



Working Session 14: Tolerance and Non-Discrimination II

*As delivered by Paul Coleman
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True tolerance surely means tolerating those with whom we disagree.

But rather than being tolerated, Christians in Europe are regularly being told that their beliefs are “outdated” and “intolerant” and therefore must not be tolerated. Such an attitude is having a profound effect on those who cannot simply update their deeply held convictions to fit in with the latest fashionable and politically correct dogma.

While the threats to freedom have varied over the centuries, today it is the new orthodoxy of “nondiscrimination” that is most rapidly eroding the religious freedom that has been so dearly fought for. In the name of tolerance and non-discrimination, Christians have been dismissed from work, sued, investigated by the police, and had their charitable organizations shut down.

Let me provide a couple of examples.

The case of Lillian Ladele, the Christian registrar who was dismissed because she would not perform same-sex civil partnerships, was argued before the European Court of Human Rights last month. The overwhelming evidence was that she could have been accommodated by her employer. A simple timetable would have allowed her to continue to work without the slightest problem to her employer or any same-sex couples seeking a civil partnership. Yet she was dismissed – in the name of nondiscrimination.

The case of Gary McFarlane also came before the European Court of Human Rights last month. McFarlane was a Christian relationships counsellor for a national organization and was dismissed for gross misconduct for simply raising with his manager his religious concerns with counselling those engaged in same-sex behaviour. His objection was purely hypothetical: no actual clients were involved, no one had been denied a service, and referring clients to other counselors when there was a conflict of interest was common practice. He, too, was dismissed in the name of non-discrimination.

Participating OSCE states must therefore ensure that they do not use anti-discrimination legislation to limit Christian freedoms or fund lawsuits punishing Christians for holding to their moral beliefs. Intolerance against Christians cannot be justified on the basis that State actors believe that Christian beliefs are themselves intolerant.

Therefore, in order to ensure that tolerance is not only permitted for the select few, Alliance Defending Freedom strongly urges participating OSCE States to find a fair balance between the competing rights that have been created by non-discrimination laws, so that Christians are not punished for simply wishing to hold to their deeply held beliefs in the workplace or in other areas of public life.