Written by **Selwyn Duke** on March 31, 2009

The Sword of Islam, the Pen of the UN

If you know anything about "human rights commissions," you know that never were there entities more euphemistically named. They have proliferated throughout the Western world and have become tools of the thought police, and whatever rights they purport to protect, the right to speak Truth isn't one of them. For evidence of this, just ask Canadian Christian Mark Harding, who ran afoul of the Ontario Human Rights Commission for criticizing Islam and was punished by his government. Or ask journalist Mark Steyn (I guess it's not a good time for Marks to be rendering opinions), whose article "The Future Belongs to Islam" in *Maclean's* magazine led to the publication being the target of a "human-rights complaint" in Canada (I guess it's not a good time for Canadians to be rendering opinions, either).

Now the United Nations Human Rights Council seeks to bring this prescribed placidity to the whole world with a resolution that places religion in general and Islam in particular off-limits for criticism. Not surprisingly, Pakistan put the resolution forward on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference. This is much like how the charges against *Maclean's* were brought by two members of the Canadian Islamic Congress who claimed that the magazine hurt Muslims' "dignity, feelings and self-respect." It's yet another example of a culturally exhausted West's capitulation to a resurgent Muslim world. Call it Saladin meets Richard the Chickenheart.

While the resolution has no legal force, many quite rightly view it as a shot across the bow of free speech. Moreover, should it metastasize into something with teeth, there is the fear that it won't "protect" all religions equally. After all, as is typical of the fruits of morally relativistic modern leftists, the resolution is more than ambiguous enough to allow for arbitrary and convenient application. Writes the *Globe and Mail*:

> The notion of defamation of religion is vague to the point of meaninglessness. What is its reach? The text of the Human Rights Council's resolution says, "Islam is frequently and wrongly associated with human-rights violations and terrorism." [Wrongly? Really? It could occur to one that the religion that would push hardest for a blanket prohibition against criticizing religion is the one with the most to criticize.] That suggests a vast range of discussion is off-limits. The UN itself has overseen several reports outlining how Arab societies (both secular and religious) have fallen into decay. "Why do Arabs enjoy so little freedom?" the authors, 40 Arab intellectuals, asked. (If defamation of religion is wrong, is defamation of ethnic groups allowed? Is there now a hierarchy of protected groups?) Islam can co-exist with modernity, they say, implying that it does

not do so now. Did the UN defame Islam, then?

Yet we don't have to wonder whose religion would be favored. Secularists have a long history of contempt for Christianity and of knock-kneed obeisance in the face of Muslim aggression. Just think about Paris' and other European cities' "no-go zones," which are Muslim communities where authorities refuse to enter and which, to an extent, are sometimes governed by Sharia law. And think about how some members of a Muslim crowd that gathered at Mark Harding's trial chanted "Infidels, you will burn in hell." Unlike the hapless Harding, they somehow weren't charged with hate speech.

And if anyone might expect better judgment from the UN, consider that some past, current, or future members of its Human Rights Council are China, Cuba, Pakistan (2011) and, for the pièce de résistance, Libya (2003 — technically, the body was then called the U.N. Commission on Human Rights).

Associating such nations with the promotion of human rights is preposterous on the face of it, yet it is part and parcel of a deeper philosophical defect. And it is the same fault that breeds the notion that criticizing "religion" is somehow in bad form. Let's examine this.

While we wouldn't want propriety enforced by our government, we know there is often a moral imperative to voluntarily censor ourselves. For instance, many would agree that we shouldn't criticize a person's physical characteristics in a way that could cause distress; we might also agree that this should be a blanket prohibition, applicable whether the characteristic is weight, wrinkles, nose size, or something else. Yet religion is not some inborn superficial quality over which we have no control. Rather, like the categories "ideology" or "philosophy," it is a grouping of different things espousing different values. Now, would we adopt a blanket prohibition against criticizing ideology — which, mind you, would protect the evil along with the ethereal — simply to avoid giving offense? No, on the contrary, we understand that some ideologies, such as Nazism and communism, should be subject to the harshest criticism we can muster, lest, for lack of stigma, they may once again find favor and poison the family of man. Above and beyond that, however, we understand that even relatively benign ideologies must be purified in the fires of criticism so that we may ever bring our beliefs into closer harmony with divine will.

Likewise, the broad category of "religion" must be subject to the same scrutiny. Again, different religions espouse different values, and as beings gifted with reason, it would be an abdication of our responsibility to render dormant man's honest and open discussion of where the Truth in that realm lies.

Of course, to the relativistic UN, there is no Truth, only perspectives based on what feels right. This is the philosophical defect I spoke of; it's one that prevents UN diplomats from making rational distinctions among nations, religions, or criticisms. From their "perspective," feelings can be the ultimate arbiters of values and, as a corollary, of laws. So then why not proscribe criticism of religion if not hurting a certain group's feelings feels right to you?

G.K. Chesterton addressed this relativistic sense of propriety more than a century ago, writing about how the essence of what the modern man says is, "Let us not decide what is good, but let it be considered good not to decide it." And the UN is perhaps the poster boy for this philosophy because it has a vested interest in painting the world only gray, as it vainly tries to be a place between Heaven and Hell where demons may consort with angels. This is a modern fault exhibited by institutions whose priority is "inclusiveness," one that tends to exist in proportion to the institution's size. What I mean is, if the UN embraced a conception of Truth (even the correct one), it would incur the wrath of those of

different “perspectives,” which, given the body’s scope, would mean most of the world. So it indulges a certain unwritten agreement, which in theory goes something like this, “I won’t say that my religion or culture is better than yours if you don’t say yours is better than mine, deal?” Call it, a coalition of the gray.

Thus the idea that the U.N. Human Rights Council — or any of its commission cousins — could be the arbiter of human rights is laughable. In fact, not only should relativistic bureaucrats have no legal right to impose such judgments on others, they don’t even have the moral right to make them for themselves. They are like a man who doesn’t know the rules of football but nevertheless wants to referee a game, when, of course, he isn’t even qualified to be an armchair quarterback. One cannot even begin to understand human rights until one understands human wrongs. For example, how can we possibly know if access to abortion is a human right unless we know whether or not performing one is a human wrong? How can we know if faux marriage is a human right unless we know whether or not homosexual behavior is a human wrong? These things are above the UN’s pay grade, just as they are above that of any relativistic entity, for being able to judge the moral species of a thing presupposes that you have a yardstick for doing so. Namely, the Truth.

Others recognize this dislocation from moral reality as well. Commenting on his “hate-speech” woes, Mark Steyn echoed this writer’s sentiments, saying, “The problem with so-called hate speech laws is that they’re not about facts. They’re about feelings.” Yes, this is the age of the exaltation of emotion.

Well, I feel that the UN can take its feelings and drop a burka over them. When I need a yardstick for judging right and wrong, I’m not going to find my higher power in a building on the east side of Manhattan — no matter how deific its dark angels may feel.

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