Written by **Selwyn Duke** on October 14, 2014

Christian Businessman Told to Leave Faith at Home and Take Diversity Training

Whatever rights the Lexington-Fayette Urban County Human Rights Commission is safeguarding, the right to engage in commerce doesn't seem to be among them — not if you're a believing Christian, anyway.

In a shocking decision, a commission examiner made a recommended ruling last Monday that a Christian businessman violated a local ordinance against sexual-orientation discrimination by refusing to print T-shirts with a pro-homosexual message. As Fox News' Todd Starnes reported, "The examiner concluded that Blaine Adamson of Hands On Originals broke the law in 2012 by declining to print shirts promoting the Lexington Pride Festival. The Gay and Lesbian Services Organization subsequently filed a complaint."

The examiner, Greg Munson, also demands that Hands On Originals go in for "diversity training" — conducted by the Lexington-Fayette Urban County Human Rights Commission (LFUCHRC) itself — within the next 12 months.

Yet as Adamson pointed out in an October 1 Kentucky.com op-ed, he did not — and does not — discriminate against individuals. As he wrote:

> My decision not to print the shirts requested of us has nothing to do with who was ordering the shirts; it had only to do with the message of the shirts no matter who was ordering them.
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> In this situation, the message is in disagreement with my values. My faith calls me to love all people regardless of whether they share my values or not.
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> … All I ask is for people to respect my right as an owner to not produce a product that is contrary to my principles.

This was too much to ask, however, for executive director of the LFUCHRC, Raymond Sexton. He told Starnes that it would be "safe" to leave your religion at home, or "you can find yourself two years down the road and you're still involved in a legal battle because you did not do so." Sexton also told Starnes that the Adamson ruling "was a landmark decision … a very important ruling for us."

It was also a very important ruling for freedom — but not the protection of it. As to this, Starnes quotes a lawyer with Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF), the organization representing Adamson, and writes, "'No one should be forced by the government or by another citizen to endorse or promote ideas with

which they disagree,' said ADF attorney Jim Campbell. 'Blaine declined to the request to print the shirts not because of any characteristic of the people who asked for them, but because of the message that the shirts would communicate.'"

Regarding this factor, Adamson points out in his op-ed, "Over the past 20 years, we have declined to produce several other products with different messages than the one at issue here because we disapproved of whatever message it was." "He said that one of these orders was actually from a Christian organization — a T-shirt that had a blood design on it; Adamson felt that it was too racy, so he declined it," reported the Blaze, providing further detail.

Many critics point out that this raises the matter of double standards. They might ask, would a Jewish businessman be forced to print a pro-Palestinian message on a shirt, a Muslim one to print a pro-Zionist message, or a homosexual one to print Leviticus 20:13 (a passage condemning homosexual behavior) on a shirt? Others will say that while homosexuals are a "protected class," Palestinian activists, Zionists, and Christians are not. One might then wonder, however, does this make them "unprotected"?

Of course, if the government acknowledged that this is a matter of messages, not messengers, it couldn't legislate in this area without violating the First Amendment. But since it's applying a standard that conflates the message and the messengers, a critic might wonder how offering different legal protections to different groups can be allowed under the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment.

But the LFUCHRC's Sexton doesn't wonder. After saying that if you want to do business in Lexington, you have to serve everyone in the "protected classes," he opined, reports the Blaze, "If this was a case involving race, religion or national origin, there would be no debate on right or wrong."

Actually, though, that's not true.

While cases such as Adamson's are always framed as religious-freedom issues, they're also matters of freedom of association. As to this, no one would deny me the right to include in, or exclude from, my home whomever I please. So why should I lose that right simply because I decide to sell clothing out of it? It's still my property, paid for with my money and created by the sweat of my own brow.

George Mason University professor Walter E. Williams has also defended freedom of association. As I wrote in August:

> After mentioning older violations of the principle that people would today consider tyrannical — such as Virginia anti-miscegenation laws (prohibiting interracial marriage) and a Baltimore regulation forbidding whites and blacks from playing tennis together in public parks — he [Williams] asked in his 2002 piece "Freedom of Association," "whether Virginia's laws would have been more acceptable if instead of banning interracial marriages, it mandated interracial marriages?" Would Baltimore's governmental intrusion have been any less "offensive if the regulation had required blacks and whites to play tennis with one another"? He then writes:
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> > While Americans would agree there should be freedom of association in the specific cases of marriage and tennis, what about freedom of association as a general principle?… Suppose I'm looking to hire an employee. You show up for the job, but I don't want to deal with you. My reasons might be that you're white, you're a Catholic, you're ugly, you're a woman or anything else about you that I find objectionable. Should I be forced to hire you? You say, "Williams, that's illegal employment discrimination." You're right, but it still has to do with freedom of association — and either you're for or against freedom of association as a general principle.

Clearly, the LFUCHRC is against it and instead wants to be the arbiter of what type of association — and discrimination — is acceptable. But the case against Adamson isn't quite over. As the Blaze also wrote, "[ADF attorney] Campbell said that local human rights commissions often times have 'scattered, unclear rules.' At this point he said that Munson's ruling will not officially stand until it is either adopted or modified by the full Lexington-Fayette Urban County Human Rights Commission."

Regardless, many find a "landmark decision" mandating what they would call "re-education" by a government bureaucracy worrisome. As Starnes put it, "Take just a moment and let that sink in — a Christian business owner is being ordered to attend diversity training — because of his religious beliefs. That's a pretty frightening concept and a mighty dangerous precedent."