

The Common Pursuit of Happiness

“Muslim women in Britain are cognisant of the fact that they have the inalienable right to the pursuit of happiness,” according to a letter published by *The Financial Times*.¹ The direct reminiscence of the American Declaration of Independence is shown by “inalienable right”, but why does Ms Ramdya extend this to the United Kingdom? Perhaps she was taught it at a British school, and perhaps by College Net Training Services, an organisation employed by schools and colleges to give them the values and beliefs they are supposed to be teaching and of which, otherwise, they might be unaware. A set of College Net’s papers about Equality begins with the quotation, in big type, in their version, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

This country fought a long war against the enunciators of that doctrine. If we had won would the world have now been unhappier? Whether or not, College Net’s programme is not yet a part of the British constitution. “**Our aim is positive futures for all and for every person to enjoy life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.**” Why is this American eighteenth-century ideal put out semi-officially on behalf of Her Majesty’s Government? This is a free country and we are under no obligation to believe this stuff, much less to have the next generation indoctrinated with it.

Is happiness to be found by pursuing it? The Christian religion is established in this monarchy, and according to Christianity “He that loseth his life for my sake shall find it”² and “Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.”³ There is nothing about the pursuit of happiness in the Bible, or about rights.

What did the founding fathers of the U.S.A. think they meant when they said all men are created equal? The proposition only makes sense if equality is said to be “in respect of” something or other, and there it is obviously and grossly untrue. We are not all as good as each other at running, mathematics, or common judgement. If we were there could be no competitions or graded examinations. In the Land of the Free they are not even equal in material inheritances, any more than we are.

Well, equal in the sight of God? Professor Anthony O’Hear agrees with me (who could not?) that men and women are not equal “in their attainment, ability, effort, upbringing or luck”, but only after the disclaimer “Aside from their position in the sight of God”.⁴ It is risky to take God for granted. Where has God said that we are all equal in His sight? In the Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard all are paid alike, but they have not all worked alike. In the Parable of the Talents the rewards are different. The rain falls upon the just and the unjust, and we are all equal in respect of the rain; but if there are just and unjust we are not all equal in respect of justice. St Paul says that in Christ there is neither circumcision nor uncircumcision, Greek nor Jew. We are all equal in the sense that we are all sinners in need of forgiveness and faith. But Paul himself claimed to be the *chief* of sinners.⁵ and one of Bunyan’s characters is Little Faith. And if we are all equal in the sight of God why are some but not others of us popes and moderators, and why are churches named after some Christians but not others?

In the great and terrible day of universal assent to our right to absolute equality in the pursuit of happiness we shall all be really equal—in the loss of mind.

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1 From Kavita Ramdya, 26 September 2009 2 Matthew x.39 3 Matthew v.4

4 “The Philosopher’s Stone—John Ruskin on Education”, *Quarterly Review* vol. 1 no. 3, 2007, p. 29

5 1 Timothy i.15