

**AMERICAN ATHEISTS, INC.**

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## Texas Supreme Court Ruling Paves the Way for Religious Abuse Nationwide

American Atheists stated today that the 6/27/08 Texas Supreme Court ruling in the case of a victim of religious exorcism set a bad legal precedent for all of America. The religious laws in place set up to protect churches and other religious groups from prosecution for crimes they commit while expressing their religion go too far. But they usually don't go this far!

The violent actions of the Pleasant Glade Assembly of God's staff, who were performing an "exorcism" on one of their own 17-year-old congregants, should not go unpunished. They harmed her, physically and mentally, and should be held accountable.

In a 6-3 decision, the court ruled that the violence that came to that young congregant was allowed under laws on the books today that protect "religious expression." To call this violent incident "religious expression" is to indict religion, but to insist that any law absolves anyone of consequences for violent and harmful acts is just plain irresponsible.

This is why American Atheists and other state/church separation groups spoke out so loudly against the passage of these religious laws. A religious organization should never be given any government privileges, but this one is outrageous.

The additional bizarre notion that enforcing the law equally on a church would amount to a state/church entanglement is preposterous. There is already an obviously unwise entanglement between church and state, in the form of unjust religious laws that give special rights to religion. The only way the playing field would be level is if those religious laws were to be repealed.

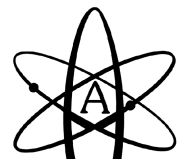
Texas State Director for American Atheists, Joe Zamecki, said "Any law that specifically protects a religious group from appropriate legal action is a special privilege, especially when that religious group has clearly harmed someone in the course of their religious activities. I'm finding that more and more religious groups in America want blanket protection from any kind of consequences for violating peoples' rights and actually harming them."

American Atheists National Spokesperson Dave Silverman said, "If Atheists had committed the exact same atrocities, then they'd go to jail for child abuse. See that? Same crime, one gets punished for committing a crime, and one escapes punishment because they did it for religious reasons. That is the exact opposite of freedom of religion."

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AMERICAN ATHEISTS is a nationwide movement that defends civil rights for Atheists; works for the total separation of church and state; and addresses issues of First Amendment public policy.

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