

# George Pyle: Utah has its own brand of Orwellian Doublethink

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In “1984,” George Orwell defines “Doublethink” — a technique used to control the thoughts of the masses in his, the most dystopian of all dystopian societies — as, “The power of holding two contradictory beliefs in one’s mind simultaneously, and accepting both of them.”

Perhaps Orwell was familiar with the 1895 Constitution of the state of Utah.

That document leads off with a promise familiar to those who know the founding documents of the United States:

“All men have the inherent and inalienable right ... to communicate freely their thoughts and opinions.”

But, three paragraphs later, the state’s founding document tries its hand at Orwellian Doublethink.

“There shall be no union of Church and State, nor shall any church dominate the State or interfere with its functions.”

It often seems that both of those ideas cannot be true.

When 60 percent of a state’s population, and 90 percent of its elected officials, are members of a particular church, it is hard to see how that faith would not “dominate the state.” Not by law, necessarily, but just in the natural course of the leaders and members of that church exercising their right to “communicate freely their thoughts and opinions.”

In public, in private and to those same elected officials.

Into this conundrum has stepped Rocky Anderson, former mayor of Salt Lake City and a crusading attorney who, bless him, clearly enjoys punching well above his weight.

As prelude to what could be a lawsuit that would force the courts to square the circle of constitutional provisions that at once guarantee free expression for all but limit the power of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Anderson wants the church, the state and various officers and functionaries of both to preserve whatever communications they have exchanged as part of the plan to replace Proposition 2 — the one legalizing medical marijuana in Utah — with an alternative set of rules that may or may not serve the same goal.

Of course those who worked hard to get Prop 2 onto the ballot and approved by a majority of Utah voters, only to see state officials clearly in league with the LDS Church sweep it aside for an alternative, would be more than frustrated by such a political power play.

But how can anyone tell anyone else, even a powerful religious institution, that it cannot express itself, lobby the powerful and, in the words of both the state and federal constitutions, "petition for redress of grievances"?

You can't.

What you can do is play the same game. Express, lobby, petition and, as was the case with Prop 2, vote. The fact that the initiative carried is evidence that many rank-and-file members of the LDS Church went against their own leadership and supported the idea.

If these same folks keep voting – for future initiatives and for different politicians – and continue to be joined by voters who are part of the influx of young liberal/libertarian folks drawn to our mountains, universities and high-tech industry, the outsized influence of the church will wane.

Or, there's the nuclear option.

Federal law gives religious organizations, and other nonprofits, exemptions from taxation. They risk losing it if they or their leaders take a stand for or against a candidate for public office. But that limit does not, and should not, apply if such organizations choose speak out on matters of public importance.

In fact most faith-based groups, and other do-gooder outfits, would be of little use if they did not speak out on such things as the needs of the poor or other public policy matters that stand to have an influence on the well-being of individuals and of society as a whole.

One big reason why there is such a thing as a tax exemption for nonprofits is that those organizations do things – for the poor, the young, the old, the sick and the stranger – in a way that relieves the tax-supported government of at least some of the burden of those needs. In return for performing tasks that fulfill a public good, they are free from paying the taxes that, in part, would be dedicated to doing those same things.

It is fair to wonder, though, if that theory should apply only to the properties and functions directly associated with the charity and public service part of most religions – soup kitchens, food pantries, hospitals, clinics and rehab operations, day care centers, retirement homes – but not to the buildings and actions that are focused on promoting religious faith.

That's something that everyone is free to do. But it is not so obviously a public service for which the taxpayers should provide even indirect support.



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