

CULTURE

# SPLC Targets Franklin Graham for 'Hate Group' Speech

BY TYLER O'NEIL NOVEMBER 14, 2019



*Pastor Franklin Graham speaks during a funeral service at the Billy Graham Library for the Rev. Billy Graham, who died last week at age 99, Friday, March 2, 2018, in Charlotte, N.C.(AP Photo/John Bazemore)*

Few evangelical Christians are as well-known or as influential as Franklin Graham, son of the late evangelist Billy Graham, and head of both the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association and the international charity Samaritan's Purse. Yet the far-left Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) ventured to attack this mainstream Christian evangelist for a speech he gave to a Christian organization the organization smears as a "hate group" — for pushing back against transgender activism.

"Influential evangelical leader Franklin Graham has continued his anti-LGBTQ associations by speaking to a hate group that brands 'trans' activists as guilty of harming children," the SPLC's "Hatewatch" [blog reported](#).

The evangelist spoke at the Illinois Family Institute's "Faith, Family, and Freedom" annual fall banquet and defended President Donald Trump amid the Democrats' impeachment effort.

The SPLC gained its reputation by suing the Ku Klux Klan and affiliated hate groups into bankruptcy. The group's co-founder, Morris Dees, pioneered the KKK attacks as a successful fundraising strategy, and SPLC staff actually resigned in protest because they thought the KKK lawsuits were distracting from more important legal work helping the less fortunate. As the KKK largely vanished, the SPLC expanded the "hate group" fundraising, demonizing conservative and Christian organizations by accusing them of being "hate groups" on par with the KKK.

The SPLC has accused both the Illinois Family Institute (IFI) and American Family Association (AFA) — of which IFI is an independent state affiliate — of being "anti-LGBTQ hate groups." The liberal group justified this smear by citing IFI's statements that homosexual activity is "medically, emotionally and spiritually unhealthy" and its warnings against the "ravenous, pro-'trans' behemoth." IFI warned that transgender activists are "propagandizing, grooming, and mutilating children."

While this rhetoric may be overblown, disagreement with the transgender agenda — and the terrifying push to pump the bodies of healthy children with **experimental drugs** that will give them a disease — is far from hateful.

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"The Illinois Family Institute holds theologically orthodox, historical Christian views on volitional homosexual activity, marriage, and cross-sex identification," Laurie Higgins, IFI's cultural affairs writer, told PJ Media. "We also hold theologically orthodox views on love, which is inseparable from truth. We believe genuine love--as opposed to what passes for love today--entails seeking for others that which is true and good. Genuine love as demonstrated by Christ does not entail affirming all the feelings, beliefs, and volitional acts of others."

Traditional Christianity, based on Jesus' teachings in the Bible, holds that sexual activity outside of marriage — one man, one woman, for life — is sinful, and that God made human beings male and female. Christianity also teaches that sinners can be redeemed — every Christian is a redeemed sinner.

For these and other reasons, IFI opposes LGBT activism and especially the idea that children who may be confused about gender should be subjected to experimental hormones and "puberty blockers."

"If these ideologies are false, then denying them is the antithesis of hatred," Higgins said. "Believing an assumption is wrong, or believing a volitional sexual act is immoral does not constitute hatred of persons who believe differently and act in accordance with their beliefs." There is a world of difference between saying that homosexual activity is a sin and encouraging harassment or violence against LGBT people, which IFI does not do.

"Perhaps SPLC hatewatchers hate everyone who holds different beliefs and moral precepts than they do, but they ought not impute their habits of mind to others," she quipped. "We at IFI, like many other people, are fully capable of loving those who believe differently and act in accordance with their beliefs--even false and destructive beliefs. And we will express our beliefs with the boldness and clarity that the sanctimonious deceivers at the SPLC express theirs."

The SPLC went on to attack Franklin Graham's statements on LGBT issues. The liberal group contrasted these comments:

"I just believe as a Christian, we are to show love; we are to show compassion to people, not to point the finger, not to do this, but to do this – to love them, to welcome them, to embrace them."

"So I want the gay and lesbian people to know that if they repent and turn from those sins, God will forgive them and heal their hearts. But I'm not going to accept it and say what they're doing is fine. It's not fine. It's not fine with God and they'll stand before him one day."

Hatewatch suggested that the expression of Christian love stood "in stark contrast" to the remarks about repentance. This misunderstanding underscores the reason why the SPLC and other groups interpret conservative Christianity as hateful. Jesus teaches that all human beings are sinful and therefore must repent in order to be reconciled to God. Yet because Jesus died on the cross, He paid the penalty for sin, making redemption possible.

Meanwhile, LGBT people have indeed faced harassment and violence. Christians should and do condemn this — all people are made in the image of God and Jesus commanded His disciples to love their enemies. Yet activists claim that the only way to prevent harassment and violence is to embrace LGBT identities and behavior, to celebrate "pride." Orthodox Christians cannot do this, because they do not want to encourage people to sin. Hate has nothing to do with it.

Samaritan's Purse, which Graham runs, is often first on the scene after a hurricane or other natural disaster. The charity also sends shoeboxes packed with Christmas gifts to impoverished children across the world. The SPLC did mention some of this work, but warned that "the charity has faced criticism for using its [Operation Christmas Child](#) donation program to try to convert children in majority-Muslim countries to Christianity."

Rather than condemning Franklin Graham for speaking to a Christian organization, the SPLC should take this opportunity to reconsider whether its "hate group" accusation against IFI is correct. If this organization's smears lead it to attack such a man, perhaps the problem is the SPLC's bias, not the Christian views it demonizes as "hate."

Then again, if the SPLC reconsidered its "hate group" smears against mainstream conservative and Christian organizations, it would escape many of the [defamation lawsuits it now faces](#). One such lawsuit cost the organization \$3.375 million. Maybe the SPLC likes the controversy.

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