

U.N. REPORT ON RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IS ABSURD

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on a U.N. report on religious freedom:

A recently released United Nations report on religious freedom that was presented to the Human Rights Council deserves a sharp rebuke. While appearing reasonable at different junctures, the report is nothing but a frontal assault on religious autonomy and religious freedom. No wonder it was criticized by senior Vatican officials.

The report by the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion and belief, Ahmed Shaheed, is more than tendentious: it is a polished ideological attack on our most foundational human right. Indeed, the report reads like a manifesto for LGBT rights. It is not the business of the United Nations to impose its secular, and indeed troubling, vision of sexuality on religions around the world.

One of its most glaring problems is the decision to link cases of violence committed in the name of religion—which are properly condemned—with instances of non-violent beliefs and practices that are seen as problematic by militant secularists. The conflation of violent acts with non-violent “discriminatory” ones is not persuasive. Indeed, by bundling inexcusable behaviors with wholly defensible religious precepts, the report shows its unmistakable bias.

For example, it is one thing to condemn the Islamic practice of stoning adulterers, quite another to lump this barbaric act with the imposition of “modest” dress codes. Similarly, when religious bodies hold to traditional moral beliefs on sexuality, they are entitled to have their convictions respected, not chastised.

It also makes no logical sense to conflate laws which criminalize persons on the basis of their sexual orientation, which is indefensible, with laws that restrict abortion, which are eminently defensible. Worse, it is outrageous for the Human Rights Committee to cite conscience laws, as observed in the United States, as problematic. Such laws are integral to religious liberty.

Another objectionable tactic is to treat nations that criminalize homosexuality with the same brush as nations that object to homosexuality being promoted in their sex education textbooks. The latter is noble. Is the United Nations so thoroughly in the grip of the LGBT community that it can't see the difference between the two?

The report embraces "gender ideology," namely, the bizarre notion that one's sex is not rooted in nature. It goes further by criticizing nations such as Poland, with its vibrant Catholic community, for rejecting this madness. In doing so, the international forum discredits itself. It should not bend to ideological whims, especially when they are based on politics, not science.

At least the report does not seek to hide its mentors. It mentions its reliance on feminists and those who work with "LGBT+" persons (it does not say who the + people are). It also cites, positively, the work of a United States organization, the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice. They gave away the store on that one.

The Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice is not only a rabid pro-abortion group, it is virulently anti-Catholic. It endorsed the Freedom of Choice Act, which the Catholic League successfully fought. This was the most radical piece of abortion-rights legislation ever proposed (the Obama administration was behind it). It would have jeopardized the right of Catholic hospitals and doctors to refuse to perform abortions.

The most serious flaw in this seriously flawed document is its attack on religious autonomy. It makes an obligatory statement saying that “religious organizations are entitled to autonomy in the administration of their affairs,” only to effectively undercut this pledge by taking issue with religious norms it finds objectionable. In fact, it cites objections to religious strictures made by feminists, as if religious bodies ought to defer to them.

Its most aggressive assault on religious liberty is the contention that religious dissidents should be on a par with religious leaders. This is what the report means by saying “religious communities themselves are not monolithic.” It even goes so far as to say that the rights of dissenters must be afforded “an enabling environment.” Maybe a big sign on church property that says “Welcome Mutineers” might work.

The sages who wrote this report should practice what they preach. They can begin by inviting me, as one of their dissenters, to join their forums, permitting me to checkmate their grandiose proposals. After all, we’re all equal. Aren’t we?

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