

Thu, August 26, 2004

Wake up, McGuinty

By PETER WORTHINGTON

Political correctness aside, it's incredible and outrageous that Premier Dalton McGuinty is apparently willing to have Sharia law resolve domestic disputes in Ontario's Muslim community.

Attorney-General Michael Bryant is already "looking into options" (to be up and running this year) and former NDP A-G Marion Boyd has been appointed to review procedures that the Islamic Institute for Civil Justice will apply if the province approves.

Premier McGuinty's wishy-washy "I want to make sure we are getting this right," compounds the outrage. He is getting it wrong -- woefully wrong, because Sharia is alien to everything Canada stands for: Our Constitution, Charter of Rights, Common law, Canadian values.

For what it's worth, the Canadian Council of Muslim Women has it right when it "sees no compelling reason to live under any other form of law in Canada, as we want the same laws to apply to us as to other Canadian women."

Amen to that. Liberals constantly agonize that every citizen should be treated equally and the same, whatever their physical or mental handicaps, whatever their colour or creed.

Mr. McGuinty should be reminded that Sharia is totally unfair and discriminates against women and has no place in Canadian culture, and certainly not in law. In short, it's an abomination that mitigates against women in favour of men.

Premier McGuinty (and others) may be dazzled and confused by the 1991 Arbitration Act that allows some religious groups to mediate or resolve family disputes. Fine, but discrimination is unacceptable.

Sharia is a combination religion and law. Muslims dispute whether these laws are divine or man-made, based on the Koran.

The risk to women if Sharia laws are applied in domestic disputes can't be exaggerated. Muslim women are vulnerable to intimidation, coercion, being bullied into accepting Sharia intervention.

Immigrants from Muslim countries may be pressured into arranged marriages and not treated equally in disputes with male family members.

Regardless, Sharia violates our values. It would seem that Sharia law violates what the Koran espouses as the "inherent dignity and equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family."

Men are still more equal than women. For example, Sharia law requires circumcision of males and females. But, there is a world of difference between snip, snip of a foreskin, and grotesque mutilation of women's sexual organs.

A Muslim man may marry "People of the Book" (Jews or Christians), but Islamic law forbids a Muslim woman from marrying anyone but a Muslim. In sexual offenses and adultery, usually the woman is blamed for tempting the man.

In places like Nigeria, women can be stoned to death. Under Islam, husbands have the right, on

occasion, to beat disobedient wives; Allah made men to excel and be "maintainers of women."

Under Sharia law no part of a woman's body should be exposed. Often, women are punished for not covering head to foot. The essence of Islam is that it is immutable and rigid.

It atrophied 1,400 years ago and cannot evolve or be re-interpreted like other religions.

None of this is to suggest that Muslims should not practice their religion or have full rights as citizens. It is to say that Canada shouldn't consider adopting any part of Sharia law. It contravenes what we should stand for, especially regarding the sexes.

It's not too late. Premier McGuinty, who seems to stumble from gaffe to pitfall, should show leadership in Canadian values and reject Sharia law being applied to domestic disputes. For the sake of the province, for Muslim women, for Canada, and for his own conscience, McGuinty should listen to Muslim women who insist Canadian law, not Sharia law be applied to domestic issues.