



Written by [Selwyn Duke](#) on October 27, 2009

Obama Pushing Secular UN Anti-Free Speech Resolution

Those who would accuse Barack Obama of pandering to — if not sympathy for — Islamists have been handed some powerful new ammunition. In a disturbing move, the Obama administration is joining Muslim nations in supporting a UN resolution restricting criticism of religion, a measure reflective of those nations' blasphemy laws.

Treating the matter in *USA Today*, Professor Jonathan Turley writes:

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While attracting surprisingly little attention, the Obama administration supported the effort of largely Muslim nations in the U.N. Human Rights Council to recognize exceptions to free speech for any "negative racial and religious stereotyping." The exception was made as part of a resolution supporting free speech that passed this month, but it is the exception, not the rule that worries civil libertarians.... It is viewed as a transparent bid to appeal to the "Muslim street" and our Arab allies, with the administration seeking greater coexistence through the curtailment of objectionable speech. Though it has no direct enforcement (and is weaker than earlier versions), it is still viewed as a victory for those who sought to juxtapose and balance the rights of speech and religion.

It is correct to point out that it is the exception, not the rule, that is worrisome. After all, the elimination of free speech is always based on exceptions. We can conceivably utter millions of things, and even the most despotic regimes — be they China, the Soviet Union, or Nazi Germany — would prohibit only a small percentage of them. Hey, you can say whatever you want, just don't criticize the regime, question communism, impugn the leader, or whatever the case may be.

Yet, while Turley is right to sound the alarm about this, he's also spreading a great misconception. And to introduce this, I'll begin with something the professor wrote later in his piece: "The fear is that, when



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speech becomes sacrilegious, only the religious will have true free speech.” Ah, this is certainly a good turn of phrase.

It is also a terrible twist of Truth.

You see, while Turley casts this as a religious plot to suppress free speech, it is actually a secular plot. Let’s be clear about two undeniable facts: First, most of the major players in this scheme — that is, the statist leaders of Western nations and the “worldists” at the U.N — are secularists. Second, you could cut the implicit self-righteousness here with a scimitar. Turley and his ilk would leave observers with the impression that secular Western nations have been bold guardians of free speech that are only now wilting under pressure leveraged by religious zealots. Yet this outrageously ignores how these very nations have for years been curtailing speech via “hate speech” laws, which have in a great measure been used to punish *Christians*.

For example, there was Swedish pastor Ake Green, who was imprisoned for preaching against homosexuality; Canadian Hugh Owens, who was forced to pay monetary damages for criticizing homosexuality; and one of his countrymen, Pastor Mark Harding, who was punished for criticizing Islam. Then, Bob Unruh [wrote](#) at WorldNetDaily.com in 2007, “Two Christians in Australia have been indicted for criticizing Islam, and another for criticizing Zionism. A filmmaker has been threatened with arrest for using the word ‘homosexual’ rather than ‘gay.’ Now a German priest faces jail time for publicly criticizing abortionists, and in Holland, ‘fornicators’ and ‘adulterers’ are protected classes and cannot be criticized.”

So where has Turley been all these years while his leftist brethren have been applying an iron muzzle? Perhaps the same place he is right now. After all, while he does mention hate speech in the second line of his piece, he then draws a curious conclusion, writing, “Whether defined as hate speech, discrimination or simple blasphemy, governments are declaring unlimited free speech as the enemy of freedom of religion.” This, despite the fact that he presents the following on a list of examples of speech infringement: “ In Canada, the Alberta human rights commission punished the Rev. Stephen Boission and the Concerned Christian Coalition for anti-gay speech.”

Given the above, how can a desire to protect religion be the motivating factor here? Is religion the common denominator when you punish some religious adherents (Christians) for criticizing others (Muslims)? Is religion the common denominator when you punish religious adherents (Christians again) for criticizing homosexuality? If the justification for this and laws prohibiting criticism of abortionists, fornicators, and adulterers was that secular Western nations wanted to protect religion, news bureaus the world over somehow missed that argument.

So what is the common thread running through all these speech prohibitions? The standard being applied is not one of blasphemy.

It is *offensiveness*.

Thus, what’s happening here is not religious but quintessentially secular. After all, blasphemy is predicated on the idea that external, universal, unchanging laws (God’s laws, the Truth) dictate that certain things really are sacred and that we must respect them, that we must, in a manner of speaking, avoid “offending” God. Yet Turley’s friends are only concerned about offending man. And in making “man the measure of all things,” they are guilty of a typical atheist mistake. That is, if there is no Truth (a notion that reduces morality to opinion) who is to say it’s wrong to offend people?



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Moreover, making man god and then saying “Thou shalt offend no god” is far scarier than anything Mideastern Imams conjure up. This is because blasphemy prohibitions are actually fairly limited, only pertaining to impious utterances relating to a certain religion. Yet, since the secularists are using that which “offends man” as the yardstick, and since man comprises thousands of groups the world over, there conceivably is no limit to the number of speech prohibitions such a standard could spawn.

No matter how they proliferate, however, it’s impossible to legislate away offensiveness because most everyone is offended by something and most everything offends someone. Thus, offensiveness-based speech codes are truly offensive because they create privileged groups, those whose feelings will be granted the protection of law. Everyone else, I suppose, must suffer the slaughtering of his sacred cows. This brings us to yet another difference between what Turley thinks he’s talking about (blasphemy laws) and what he is actually talking about.

In reality, the offensiveness police make no claim that they are protecting the sacred; why, they generally don’t even believe in such a thing. In contrast, at least religionists can make such a claim, that their blasphemy laws are not designed to protect their feelings but *the* faith. Sure, some are certainly offended by blasphemy, but there no doubt are also those who simply believe they are responding to divine injunction. Thus, their reasoning is far more credible than that of the secularists.

Of course, an atheist would say that religionists’ reasoning is based on a silly assertion; namely, that the divine exists. I won’t argue that here but will only say that the secularists’ offensiveness-based speech laws are silly regardless of the facts. After all, while secularists’ relativism dictates nothing can be wrong, they claim it’s wrong to offend others. They also claim nothing can be sacred but yet would have us treat certain people’s feelings as sacred.

So Professor Turley is right to oppose the UN speech resolution but wrong to blame it on religion. Without the secularists, Muslims couldn’t even dream of blasphemy laws beyond their own borders. Without the secularists, Christians could very successfully ignore the protestations of those clamoring for speech prohibitions. It is today’s atheists who care more about offending others than defending Truth. It’s yet another example of how, to twist a Christopher Hitchens line most deliciously, atheism poisons everything.



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