

Absurd and Vain Attempt*Thomas Scott (1705–1775)*

Absurd and vain attempt! to bind
 With iron chains the free-born mind,
 To force conviction, and reclaim
 The wand'ring by destructive flame.

Bold arrogance! to snatch from heaven
 Dominion not to mortals given;
 O'er conscience to usurp the throne,
 Accountable to God alone.

Jesus! thy gentle law of love
 Does no such cruelties approve;
 Mild as thy self, thy doctrine yields
 No arms but what persuasion yields.

By proofs divine, and reason strong,
 It draws the willing soul along;
 And conquests to thy church acquires
 By eloquence which heaven inspires.

O happy, who are thus compell'd
 To the rich feast, by Jesus held!
 May we this blessing know, and prize
 The light which liberty supplies.

ΤΩ ΧΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ*In the Nick of Time***White House Faith Office***Kevin T. Bauder*

On February 7, 2025, President Trump issued an executive order creating a White House Faith Office. The purpose of the office is to empower “faith-based entities, community organizations, and houses of worship to serve families and communities.” This service includes “protecting women and children; strengthening marriage and family; lifting up individuals through work and self-sufficiency, defending religious liberty; combatting anti-Semitic, anti-Christian, and additional forms of anti-religious bias; promoting foster care and adoption programs in partnership with faith-based entities; providing wholesome and effective education; preventing and reducing crime and facilitating prisoner reentry; promoting recovery from substance use disorder; and fostering flourishing minds.” The office is also supposed to advise the President on matters related to these faith-based organizations.

The president means well. The order is a gesture of support toward people of faith. The Biden administration wanted to force us to violate our biblical commitments. This is better. We welcome the attempt to protect religious people from state interference.

But the order also poses problems. One problem is the notion that the government has any business “empowering” faith-based efforts. As a Baptist, I do not look for empowerment to any government at any level. The church’s authority to make disciples comes directly from Jesus Christ. He has received all authority (Matt 28:19–20). He promises that His followers will receive power from His Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8). Churches have all the power they need to fulfill their mission. No government has the right to restrict or oppose them as they pursue it. Any government that tries to will answer to Christ (2 Thess 1:4–10).

We do not ask the government to empower us. We simply ask that it get out of our way. We do not deny that we are subject to every rightful law. We insist, however, that no just law can oppose or restrict our obedience to Christ. If we violate rightful laws, then we accept the penalty. Otherwise, we demand in the name of God that the state recognize our liberty to do His work (Acts 27:13). President Trump’s job is to stop the government from interfering with us.



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Furthermore, we fear that accepting state support risks government interference. What the government pays for, even if indirectly, it tries to control. Government largess always comes with strings attached. We perceive any offer of state assistance as a poisoned chalice.

We deny, however, that tax exemptions constitute state support. Religious organizations should not pay taxes, except where they work for profit. A rightly ordered church gets its support from the freewill gifts of God's people. Their resources have already been taxed. Furthermore, taxation is an exertion of authority. It is a form of control. Chief Justice John Marshall noted that the power to tax is the power to destroy. Churches ought to be exempt from taxation because they are exempt from the power of the state to control and destroy.

When the state empowers faith-based organizations, it must make choices between them. President Trump's executive order certainly does. It says that it will empower faith-based efforts to combat anti-Semitism. But some forms of anti-Semitism are based in faith. In other words, President Trump intends to empower one faith at the expense of another. This is contrary to the role of governments under the New Testament. Far better that our president should echo Gallio: "If it be a question of words and names, and *of your law*, look ye *to it*; for I will be no judge of such *matters*" (Acts 18:15). When faiths are wrong, they should be opposed by sound argument and not by state coercion. Governments should only interfere when people use faith as an excuse to transgress just laws that protect all people. This side of the Millennium, governments cannot rightly enforce one religion over another.

The president must appoint someone to lead the White House Faith Office. That choice necessarily divides. It inevitably gives one faith greater access than another to the president. And President Trump has made a bad choice. He has appointed a Seven-Mountain-Mandate charismatic. She is a leader in the New Apostolic Reformation. She advocates the Prosperity Gospel. She considers herself an apostle. She makes her religion up as she goes. She believes that she has God's approval for what she makes up. One shudders to think what counsel she might offer the president.

The problem is not just with the president's selection. He could not select any person to lead this office who would be acceptable. The only acceptable person is one who would refuse the office. The state should keep out of religion. If the state is going to poke its nose into religion, then crazies and hucksters should not be in charge.

If the president wants to create a religious office, it should be an office of religious liberty. That office should hunt down every instance of governmental religious discrimination. It should ensure both non-establishment and free exercise. Such an office would be welcome.

The White House Faith Office is superfluous. It is more likely to become an avenue of state interference than it is to be a help. The best help that the government can give people of faith is to take its hands off all questions of religion. It should protect all its citizens from religious force or coercion. Otherwise, it should get out of the way.



This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.
