An atheist challenged your beliefs?

No problem!

STOP PRESS!
American Accused of Blasphemy Is Killed in Pakistan Courtroom

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Secular World - the quarterly journal of Atheist Alliance International
Charity Reg 1991, UN Consultative Status, Council of Europe Participatory Status, Gold rated by Guide Star
Our affiliates have voted and the election was a big success! It has provided us with some excellent new Board Directors.

We have filled all but two of the newly created places for Regional Directors. Andy Phillips is Director for Europe, Jason Frye-Kolarik is Director for North America and Larry Tepa is Director for Africa. Rosi Guastella, our longtime volunteer, was elected to the position of Social Media Director and Manoj John takes up the post of Development Director.

The Board now has members resident in Greece, India, the Netherlands, the UK, the USA and Zambia. We still have no Directors for Australia and South America but, since our Chief Executive, Michael Sherlock, is Australian, we can claim to have truly global representation.

In our first meeting, the new board elected the following officers: President: Howard Burman Vice President: Bill Flavel Sec/Treasurer: Fotis Frangopulos.

I’m really pleased to congratulate our officers on their election. Howard Burman has shown himself to be excellent. Presidential material since he took over following Gal’s retirement, Bill is the powerhouse of administration and Fotis is unbelievably hardworking and committed.

Thus reinvigorated, we are forging ahead with a bigger and better program for 2020 and beyond. Let me tell you about our exciting new developments!

We have just formed an Advisory Council of the great and the good. Howard will be telling you about that on the next page.

The other new initiative that is keeping me busy at the moment is our plan for the first ever live streamed mini telethon! If you can remember Live Aid, you will know what a telethon is - it’s a mixture of entertainment and appeal. The performers donate their talent and the viewers donate their money to a worthy cause.

This has always been done on television before and often runs on for hours, but now we have the technology for doing a mini version by live streaming. Someone has to be the first to do it and the Board has given me backing to do a pilot which could make Atheist Alliance International the trail blazing organisation!

On Sunday August the 16th at 20:00 BST (3pm on EST, noon on PT and 21:00 in Europe and Africa) we will be launching the first ‘Herding Cats’ show! I have recorded a great intro and already have a line up of several different artists.

I’m preparing a video/slide presentation for the appeal. We will visit the GoFundMe site periodically to show the money coming in, just like they do on the TV. Throughout the show, clues will be given to the identity of the Guest Celebrity, and viewers will be able to guess in the comment bar. At the climax of the show, the Celeb will be revealed and the winners will be invited on screen to chat with him or her! Yes, it’s interactive!

This being the era of lockdown, there is a large number of frustrated performers desperate for an audience! So far, I have more than enough for the first show, including an actor, a comedian, a magician and a professional singer/guitarist. We will be promoting the pilot show in our free Insider newsletter (sign up here) and on our Facebook and Twitter sites. There will even be a trailer!

Now I’m normally a phlegmatic and sanguine Englishman, but even I am excited by this! I hope you will be in the live audience, or will watch the subsequent podcast...

This planet needs rationalists!

John Richards
Publications Director
secureworld@atheistalliance.org
At AAI, we are continually looking for ways to enhance our presence and effectiveness as we work to support atheists and atheist organizations world-wide especially where lives are threatened or diminished by theists.

To assist us we have created a new component to our organization—an Advisory Council of influential and committed secularists from around the world. They will be working with the Board and Executive Director by providing input on AAI’s work and by being responsive to AAI’s public activities.

We are eagerly looking forward to their contributions. The initial Advisory Council members:

- Arup Chatterjee, a doctor deeply committed for people all around the world to have a choice to be free from religion. He is the author of Mother Teresa the Untold Story.
- David Fitzgerald is an atheist author, public speaker and historical researcher who has been actively investigating the Historical Jesus question for over twenty years.
- Leo Igwe is a scholar and an activist. He founded the Nigerian Humanist Movement (now the Humanist Association of Nigeria) and worked for some years for Humanists UK and the Center for Inquiry in the US.
- Spencer Lucas is a mental health worker, a teacher who emphasizes critical thinking, and a leader of several atheist and humanist groups in Canada.
- David Madison, a former Methodist minister, writes a weekly article for the Debunking Christianity Blog and has a YouTube channel featuring videos relating to atheism.
- Yasmine Mohammed is the author of Unveiled: How Western Liberals Empower Radical Islam and the founder of Free Hearts Free Minds, an organization that provides mental health support for freethinkers living in Muslim majority countries who are in danger of being executed for denouncing Islam.
- Matt Kovach has been an atheist for more than 35 years and an activist for more than 20 years. He worked for Atheist Alliance back in the late 1990s and joined Atheist Alliance International the same year the organization was set up in 2001.
- Narendra Nayak is a rationalist and skeptic who has conducted more than 2000 workshops promoting scientific temper and rational thinking in his home country India, as well as in Australia, Greece, England, Norway, Denmark, Sri Lanka and Nepal. He founded the NGO, Aid Without Religion.
- Hank Pellissier is the founder/director of Humanist Global Charity, a non-profit organization working primarily in DR Congo, Uganda, Kenya, Ghana, and Nigeria.
- Ali Amjad Rizvi writes a column for the Huffington Post and co-hosts the Secular Jihadists for a Muslim Enlightenment podcast.
- Dr. Gad Saad, a leading public intellectual, is a professor and evolutionary behavioural scientist.
- Michael Shermer is a science writer, historian of science, founder of The Skeptics Society, and editor-in-chief of its magazine Skeptic. He is also a scientific advisor to the American Council on Science and Health.
- Kate Smurthwaite is a British political comedian, writer and activist who addresses issues of religious intolerance and injustice. She has made thousands of appearances on British and international TV and radio and is a patron of Humanists UK.
- John Wagner is a Professor of Neuroscience at Weill Cornell Graduate School of Medical Science. He is a board member of The Secular Humanist Society of New York and he represents Humanists International at the UN.

Howard Burman
President, Atheist Alliance International
president@atheistalliance.org
How I changed my mind about: FAITH

It’s said in so many ways, explicitly and implicitly. “If you choose not to believe...” It’s the accusation of the believer on the unbeliever. I’ve lost track of the number of times and ways I’ve seen this argument or engaged in it. The accusation is infuriating because of the implication of dishonesty. By choosing beliefs you are, essentially, lying to yourself about reality because you don’t want to deal with it. Believers know that this argument makes us angry, but they do not really understand why.

To the type of believer who has listened to the bad apologetic arguments of Ray Comfort or Peter Hitchens the accusation of choosing a belief isn’t an insult to the same degree that it is to the freethinker. We are rightly insulted by the implication that we are so dishonest as to choose any belief. To the believer the only dishonest thing is not choosing his own belief.

As a believer I was trained to feel that I had an obligation to believe certain things. This was not divorced from the claim that these things were true, but was paired with it.

Remember, in Christianity, the greatest and only important virtue is to believe. The only sin god will not pardon is the sin of disbelief.

This is a more profound distortion than many people realize. It is not just dogma. It's an active part of the Christians' life on many levels. Steven Hassan's BITE model analyses cults and cult-like groups on the basis of four things: Behaviour control, Information control, Thought control, Emotion control.

As 2 Corinthians 10:15 proclaims,

"Neither do we go beyond our limits by boasting of work done by others Our hope is that, as your faith continues to grow, our sphere of activity among you will greatly expand"

So, they attempt to demolish every argument and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and they try to take captive every thought and make it obedient to Christ.

Truly this verse may count as thought control but if you’ve ever heard a sermon on it you know it is used to advocate all four BITEs. A believer ought to start or end their day in prayer and bible study. Ideally both. They ought to pray over each meal. To remain constantly aware of god in their every action. And above all to shield themselves from doubt.

Doubt is a terrifying thing to the believer. It is characterized as a lurking shark. Or, more frequently as the flaming darts of the devil. There is actually a description in Ephesians illustrating Christian virtues as the armour of god. Not for nothing are they told to take up the shield of faith.

In an age of doubt some ministers have had to adapt these narratives, characterizing doubt as a noble trial, a baptism of pain that refines the faith of the believer.

You may notice the one thing that the believer is never, ever, encouraged to do is to answer the bloody question! Questions posited to the believer by the unbeliever are, at best, treated like a salesman ‘overcoming objections’. It’s not a matter of honest enquiry but of trying to find the “right” patter that will fix the problem, patch the hole, and let you move on.

Every once in a while, a believer determines to be more honest than their training. To really look for factual answers. To refuse to blindly surrender into the waiting arms of

(continued on page 5)
mindless faith. If they persevere, they become atheists.

I cannot describe what an earth shaking change it was to realize this. To release the idea that I "ought" to believe in something. To realize that doubt is not a sin, or frightening, or evil. That it is, in fact, the very best way to the truth. Doubt is actually the virtue. Faith is the vice. This was one of the most earth shattering realizations of my life.

When I first came out as an atheist to my family there were a few attempts to talk me back. My mother tried this same tactic, accusing me of not wanting to believe. When I pointed out that this was a dishonest tactic, that choosing to believe was literally make-believe, she was shocked. I can still see the fear in her eyes as she denied it.

Many insist that they cannot choose their beliefs. That they must be compelled by evidence. The underlying word they miss is "honesty".

Because that is the root of the conflict: the claim that faith is a virtue; pretending that resisting the compulsion of overwhelming evidence is sometimes the right thing to do; the weird idea that choosing a belief could ever lead to truth...

Eventually some calm returned. Blacks were said to be descended from the disreputable son of Noah, Ham, thus justifying their slavery. 11 million Africans were transported to the Western hemisphere. Slaves were not emancipated in the US until 1865.

Although the founders of the United States, including Jefferson, Madison and Adams established a secular, not religious, government, America was 'steeped' in Christianity, which was 'tightly interwoven in the fabric of American life'. In the 19th century, there were 3 popular movements called 'Great Awakenings', highly emotional and anti-rational.

In Tennessee in 1925, biology teacher John Scopes was 'convicted' for teaching evolution, contradicting the Biblical account of the origin of life. This anti-evolution law has since been repealed, but Biblical literalists are not deterred. They demand equal time in the science class for "Creationism". Fortunately, in 2004 Judge John Jones III in the Kitzmiller vs. Dover schools trial dismissed 'Intelligent Design' as a 'religious alternative masquerading as a scientific theory' and ruled that it could not be taught as science in Dover's schools. He added that evolution itself did not deny a creator.

In spite of the 909 deaths of his cult members ordered by its leader Jim Jones and the 11 murders of abortion providers since 1993, Rick Snedeker is optimistic that the US is becoming more secular. As evidence, fewer new hotels routinely install Gideon bibles in every room. The proportion of 'Nones' (those with no religious affiliation) in America is steadily increasing. Rick Snedeker proposes that philosophy should be taught to all young children to introduce them to the idea of doubt. We can all applaud that.

For other articles by Evangelical Lilith see back issues of Secular World available free to read or to download and print on our website by pressing shift, control and clicking here.

**Evangelical Lilith**

Regular Contributor

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**Secular World**

**Norman Bacrac**

Secular World's Book Reviewer

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"All non-Catholics are doomed to Hell" was the dreadful warning taught to Catholic children in their catechism class fifty years ago. This is typical of the 'teaching' that inspired Rick Snedeker to write this record of Christianity's malign influence on American life, believing that its good effects do not cancel out its atrocities.

He asks 'Why do most Americans still worship? Are they scared not to believe? Are we born to believe something?' He fears we are 'soaked' in religion: unconstitutional slogans such as 'In God we trust' and 'One nation under God' still abound, although the USA's founders intended there to be a 'wall of separation' between church and state.

The fault began with the Puritans of the 1620s and 30s. They were not necessarily in favour of religious tolerance, regarding that as 'the enemy of American religion'. In early New World settlements, the local Christian church was often the only organised governing institution. Only Puritan Church members could be electors. Poverty was evidence of sin or weakness (see Weber's The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism). Personal prosperity indicated divine Election for immortality, Puritanism having derived from Calvinism. Slavery was Biblically justified: "Slaves. Accept the authority of your masters..." [1 Peter 2:18].

There were reformers - Roger Williams opposed theft of land from the natives and believed in the equality of all citizens, religious freedom and the church dissociated from the state. A Reformed Baptist, he founded the first Baptist church in his Rhode Island colony in 1636.

By contrast, Satan was widely believed to be active on Earth, prompting multiple accusations of witchcraft as religious hysteria spread. In the Puritan-governed village of Salem in 1692, 150 people were imprisoned for allegedly communing with the Devil and 19 were hanged.
Breaching the Founders’ “Wall of Separation”

Since the first English Christian fundamentalists arrived in the 1600s on the shores of what would become the United States, Christianity has become increasingly embedded in the nation's social and cultural fabric. This is completely contrary to the Founding Fathers' original vision of America; it was designed by them to be a secular democratic republic built on evidence-based Enlightenment values, emphatically not religious faith. Indeed, the Founders purposefully intended that a high, strong “wall of separation” should keep church and state apart in the new nation, while allowing individual religious freedom untrammeled by government—and vice versa. But Christians with theocratic dreams keep trying to breach the wall. Through their efforts, God is now in evidence everywhere in American public life—on our money, in our schools, even in high-level-government officials’ speeches. Freedom of—and from—religion is the American promise to all its people whatever their belief—or disbelief. This is what the Founding Fathers intended for their new nation, not the undemocratic theocracy zealous evangelicals are trying to force on American society today.

Shift + Command and click on the pic to buy.

Thomas Walters, the newly appointed professor of natural philosophy and astronomy at Tideland College, strode confidently into the faculty lounge and scanned the room. He observed that a couple of gray-haired men had glanced in his direction, frowned, and immediately returned to their reading. He was exhilarated, yet his pounding heart evidenced a touch of anxiety as well...

Marshall Moskow has written an absorbing historical drama about science, faith, and social upheaval during the period of reconstruction after the American Civil War. The reader follows the experiences of Thomas, his family, two former slaves employed by him; a professor of Latin from Germany with a secret past; and three questioning, rambunctious students.

Shift + Command and click on the pic to buy
Non-evidential god is a snowflake!

One wonders, is God so insecure as to have his feelings hurt by those who would question his existence? Taking offense is a peculiarly human trait, one that repeats through most religious anthropomorphizations of divinity. Here’s a Biblical example:

Exodus 20:5 I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me. These are the traits of a petty tyrant, not a divine and, supposedly, all-powerful entity. The logical conclusion then is that blasphemy laws are designed to save religious people not only from having their belief system confronted, but also from having their feelings hurt.

In this era of fragility and cancel culture, it staggers the imagination that some people think they are entitled to have their tender emotions pampered on a daily basis. Can there be any more proof that God is a human invention, than the assigning of these human feelings?

In 2017, when I attended the IHEU Asian Humanist Conference in Manila, I had the privilege of meeting Carlos Celdran. Carlos enjoyed the unique status of having been the first Filipino to be accused, tried, and convicted for blasphemy under the national Penal Code (Sec. 4, Article 133): Offending religious feelings: The penalty [6 months to 2 years, 4 months] shall be imposed upon anyone who, in a place devoted to religious worship or during the celebration of any religious ceremony, shall perform acts notoriously offensive to the feelings of the faithful.

What did Carlos do to warrant such a conviction? He held up a sign, bearing the word, ‘Damaso’ In a Catholic church.

To explain, Father Damaso was a character in José Rizal’s decidedly anticlerical book, Noli Me Tangere (Touch Me Not, published in 1887) in which Damaso was the embodiment of all the abuses perpetrated by the Spanish friars who had systematically plundered the Philippines for centuries. For those unfamiliar with Philippine history, one of the reasons for the Philippine Revolution (1896-8), besides wanting independence from Spain, was revulsion at their treatment by the Spanish Catholics.

It was cosmically ironic then that devout Filipino Catholics should be offended by Carlos holding up a sign reminding them of their own opposition to Spanish Catholic interference, when Carlos was protesting the local version of exactly that, but it led to their delicate feelings being collectively hurt.

Carlos was objecting to the Catholic Church’s vehement opposition to the Reproductive Health bill. This bill was so divisive that it took over a decade to get passed because the Catholic Bishops threatened any legislator who voted for it with excommunication. And when a group of professors at a Catholic university signed a petition in favor of it, the chairman of the Episcopal Commission on Canon Law for the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines called for the professors not only to be fired, but to be charged with heresy!

Holding up this sign was apparently so offensive to the feelings of the faithful that they decided Carlos needed to be taught a lesson, with the outcome described above. When the Supreme Court failed to acquit him of this ridiculous charge, Carlos exiled himself to Spain to avoid serving the jail sentence. He died alone in 2019. This article is dedicated to him.

Jason Sylvester (Diogenes of Mayberry on Facebook, Dio_of_Mayberry on Twitter)
All of our cool merchandise can be seen and purchased here:
https://www.atheistalliance.org/our-shop/

Our Right to Be Secular Campaign has already accumulated thousands of signatures but we need thousands more before we take it to the United Nations Human Rights Council where we are the only atheist organization with consultation status.

If you haven’t already done so, please consider signing the petition. If you have, please consider encouraging your friends to do the same. Even if they are not atheists, they may well agree that atheists should have rights equivalent to those guaranteed to the religious. The more people who sign, the louder our voice will be at the UN! Granting the right to be secular should be a basic human right. Help us to make that a reality!

Please shift, control and click the link, then sign:
https://www.gopetition.com/petitions/the-right-to-be-secular.html
Poetry Page

The foul engendered worm
Feeds on the flesh of the life-giving form
Of our most Holy and Anointed One.

He is not risen, no,
He lies and moulders low;
Christ is not risen.

Ashes to ashes, dust to dust;
As of the unjust, also of the just —
Christ is not risen.

Is He not risen, and shall we not rise?
Oh, we unwise!
What did we dream, what wake we to discover?
Ye hills, fall on us, and ye mountains cover!

In darkness and great gloom
Come ere we thought it is our day of doom,
From the cursed world which is one tomb,
Christ is not risen!

Eat, drink, and die, for we are men deceived,
Of all the creatures under heaven's wide cope
We are most hopeless, who had once most hope,
We are most wretched that had most believed.
Christ is not risen.

Eat, drink, and play, and think this is bliss!
There is no Heaven but this!

by Arthur Hugh Clough

Conrad Didiodato
Poetry Page sub-editor
Pascal's Wager

I'm sure you've all heard of Pascal's Wager. The gist of it is that if you bet on there being a God (meaning the Medieval Catholic God in Pascal's case), you have an infinite expected return on investment, because at worst it costs you nothing and at best you get to go to an eternal heaven. Whereas if you bet against there being a God, you have an infinite expected negative return on investment, because at worst it costs you an infinite torment in an eternal hell, and at best it earns you nothing. So you should always put your money on there being a (Medieval Catholic) God.

There are several problems with this argument. For example, suppose we were speaking instead of the following scenario: a tsunami is rising behind you on the road, and you see no traffic, but the road is heavily fogged so you have no real way to know; you can surrender and be drowned, or attempt to drive faster than the wave in the mere hope there is no one ahead of you on the road to collide with. A simple utility equation will reveal you should attempt to outrun the wave. That option has a less than 100% probability of resulting in your death, whereas the surrendering option effectively has a 100% probability of your death. In other words, the outcome of that decision is "always death", whereas the other it’s "sometimes survive."

Once you have fully, rationally recognized that, the very fact of doing so will indeed cause you to genuinely believe survival is more likely when you assume without evidence the road is clear. This might not be what you would normally call "a belief the road is clear," since you would also still correctly believe that it yet might not be. But it is nevertheless a belief that "the road is more likely clear than that the tsunami will not overtake me if I remain still." Analogously, if Pascal's Wager is as sound as this reasoning would be about the road and the tsunami, then your recognizing that will likewise cause in you a genuine belief that "God more likely exists than that I will end up in an eternal paradise if he doesn't or that I will avoid an eternal hell if he does."

You will therefore believe in God to some significant degree, even as you admit you are not certain that God exists. Just as you would believe to some significant degree the road is clear—which means, not wholly, but enough to motivate your every decision. Just as Pascal was arguing for Catholicism.

Pascal's Wager is often presented in a formally invalid way, such that the conclusion really doesn't follow from the premises. But it nevertheless could be written in a form that would be formally valid.

Formal validity means the conclusion must be true if the premises are. But to get that outcome, those premises must be more numerous than those usually stated by Pascal, or by anyone defending or using the argument, and it is the fallacies inherent in those premises that cause it to fail.

Logicians must then say the argument is unsound. And it is. Its conclusion does not follow because its premises lack sufficient probability to render its conclusion probable.

Dr. Richard Carrier
Ancient Historian
The Evil God Challenge

Stephen Law, now retired from his full time post as Reader in Philosophy at Heythrop College, London University, has been a regular contributor to Secular World for several years. He is most famous for his ‘Evil God Challenge’, which is the most viewed paper of the journal Religious Studies of the decade. We reproduce a section of it here and you can shift/control/click on the image to view the movie version.

Abstract:
This paper develops a challenge to theism. The challenge is to explain why the hypothesis that there exists an omnipotent, omniscient and all-good god should be considered significantly more reasonable than the hypothesis that there exists an omnipotent, omniscient and all-evil god. Theists typically dismiss the evil-god hypothesis out of hand because of the problem of good – there is surely too much good in the world for it to be the creation of such a being. But then, why doesn’t the problem of evil provide equally good grounds for dismissing belief in a good god?

The evil-god challenge
Let’s call the central claim classical of monotheism – that there exists an omnipotent, omniscient and supremely benevolent creator – the ‘Good God Hypothesis’. Typically, those who believe this hypothesis, while perhaps insisting that it is a ‘faith position’, nevertheless consider it not unreasonable. Believing in the existence of God, they maintain, is not like believing in the existence of Santa or faires; it is much more reasonable than that.

In response, critics often point out that, even if most of the popular arguments for the existence of God do provide grounds for the supposing that there is some sort of supernatural intelligence behind the universe, they fail to provide much clue as to its moral character. Suppose, for example, that the universe shows clear evidence of having been designed, to conclude, solely on that basis, that the designer is supremely benevolent would be about as unjustified as it would be to conclude that it is, say, supremely malevolent, which clearly would not be justified at all.

Critics may add that there is, in addition, ample empirical evidence against the existence of such a supremely benevolent being. In particular, they may invoke the evidential problem of evil. (Continued in next edition)

Stephen Law has written several books.

They make philosophy accessible to the general reader and some are aimed at children.

Purchase them here: https://tinyurl.com/yazkkun7
Blasphemy is for the Irrational

The character Dr. House quipped, “Rational arguments don’t usually work on religious people, otherwise there would be no religious people.” (House - S02E03)

Here are a few examples of my own brushes with irrationalism over the issue of blasphemy.

In 2016, I was a speaker in Taipei at the IHEU (now Humanists International) Asian Humanist Conference, where I met a Pakistani freethinker who had travelled there to meet like-minded people. In 2018, when I was sent to work in Pakistan for eight months, I reached out to this gentleman to see if we could meet up. He and a fellow atheist friend came to have dinner with me, where we chatted about disbelief in this zealously Islamic country.

This was less than a year since Mashal Khan had been stripped and dragged outside to be beaten to death by an enraged mob at his university for posting blasphemous content on social media, which he didn’t do, but this fact was irrelevant to the inflamed passions of the true believers. Our conversation was muted, lest we be overheard and arrested, or worse, suffer Mashal Khan’s fate.

The realization that the simple act of having a conversation can get you imprisoned or killed was a hugely experiential eye-opener. By comparison, the whining of ‘oppressed’ American evangelicals in the West is laughable.

A second example also took place over a dinner in Pakistan, but this time with a devout believer. This gentleman mentioned that the End-of-Days battle between God and Satan was a Muslim conception. I politely disavowed him of this mistaken interpretation, pointing out the Christian book of Revelation details this Armageddon scenario and that it was written around five hundred years before Mohammad was born. How, then, could it be a Qu’ranic invention? He, despite the obvious evidence to the contrary, continued to insist. I never one to roll over and concede when the facts are on my side, kept on. I next pointed out that not only does the book of Revelation predate Islam, but that this story itself shares much in common with the Zoroastrian Enc-Times myth, making it predate the Muslim version by at least a millennium.

He asserted that I should not challenge his faith as it hurt his feelings. I said hurting someone’s feelings is not against the law, to which he replied, “It should be.”

Finally, I was still in Pakistan when Asia Bibi was released from jail, and the zealots lost what little of their minds they could politely be said to possess. Protestors blocked major intersections and demanded that this supposed blasphemer should be killed. I could hear this from my apartment and was warned by local friends not to go out for my own safety.

Blasphemy laws are designed for one purpose only: to prevent the irrational from having their impotent arguments, like their ultimately impotent gods, from being challenged.

Jason Sylvester
(Diogenes of Mayberry on Facebook, Dio_of_Mayberry on Twitter)
An Egyptian Apostate's View

Historically, Islam was spread by hate, the sword and war (jihad). The glorified Islamic bloodbath resulted in the conquering of Spain in the West and India and much of Asia in the East. Islamic conquest was about killing non-Muslims and the mass conversion of women as the future of a Muslim society. That all illustrates one thing, which is that those who had that in their past will never have peace in their own society. Islam teaches us that the struggle with oneself is the straightforward way to heaven.

The Islamization of Egypt was started by Hassan Al-Banna, the leader of the Muslim Brotherhood. The intention was an Islamic revival of a comprehensive and complete Islamic theology as the basis for all aspects of life constitutionally, economically and socially with no limitation. They set out to turn Egypt from the secular, democratic society that was handed over by the British into a backward, new Islamic epoch.

Hassan Al-Banna was soon assassinated by secret Egyptian police. Amir Al-Mu'minig gave him the martyr title of Caliph Omar Bin Al-Khattab. This inspired other Islamic figures to take the Jihad flag with the intention to kill and destroy every tribe, every nation and convert all to the new ideology of Islam. The killing of Al-Banna was just the beginning. Al-Banna’s followers assassinated the judge of the appeals court, Ahmed Al-Khazendar, afterwards.

This was followed by the assassination of Al-Nuqrashi, who was then prime minister. One of the Muslim Brotherhood, disguised in a police officer’s uniform, shot Al-Nuqrashi from behind and later one of the followers of Al-Banna murdered the assassin.

In the Egyptian revolution of 2011, the Muslim Brotherhood used violence and torture to overthrow the despotic Husnii Mubarak and, after coming to an arrangement with the military of Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood got into power. They elected Mohamed Morsi as president - the first Islamist to be president, and many things changed. Violence and threats were used to control the deep state of Egypt but it didn’t work out so the military grabbed Morsi from power and a coup d’état enabled another military despot to rule. There’s seemingly no end to this story.

No freedom in an Islamic state

The Islamic interpretation of civil rights is nonsense. Islam bashes civil rights. It is not only the Muslim Brotherhood but all the Muslim groups: Wahhabism, Shiaism, Sunnism agree that people are property. There are no women’s rights, no child has a right to choose anything in his/her own life. Patriarchy prevails, the minority have no rights so any human being, whether in Egypt or any other Islamic state, is suffering because of Islamic rule that emanates from Islamic theology and culture. Killing apostates, throwing LGBTQ people from high buildings and psychological torture all goes on.

Atheism

Atheism is a crime in most of the Muslim region and punishment can be meted out to those who don’t believe in Allah. Promoting atheism is unthinkable; many are jailed because of their thoughts and expressions. Non-Muslims effectively live in a big jail and are psychologically tortured by everyone else. If your family members don’t kill you they will abandon you. The experience is tough, the life intolerable, and we are just awaiting our death.

The only way of surviving is to seek refuge in a country that will accept us (atheists, LGBTQ or Christians even) from Islamic nations. I see refugees practicing Islam in Europe and America but no Atheists or freethinkers. Isn’t it a weird world that we are living in? That’s a question that’s hard to answer.

Marcus
Victim of 'Blasphemy':
Mubarak Bala

Plato considered the ideal society to be reflective of the ideal individual. If true, the accurate image of the society probably reflects the image of the average citizen.

Tendencies of hate and bias towards nonbelievers, can follow from theocratic nation-states or theocratic portions of a society. In northern Nigeria, such cases exist.

Northern Nigeria remains Muslim-majority as a state of Nigeria. Within this region, Mubarak Bala, who is now the President of the Humanist Association of Nigeria, has been involved in two cases based on the values of northern Nigerian culture. Being a Muslim-majority area, many impose an interpretation of Sharia Law into the legal context deemed binding on both Muslims and non-Muslims.

The first case for Bala happened in 2014, when he publicly renounced faith in Islam. He was forced to enter into a psychiatric ward where he was drugged and put in a coma. Many hoped Bala would come back to Allah and belief in Muhammad as the final messenger of Allah.

However, when Bala awoke, he was pissed off. It became a widely known case in northern Nigeria and within some of the international humanist community.

Abubakur Shekau – no less – purportedly spoke out against Bala.

He is the leader of Boko Haram which displaced more than two million people, murdered thousands and raped hundreds, while costing the Nigerian economy untold amounts as a result of the mayhem caused by their terrorism.

The ‘problem’ doesn’t come from atheists, because most remain in hiding or silent; it comes from the public who disapprove of the confident status of an atheist and a humanist. That’s the ‘crime’. This year Bala was arrested on a complaint filed by S.S. Umar & Co. about his social media posts. They referenced a claim about Muhammad being a terrorist. S.S. Umar & Co. reported that this was provocative and annoying to the mostly Muslim population.

Bala and I were working on some interviews on April 27 for publication about this issue. On April 28, Bala was apprehended by two non-uniformed officers in Kaduna, and placed in jail. Subsequently, he was moved to Kano, Nigeria, where the legal context differs from Kaduna and conflicts with the Nigerian Constitution. The Sharia law states, Whoever by any means publicly insults or seeks to incite contempt of any religion in such a manner as to be likely to lead to a breach of the peace, shall be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to two years, or with fine, or with both.

Whereas the Constitution says, 38 (1) Every person shall be entitled to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, including freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom (either alone or in community with others, and in public or in private) to manifest and propagate his religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice and observance.

39 (1) Every person shall be entitled to freedom of expression, including freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart ideas and information without interference.

Nigeria needs to get this sorted out. AAI is campaigning for the constitution to be obeyed.

Can a non-evidential god be harmed by words? I doubt it. But men can be harmed by laws to ‘protect’ those gods...

Scott Jacobsen

Mubarak’s wife, Amina, tells her story
Shift, control, click here
If I asked you to think of a famous atheist, one of the 'New Atheists' - Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, Christopher Hitchens and Daniel Dennett - might come to your mind. The atheist movement, however, includes other individuals from all over the world, whose work and activism matches their great contributions. One such person is Ayaan Hirsi Ali, a Somali-born Dutch-American woman who has been leading a fight against religious indoctrination for decades, while supporting women's right and freedom from religion, especially in the Muslim world.

Hirsi Ali, born in 1959, was forcibly subjected to female genital mutilation (FGM) and was forced, by her family, to marry a distant cousin whom she had never met. In order to avoid the arranged marriage, Hirsi Ali fled Somalia and arrived in the Netherlands in 1992, where she applied for asylum, managing to obtain a residence permit. Since then, she has been fighting relentlessly for women's rights, leading the campaign against forced marriage, honour killings, child marriage and FGM.

Hirsi Ali's belief in God and her devotion to Islam was profoundly shaken by the September 11 attacks in the United States in 2001. After listening to Osama bin Laden saying that the Qur'an justified the attacks, she said: "I picked up the Qur'an and the hadith and started looking through them, to check. I hated to do it, because I knew that I would find Bin Laden's quotations in there."

In 2002, she renounced her religion and became an atheist. It was then that Hirsi Ali started becoming a public figure, appearing in the media and writing against religious indoctrination and for the rights of all people, especially women, to be free from the shackles of religion. In 2003, she successfully fought a parliamentary election and became a member of the Dutch House of Representatives.

As Hirsi Ali got more involved in public discourse, she received more and more complaints and a number of death threats, one of which led to the assassination of one of her colleagues. In 2004, Hirsi Ali collaborated with Theo van Gogh, a Dutch director, to produce the 10-minute short film 'Submission', which dealt with violence against women in the Islamic world. The film caused a lot of controversy and both Hirsi Ali and van Gogh received death threats. Sadly, the death threats against van Gogh became a reality as, soon after the production of 'Submission', van Gogh was fatally shot and stabbed in Amsterdam by a member of the terrorist organisation Hofstad Group.

The murderer had left a death threat for Hirsi Ali pinned on van Gogh's chest. Following this event, Hirsi Ali was aided by government agencies to go into hiding in various places in the Netherlands and in the United States. This incident alone reveals the great risk and courage that individuals such as Hirsi Ali and van Gogh take in openly talking against human rights abuses fuelled by harmful religious doctrines.

Throughout her activist career, Hirsi Ali received multiple awards in recognition of her contribution to women's rights. In 2005, she was named by Time magazine as one of the 100 most influential people in the world and in January 2006 she was recognised as "European of the Year" by Reader's Digest.

Ayaan Hirsi Ali did not let religious extremists control her life and has exposed religious violence and religious indoctrination. Through her immense determination and courage she has managed to give voice to thousands of women and girls around the world whose lives are destroyed because of religious fundamentalism.

Angelos Sofocleous
Sub-editor
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