimed” Oklahoma for God:¹

Father, we just claim Oklahoma for you. Every square inch, we claim it for you in the name of Jesus. Father, we can do nothing apart from you. We don't battle against flesh and blood but against principalities and darkness.

And father, we just come against that, we just loose your will over our state right now in the name of Jesus. We just thank you and we claim Oklahoma for you as the authority that I have as governor and the spiritual authority and the physical authority that you give me.

I claim Oklahoma for you that we will be a light to our country and to the world. We thank you that your will was done on Tuesday and father, that you will have your way with our state, with our education system, with everything within the walls behind me.

Lord, we pray that you will root out corruption and bring the right people into this building.

Our nation is founded on a godless Constitution, whose only references to religion in government are exclusionary, such as “no religious test shall ever be required” for public

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wykVWdHXfdM>

office. U.S. Const. art. VI. The United States was the first nation to adopt a secular constitution, investing sovereignty in “We the People,” not a divine entity. In our nation, citizens can be any religion they like or none at all. Non-Christians and non-believers are not second-class citizens and our government and its representatives may not take sides on religious matters.

Notably, there was no prayer during the acrimonious, four-month-long constitutional convention that adopted our godless constitution, which shows intent. The Framers of the U.S. Constitution were aware of the centuries of warfare, schisms, bloodshed and persecution in the Old Countries where church and state (or church and monarch) were united, and of the continuing persecution and strife in most of the original colonies that established religion. Wanting no part of this, they purposefully and deliberately adopted the first secular constitution in history, a constitution that, because of that foresight, lives on to this day and has served our country so well.

Contrary to your prayer, the United States of America was *not* founded as a Christian nation. Rather, it was founded on Enlightenment values that often run directly counter to the religious values Christian nationalists claim.² It is the esteem in which we hold the principles of reason and equality that allows us to live in a peaceful society with people of all different walks of life united as Americans, not the ossified dogmatism stemming from the bible or the church.

The First Amendment of the Bill of Rights to our secular Constitution wisely prohibits the kind of Christian theocracy you are promoting. The Supreme Court has long held that the Establishment Clause “mandates government neutrality between religion and religion, and between religion and nonreligion.” *McCreary Cty., Ky. v. Am. Civil Liberties Union of Ky.*, 545 U.S. 844, 860 (2005); *Wallace v. Jaffree*, 472 U.S. 38, 53 (1985); *Epperson v. Ark.*, 393 U.S. 97, 104 (1968); *Everson v. Bd. of Educ. of Ewing*, 330 U.S. 1, 15–16 (1947). The Supreme Court has also stated, “If there is any fixed star in our constitutional constellation, it is that **no official, high or petty, can prescribe what shall be orthodox in politics, nationalism, religion, or other matters of opinion . . .**” *West Virginia Board of Education v. Barnette*, 319 U.S. 624, 642 (1943) (emphasis added). As an elected representative of the people, you violate both constitutional mandates when you suggest that you have “claimed” the state for the Christian God, an implication that Christians are favored over non-Christians and the non-religious in Oklahoma.

This wise separation between religion and government embodied in the Establishment Clause has largely protected the United States from the religious slaughter and persecution rife around the world and historically whenever the government and religion are aligned:

“There is no such source and cause of strife, quarrel, fights, malignant opposition, persecution, and war, and all evil in the state, as religion. Let it once enter our civil affairs, our government would soon be destroyed. Let it once enter our common schools, they would be destroyed.” *State ex rel. Weiss v. Dist. Bd. of Sch. Dist. No. 8 of City of Edgerton*, 76 Wis. 177, 44 N.W. 967, 981 (1890).

² See generally ANDREW SEIDEL, THE FOUNDING MYTH: WHY CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM IS UN-AMERICAN (2019).

As governor, your duty is to support the Constitution and protect the right of Oklahomans to free exercise of religion, not to promote your personal religious views, much less a Christian theocracy. Your continued promotion of Christianity is insulting and exclusionary to non-religious and non-Christian citizens. Nonreligious Americans overall make up the fastest-growing segment of the U.S. population by religious identification and almost 30 percent of adult Americans today are nonreligious.³ In Oklahoma, 18 percent are unaffiliated with religion and another two percent belong to non-Christian faiths.⁴ When you claim “every square inch” of your for Jesus, you turn Oklahoma nonbelievers and non-Christians into second-class citizens — and that is not OK.

Your prayer and implication that America is a Christian nation made up only of Christians “sends the ancillary message to . . . nonadherents ‘that they are outsiders, not full members of the political community, and an accompanying message to adherents that they are insiders, favored members of the political community.’” *Santa Fe Indep. Sch. Dist. v. Doe*, 530 U.S. 290, 309-310 (2000) (quoting *Lynch v. Donnelly*).

You were elected governor, not preacher. You took an oath of office to uphold the secular U.S. Constitution. Imagine the fury of Christians, and rightly so, were an elected official to claim Oklahoma for Allah or Satan. Your remarks as the state’s highest-ranking elected official are equally inflammatory and inappropriate. Your oath of office has charged you with great responsibility over citizens, including those citizens who may not or do not share your personal religious viewpoints. You have, once again, shown that you are unfit for this responsibility. You owe an apology to all non-Christian and nonreligious citizens of Oklahoma.

Very truly,



Annie Laurie Gaylor & Dan Barker
Co-presidents
ALG/DB:cal

³ Gregory A. Smith, *About Three-in-Ten U.S. Adults Are Now Religiously Unaffiliated*, Pew Research Center (Dec. 14, 2021), available at www.pewforum.org/2021/12/14/about-three-in-ten-u-s-adults-are-now-religiously-unaffiliated/.

⁴ www.pewresearch.org/religion/religious-landscape-study/state/oklahoma/