

Sweden's Shame

*Liberal Sweden, supposedly a land of tolerance,
is about to make criticism of homosexuality a crime*

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Sweden is the liberal utopia. Confiscatory taxes fund a cradle-to-grave welfare state, with "free" health care, job security, and government regulation for all. Sexual freedom is taken for granted, to the point that the majority of Swedish couples live together without being married, and the majority of children are born out of wedlock.

Sweden has become so tolerant that it is taking the next step: prosecuting those whom it considers intolerant, even if this means throwing out freedom of speech and freedom of religion. The Swedish parliament has passed a constitutional amendment that would make it a crime to teach that homosexual behavior is immoral.

The Swedish constitution affirms freedom of expression but makes exceptions. "Freedom of expression and freedom of information may be restricted," says the constitution, under certain circumstances, including speech that would "imply the unfavorable treatment of a citizen because he belongs to a minority group by reason of race, color, or ethnic origin" (Chapter 2, Articles 13 & 15). The amendment, which must be approved by one more vote after the new parliament convenes in September, adds "sexual orientation" to that list of groups that must not be subject to "unfavorable" speech.

Sweden's Criminal Code already has laws against "insulting" or "agitating against" minorities. The constitutional amendment, if approved, would go into effect in January, effectively outlawing the teaching that homosexuality is morally wrong. A pastor, for example, who teaches what the Bible says about homosexual sin could go to prison for up to four years.

Despite, or perhaps because of, the Swedish culture's hostility to Christianity, that country has a vibrant Christian community. Remnants of the hopelessly liberal state church, abolished in 2000, remain, but as many as one-third of the pastors in the Lutheran Church of Sweden are conservative. There are also many independent churches, Lutheran, Pietist, Baptist, Pentecostal, as well as Roman Catholics and Orthodox. Swedish evangelicals are known throughout Europe for their evangelistic zeal, particularly in sending missionaries to the former Communist states.

The new law would presumably outlaw the use of the Roman Catholic catechism, which teaches that homosexuality is a sin, as well as the teachings of Islam. (Sweden's ultra-tolerant immigration policies have brought in some 300,000 Muslims.) As Swedish Christians

understand the law, they would be allowed to quote the Scriptures, but they would not be allowed to say that what the Scriptures teach on the matter is applicable today. If they do, they could go to prison.

The new law is only one front in the Swedish establishment's war against Christianity and other conservative religions. Conservative pastors and Christian schools report constant harassment by government officials.

Indeed, parental rights—like other “family values”—have gone the way of the Viking ships. Spanking one's child is a criminal offense. The government tells children to turn in their parents if they attempt to punish them. The government has taken away children from Christian parents on trumped-up child-abuse charges, because of even mild exercises of physical discipline.

Organizations ranging from Amnesty International to the United Nations oppose human-rights abuses, and the United States regularly slaps sanctions on nations that violate human rights.

Persecution of Christians around the world has gained new attention. China, Sudan, Iran, Indonesia, and other Muslim and African nations have been the most noted offenders, and have received widespread condemnation for their anti-Christian oppression. But will white, European, progressive Sweden face the same kind of sanctions and international condemnation if they start imprisoning people for disapproving of homosexuality? Sweden is a member of the European Union, whose founding documents commit member nations to human rights and to policies of religious tolerance. Will the EU discipline Sweden if it amends its constitution to allow religious persecution?

Will the United States lodge a statement of concern or of protest, through the State Department or the American Consulate or a resolution from Congress, to discourage the new parliament from ratifying the new law? We do that sort of thing to Israel, when it mistreats Palestinians, and to Serbia, when it mistreats its religious minorities. When the offenses are particularly flagrant, we cut off trade against the oppressive nation. Should we not give Sweden the same treatment?

More importantly, is Sweden just slightly ahead of where the United States will be in a few years? Will anti-discrimination laws, which punish external actions, develop into laws that punish inner convictions and beliefs? Will the desire to be tolerant mutate into an oppressive intolerance against intolerance?