

Why do universities repudiate Christian orthodoxy but welcome sharia law?



Only a few weeks ago, the one remaining male-only college at Oxford University announced that it was going to admit women. St Benet's Hall – of Benedictine foundation – has found a way to comply with Roman Catholic canon law and accommodate celibate monks surrounded by young ladies. This is progress: it is, after all, a little odd for a Christian college to actualise an ethos which is welcoming to students of all faiths (and none) while rejecting women, who are also made in the image of God.

Or is it progress?

Must we now expect Cambridge University to coerce its three remaining female colleges to admit men? If so, why should we tolerate gender-restricted admissions at any level of education? Why boys' prep schools? Why girls' high schools?

And isn't all this binary male-female categorisation rather limiting? What about those of 'indeterminate sex'?

Gender segregation in our universities has become an issue since certain 'fundamentalist' Muslim teachers appear to want the sisters seated separately from the brothers. And 'separately' in this context appears to mean 'at the back'. Up until a few days ago, this policy had the support of Universities UK, which purports to speak on behalf of all British universities. They decreed that institutions could allow gender segregation during lectures given by external speakers if the tenets of their religion required it, as "there does not appear to be any discrimination on gender grounds merely by imposing

segregated seating".

But then Michael Gove and the Prime Minister and Yasmin Alibhai-Brown and Richard Dawkins all objected to this 'gender apartheid', and so the UUK 'guidance' was hastily withdrawn.

His Grace does not wish to rehearse again the arguments for or against the assertion of inviolable equality over religious freedom: it is a path well trodden upon this blog.

He simply wonders why these universities have been so eager to accommodate the sharia of certain rather robust Muslims, while they have become increasingly hostile to certain expressions of Christian orthodoxy. Why is sexism encouraged – even endorsed – on a university campus, while all debate around the ethics of homosexuality is suppressed, for fear of offending the sensitivities of homosexual and lesbian students?

Is discrimination against women somehow less offensive than discrimination against the LGBT communities?

If the toleration of Islam's 'gender apartheid' is about free speech and freedom of religion, why do some universities clamp down on 'pro-life' Roman Catholic speakers?

It is a curious state of affairs in which supposedly 'secular' educational institutions permit Muslim speakers to impose their interpretation of sharia upon an audience, while Christian speakers – who simply wish to expound a moral worldview and impose nothing upon no one – are increasingly not even allowed through the door.

University Islamic societies are run in the interests of Muslims, and many of their members deplore gender segregation. Yet the practice has been seemingly commonplace at no fewer than 21 separate institutions.

Now they've got wind of it, feminists are in a rage: no assertion of religious power should be permitted

to obliterate their hard-won equality. But why has it taken them so long to protest? Why has this matter received so little media attention up until now?

And why should an organisation like UUK find a manifestly discriminatory practice acceptable in the name of religious freedom? They said in a statement:

“The guidance does not promote gender segregation. It includes a hypothetical case study involving an external speaker talking about his orthodox religious faith who had requested segregated seating areas for men and women.

"The case study considered the facts, the relevant law and the questions that the university should ask, and concluded that if neither women nor men were disadvantaged and a non-segregated seating area also provided, a university could decide it is appropriate to agree to the request.”

Why have they never issued such guidance in defence of Christian external speakers? It is not against the law to seek to limit abortion. It is not against the law to assert that marriage is a union between one man and one woman. And yet a totalitarian and intolerant mindset has become pervasive: pro-abortionists restrict the pro-life message; gays and lesbians shut down all debate on sexual ethics and the nature of marriage.

Surely, if no one is disadvantaged by the expression of orthodox beliefs, Christians ought to be free to speak in British universities about the power of the sexual drive and the horrors of abortion. And maybe one or two might even do it with a little canonical perspective

Archbishop Cranmer blog