

# ORLANDO SENTINEL ATTACKS FIRST AMENDMENT

The editorial in the February 18 *Orlando Sentinel* is critical of private schools, mostly Christian, which participate in a state-school voucher program; the schools uphold biblical teachings on homosexuality. The newspaper says they should not qualify for the program because they discriminate against homosexuals the way Bob Jones University once discriminated against blacks. There are several problems with this line of reasoning.

Race and sexual orientation have nothing in common: race is not a behavioral category but sexual orientation is ineluctably ordered to behavior. Christian sexual ethics, which are based on Judaism, proscribe adultery, homosexuality, and other sexual acts. That is their right.

There is no rational argument for denying a person who is black, brown, or white from marrying to attending a Christian school: race is behaviorally neutral. Indeed, it is because Bob Jones University—which also promoted anti-Catholicism—could not sustain a rational argument that it eventually was forced to change course.

There is a rational argument for allowing religious schools to sanction behaviors it finds sinful. To deny them this option is to deny them their identity. Moreover, to protect the institution of marriage—indeed to grant it a privileged position—Christian sexual ethics does not approve of sexual conduct that is outside the union of a man and a woman in the institution of marriage. No such reasoning could plausibly be applied to denying mixed racial marriages.

An investigation of private schools in Florida by the *Orlando Sentinel*, published January 23, found 156 private Christian

schools with “anti-gay views.” Almost half are Baptist. Catholic schools were mostly given a pass by the newspaper.

Catholic schools do not reject applicants on the basis of sexual orientation, though they will enforce teacher contracts which bar them from marrying someone of the same sex, and they generally do not admit students whose parents are homosexuals. The reasoning is sound: sending mixed messages to students only confuses them about the validity of Catholic sexual ethics.

As it turns out, there are nine schools cited by the newspaper where a quoted statement is cited as proof of their “anti-gay views.” It is important to note that they *have nothing to do with the status of a student’s sexual orientation*. Rather, they have to do with beliefs and practices.

1. Central Florida Christian Academy admits students who follow biblical teachings and abstain from “sexual immorality.” The newspaper concludes this means “gay children aren’t welcome.” But it is not clear that it does. The school did not say it does not admit gay students. It said it does not admit students who are engaged in sexually immoral behavior. That could mean premarital sex (until recently confined to heterosexuals) as well as homosexual acts.

2. Calvary Christian High School in Clearwater is mentioned because it denies students who practice a “homosexual lifestyle or alternative gender identity” or “promoting such practices.” Lifestyle, switching sexes, and [homosexual] practices are all behavioral categories, and as such are entirely legitimate for a Christian school to consider.

3. Wade Christian School in Melbourne says students can be expelled for a “homosexual act.” The emphasis is on an “act,” not orientation.

4. Master’s Academy describes “homosexual behaviors” as sinful and does not enroll those who engage in them. Again, it is the behavior that matters.

5. Mount Dora Academy lists as an offense “sexual misconduct

or professing immorality (including homosexuality) on or off campus.” Conduct is not neutral—it is normative—and is therefore a valid concern for Christian schools.

6. Landmark Christian School in Haines City does not accept or retain “faculty, staff, or students who profess to or practice a homosexual lifestyle.” A lifestyle is empirically a behavioral category.

7. Cooper City Christian Academy in Broward County says students should refrain from “talking favorably or engaging in” such things as “idolatry, Satanism, astrology, profanity...premarital sexual activity, pornography, homosexual behavior, gender-confusion behavior, cross-dressing” and the like. All of these beliefs and practices are proscribed by our Judeo-Christian tradition.

8. Worshipper’s House of Prayer Academy in Miami says it has a “zero tolerance” policy for “homosexual activity.” Activity is conduct.

9. Donahue Academy is the one Catholic school listed. Its “anti-gay” rule bars those who “advocate” or act “upon those [disordered] inclinations romantically or sexually.” This speaks to the religious beliefs of Catholic schools and the acting out of proscribed moral conduct.

In short, the *Orlando Sentinel* counts as “anti-gay views” anything associated with the sexual ethics of the three monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. It has a First Amendment right to free speech to do that. But religious schools also have a First Amendment right to free speech, as well as the free exercise of religion.