

## Hesitance against Violence

As a Christian, I hesitate to criticize other religions. Nothing human is perfect, no culture is perfect, no religion (the root and heart of culture) is perfect. And pointing to others' flaws has the double downside that it misdirects attention both from one's own weaknesses and from others' strengths. But faced with this question, I cannot avoid a few comments on *Islam and violence*: "A journalism student in Afghanistan has been sentenced to death for distributing an internet article that was considered an insult to the Prophet Muhammad. Do Islamic beliefs preclude freedom of speech? What about other faiths?"

1.....I preface these remarks with what I said in prefacing my teaching of Islam in the University of Hawaii: "This is a *noble religion* of high contributions to humanity and with a high potential for contributing to global peace and prosperity." I am pained to have to speak of any downside of any religion. Would that we could speak of the downside each of one's own religion and only of the upside of all the others! But we can honor truth and hope only by admonishing as well as affirming one another.

2.....Violence is a factor in all human traditions, all cultural-religious histories. I confess my own religion's shameful story of it. But the formative Christian literature has a greater suspicion of violence, and less expectation of what good it may achieve, than does the formative Islamic literature. This is largely because of a difference in the roles of our founders: Muhammad, the warrior prophet, led in killing; Jesus, the nonviolent announcer of the full-coming kingdom of God, *was* killed. For Christians and their societies, the cross of Jesus (the fact of his execution) erects, between the impulse to violence and acts of violence, a barrier of hesitance that is unparalleled in Islam.

3.....Less complex higher animals have cultures, but for two reasons they do not develop civilizations: both their languages and their ability to defer gratification are too primitive. Human beings mature, and create civilizations, only to the extent of their developing both their linguistic and their gratification-deferral potentials.

4.....We can develop language because of the complexity and pliancy of our speech-organism, and we can develop gratification-deferral because our brains offer the amygdala-neocortex route as alternative to the immediate passage from sensory-emotive impulse to neuromuscular action. When we impose thought and decision between our lower-animal direct movement from impulse to action, we are using this God-given alternative route. All of us earthlings will have to make more use of it as we strive toward addressing global problems globally on the basis of religion as well as the other dimensions of human life. (Violence, of course, is only one gratification needing deferral for humanization.)

5.....In the West, there's a long and lengthening distance between crime and the death penalty. In Islam, that distance is shorter. In the West, blasphemy is no longer a crime. In Islam, blasphemy is an expansive category of capital crimes; and the fear of death (official and unofficial) as the general punishment for "blaspheming" lies like a gray incubus of fear in the Muslim world and beyond. (Apparently, the blasphemy which that young journalist was condemned to death for was not *directly* insulting Muhammad but suggesting a particular equal right for women in implicit alleged violation of the Qur'an.)

6.....Blasphemy in Islam is a negative-sanctional blanket over what the West calls freedom of speech, including of the press. The contrast with Christianity could not be starker. In orthodox Christianity, Jesus is God (as well as man) and nobody gets killed for blaspheming him or for departing from him into another religion. In orthodox Islam, Muhammad is *not* God, but everybody is in danger of death for blaspheming him or for departing from him into another religion.

7.....Osama bin Laden, soon after 9/11, said "I was ordered to fight the people until they say there is no god but Allah, and his prophet [is] Muhammad." I would like to think that this understanding of jihad is marginal in Islam, like a shoreside whirlpool in the fast-flowing Niagara River. But it turns out that he was quoting Muhammad's farewell address, March 632 (Osama adding the last four words). Increasing numbers of Muslims are speaking out against the Islamist overreading of this to promote world-intimidating violence. Against this extremism, Muslims of ecumenical mind are increasingly reaching out to engage non-Muslim religious leaders in conversations toward a more truly human world of peace and prosperity.

8.....Between the U.N. Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Islamic sharia there can be no reconciliation. For Islam, “war territory” is the whole world except where populations live under sharia. And sharia cannot survive freedom of speech and press. That is why this 20-year-old journalist has been condemned to death.

9.....Contrast these words of faith in the power of truth to win its own battles, unimpeded and unaided by the force of law and the power of the sword. They are from Jefferson’s Second Inaugural Address (1805). “...truth and reason have maintained their own ground against false opinions in league with false facts; the press...needs no...legal restraint; the public judgment will correct false reasoning and opinions on a full hearing of all parties.... [If the press descends to] demoralizing licentiousness, [the cure is not to be sought in coercive suppression, but in] “the censorship of public opinion.” Yes, this is a doctrine of the West, emergent after long, bloody centuries. But every civilization has good gifts to give to the whole human family. This is one which we of the West are imperfectly, sometimes even bunglingly, offering to the world.

BY WILLIS E. ELLIOTT | FEBRUARY 4, 2008; 6:46 AM ETSAVE & SHARE:        

PREVIOUS: [NO PEACE WITHOUT PLURALISM](#) | NEXT: [MORMONS, FREE SPEECH AND RIGHT SPEECH](#)

### Comments

Please report offensive comments below.

Petitions to try and help Mr. Kambakhsh have been started on the internet.

[http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id\\_article=25199](http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=25199)

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/article775954.ece>

[www.petitiononline.com/af8f6912/petition.html](http://www.petitiononline.com/af8f6912/petition.html) (you will have to cut/paste)

Please sign and spread as far as you can. Hopefully we can help get Mr. Kambakhsh a pardon or a reduced sentence.

POSTED BY: MIA | FEBRUARY 5, 2008 11:36 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

GaryD:

I'm not Terra. Thanks for the compliment, though. :)

"As for the nature of the Christian hell remember that the worst part of it is occupied by false teachers many of whom have proclaimed themselves Christian but are not including all but a handful of popes and more than a few Baptist and Pentecostals."

I am not Christian. At all. Never was, nor will I ever be. I'm Pagan. I would never claim to be something I'm not.

"God saves according to the Bible whom he wills and lets enter into hell all others. Hell is man's ultimate fate unless God intervenes. The Christian God sends no one to hell. He doesn't have to. All of us by our selfish nature volunteer for service there."

Which is how your god works for you based on a book that you read. Unfortunately that doesn't work for me. And it's ok that that happens. I think the Divine can accommodate.

Any god that would punish someone merely for being human is not a god worthy of worship in my opinion.

POSTED BY: ANONYMOUS | FEBRUARY 5, 2008 10:26 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Garyd:

Get down on your knees and thank God the Bible is a proved hoax for if it is not it's a sure thing every member of all three great faiths is going to hell.

Much better to be the victim of a con than the victim of a Devil named Lucifer. If the Bible is so then look out scout for hell awaits all who say the being in the burning bush was God. That's the only deadly sin, blasphemy.

It's a no brainer <http://www.hoax-buster.org/sellyoursoul> will send you to hell if the Bible is the word of a supernatural being.

<http://www.hoax-buster.org> proves you're the victim of a con.

You can't prove there is no God so don't hang your hat on the Bible is a hoax thus getting you off the blasphemy hook. Common sense dictates that God will not take calling Devil God lightly. Even atheists abide the 1st commandment, unlike people of faith who blaspheme every time they recite the pledge.

POSTED BY: BGONE | FEBRUARY 5, 2008 6:21 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Nor was I responding to you bgone but rather to Terra.

AS for speaking for my God I speak only what I have been given by the Bible to say. As for the nature of the Christian hell remember that the worst part of it is occupied by false teachers many of whom have proclaimed themselves Christian but are not including all but a handful of popes and more than a few Baptist and Pentecostals.

God saves according to the Bible whom he wills and lets enter into hell all others. Hell is man's ultimate fate unless God intervenes. The Christian God sends no one to hell. He doesn't have to. All of us by our selfish nature volunteer for service there.

POSTED BY: GARYD | FEBRUARY 5, 2008 3:48 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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"I'm a Christian, you're a Pagan. Changing your heart is up to God not me or any other Christian. I have only the duty to warn you of impending doom if you do not repent.

As long as you eschew certain ancient Pagan practices - most notable of which is human sacrifice - I have no problem with you beyond the obvious."

I was not addressing you, GaryD. I was addressing this panelist who makes a habit out of saying that we are somehow 'unAmerican' and then turns around and says he 'hesitates to criticize other religions'. That is a contradiction and I pointed it out to him as such. If you assumed I was addressing you, I apologize. I was not.

As for your 'impending doom' idea, there is no evidence whatsoever to back up such a statement. We have different definitions of what makes up Divinity and differing ideas of what may or may not happen after we die. And that's ok.

Let me ask you this: If, as you say, it is up to your god to decide to 'change hearts', wouldn't it also be up to such a god to decide whether 'doom' is called for? Or are you attempting to speak for your god? And what if your god is incapable of changing my belief system to match yours?

It is not my hell. Keep it, believe in it if you must if that's what it takes to help you to be a better person. But please don't think that what works for you is going to ever work for me.

I don't need anyone's threat of hell to make me be a better person. I try to be better because I see the result right here- that it's the right thing to do. When I do well, good things come to me and I'm extraordinarily blessed to have the life I do. I try to be better because when I screw up, and I do because I'm human, my gods and goddesses kick my ass. Right in the here and now.

I give the divine enough credit to be able to appreciate the differences in and among all people. I seriously doubt a divine creator would create all these wonderful differences in people, allow them to have different experiences that leads them to find their own faith and then expect them to homogenize themselves.

And seeing as how we only have the writings of history's victors to go on about beliefs that were not their own, it is entirely possible that some things were created to give the impression that these were people to be afraid of because they were different.

In those cases where there may be more than just written evidence that some sort of sacrifice was involved it's our duty to study the context in which that happened and to understand the products of the times. It has nothing to do with modern day practice.

What you think of as some sort of 'obvious' is not at all clear to me.

Blessed be.

POSTED BY: ANONYMOUS | FEBRUARY 5, 2008 12:39 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Rev Willis:

When you say religion is at the heart of culture you bring something to mind, those cultures done in the laboratory to determine just what the disease is. Maybe religion is some kind of social disease that suppresses free speech and sends people to early graves? Calvin too burned people at the stake.

Was that really God in the burning bush? Did Muhammad really have sessions with supernatural beings? How about Joe Smith? He wouldn't lie about something as important as visits from God's angels would he?

We must not call them liars else we tempt the wrath of God's representatives, put to death for what we say like that poor lad. Are we allowed to even notice that there is no way to determine if a vision is from God and not from Devil?

Faith in what? That is the question that begs an answer. Can we not determine that, what beings those holy ones had conversations with by the actions of IT's representatives?

This is one nation under God? If so then God must be in favor of free speech. And that free speech must include the freedom to question just which supernatural being IT was spoken to by those who claimed to have spoken to God or God's man.

It's not a sin to wonder if that was Lucifer in the burning bush is it? I mean, I'm not sinning when I say have a look at <http://www.hoax-buster.org/sellyoursoul> am I?

What do you suppose a group of 5th graders would say if they had that side of the story as well as the standard interpretation -faith that was God and never even mention the other possibility?

POSTED BY: BGONE | FEBRUARY 5, 2008 11:21 AM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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I'm a Christian, you're a Pagan. Changing your heart is up to God not me or any other Christian. I have only the duty to warn you of impending doom if you do not repent.

As long as you eschew certain ancient Pagan practices - most notable of which is human sacrifice - I have no problem with you beyond the obvious.

POSTED BY: GARYD | FEBRUARY 5, 2008 9:03 AM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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I find it absolutely untrue when you say that you 'hesitate' to criticize other religions, yet when it comes to denigrating one who lives as a Pagan, all bets are off.

Which is why you are not qualified to be a teacher of any other belief system other than your own.

POSTED BY: ANONYMOUS | FEBRUARY 4, 2008 7:53 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Angela,  
You say man made religion doesn't work...what is your's?

From what I see of your words...your religion is what you view as correct, it is what you have been taught by man.

I follow a religion that, though I admit is what works for me, but I can not say that it is anything but man made. No God or Goddess spoke to me with booming words and sound effects, I do hear a inner voice; though we do have words handed down from antiquity, are they the words of our Goddess? I have no idea, but they certainly effect me, they ring true to me. And personally I don't care if they were writ by Gardner or Demeter...they work.

Why do you care about what others believe? my Mother used to say, that "if you are living your life as throughly as you can, you wouldn't have time to worry about what others are doing."

terra

POSTED BY: TERRA GAZELLE | FEBRUARY 4, 2008 7:22 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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To: ceflyonline@msn.com:

When I read your post, I was astonished. Man-made religion never works and that includes Catholicism. No where in the bible does it speak about pergratory nor that good works get you into heaven, nor baptism. Only rebirth. Seeing your sinful nature in the presence of a Holy, Righteous, Loving and Just God. Also, The Pope, even though well respected cannot forgive sins. There is no clearer version of what being a "Christian" really is except through the world of God. Also, how can you claim that Christians that study God's word the way it is in the bible distort the bible. Over and over again, the Bible is clear that our good works do not get us in heaven. Also, WWJD is not hateful: it's totally biblical. We need to be clear that all religious people have distorted God's word as we don't see ourselves clearly in the presence of the God's Holiness. Jesus Christ did not think religious people understood. Religion without spirit-led power is a form of godliness, i.e., piety, outward goodness. Also, the "The Way of the Master" WWJD teaching, is clearly biblical but of course, we want to make ourselves righteous in our own eyes and that teaching is quite convicting. If we read God's word not listen to religious men who have no more power than mere men and we all need to understand that the teaching of WWJD is the only chance we can see ourselves clearly as sinful and wicked, rebellious creatures of God before we come to Christ (not in good works; faith, obedience, His way; not our way) Worldly sorrow only sends people to HELL. Godly sorrow brings forth repentance which leads to salvation and the only way to HEAVEN...We received the name: Christians as the definition as a "follower of Christ" not MAN. Also, no pope, no prophet can make you holy. Lastly without holiness, no man shall see the Lord.

POSTED BY: ANGELA | FEBRUARY 4, 2008 10:59 AM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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And the Anglican Church is still resisting the repeal of Britain's Blasphemy Law:

News Brief

## Churches consulted as abolition of blasphemy law takes a step forward

By staff writers

10 Jan 2008

The Prime Minister's office has said that it will consult Britain's churches over the scrapping of the country's blasphemy laws, after the principled need to do so was strengthened by a tabled amendment in the House of Commons.

Downing Street's intervention came ahead of a parliamentary vote yesterday which would almost certainly have seen backbenchers demanding the repeal of legislation now regarded by most as archaic and unjust.

Opponents of the offences of blasphemy and blasphemous libel, designed to protect the Established Church in particular, and which criminalise the "scurrilous vilification" of Christianity, include MPs, civil rights campaigners led by Liberty, senior church figures (including the retired Bishop of Oxford, Lord Harries, and the former Archbishop of Canterbury Lord Carey), the British Humanist Association, satirists Ricky Gervais and Rowan Atkinson, writers and journalists including Philip Pullman, the National Secular Society, the Christian think-tank Ekklesia and others of all faiths and none.

Dr Evan Harris, the Liberal Democrat MP whose amendment to the Criminal Justice and Immigration bill provoked the government move, welcomed the concession.

He declared: "As a result of the government's acceptance of the need to repeal ... Britain will no longer have an ... illiberal blasphemy offence and will be in a far better position to ensure respect for human rights in countries like Sudan, Pakistan and elsewhere."

Ekklesia has pointed out that there are strong religious as well as secular arguments against blasphemy laws. Jesus himself was arraigned, tried and executed on a charge of blasphemy, and the notion of a transcendent God needing human protection is both theologically incoherent and itself blasphemous in many traditions.

\*\*\*\* NOTE THIS:

However Don Horrocks of the Evangelical Alliance says that repeal would signal that protecting Jesus, God and the Bible was no longer regarded as so important within society.

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Keith Vaz MP, chair of the House of Commons Home Affairs Select Committee, and a member of the Christian Socialist Movement, said the government had faced defeat yesterday.

"It is a pretty arcane law," he declared. "It is old and unnecessary, and it does need to be modernised. What they need to do is bring that forward as quickly as possible."

A major role in getting blasphemy laws close to abolition has inadvertently been played by Stephen Green of the pressure group Christian Voice, whose campaign against 'Jerry Springer - The Opera' has encouraged free speech campaigners to give greater priority to the issue.

The Prime Minister does "fully understand" the case made for abolition, a Downing Street spokesperson said.

He added: "However, we do believe it is necessary to consult with the churches, particularly the Anglican church, before coming to a final decision, and that's what we are doing. Subsequent to that, we will consider moving amendments in the House of Lords."

The Church of England seems to have reluctantly acknowledged that abolition is inevitable, urging "caution" in proceeding. "We are open to the possibility of a review," said a spokesperson.

The government had originally indicated that blasphemy laws would be repealed in the light of the Religious and Racial Hatred Act, but had then failed to act further, pushing the matter into the lap of campaigners and backbenchers.

See: <http://www.ekkleisia.co.uk/node/6554>

POSTED BY: NORRIE HOYT | FEBRUARY 4, 2008 10:25 AM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Also:

"Thomas Aikenhead (baptised March 28, 1676-January 8, 1697), a young Edinburgh medical student who allegedly railed against the Holy Trinity, was judicially hanged for his offence on January 8, 1697. His execution, which raised considerable concern, was the last execution for blasphemy in Britain."

See:  
<http://www25.uua.org/uuhs/duub/articles/thomasaikenhead.html>

POSTED BY: NORRIE HOYT | FEBRUARY 4, 2008 9:37 AM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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"In orthodox Christianity, Jesus is God (as well as man) and nobody gets killed for blaspheming him or for departing from him into another religion."

They used to be:

"It is widely reported that the last person to be burned alive at the stake on orders from Rome was Giordano Bruno, executed in 1600 for a collection of heretical beliefs including Copernicanism and (probably more important) an unlimited universe with innumerable inhabited worlds. The last case of an execution at an auto de fe by the Spanish Inquisition was a schoolmaster, Cayetano Ripoll, executed in Spain July 26, 1826."

See:  
[http://www.important.ca/christian\\_orthodoxy\\_and\\_heresy.html](http://www.important.ca/christian_orthodoxy_and_heresy.html)

POSTED BY: NORRIE HOYT | FEBRUARY 4, 2008 9:31 AM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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In order to decide what a "religion" is, and teaches, we need to determine if there is an authority to whom we can look to get an answer to that question. The Catholic Church has the pope, who may infallibly state what the Church is or is not (mostly in the negative form.). Eastern Orthodox Christianity has no particular individual to speak for it, but its various Patriarchs and Metropolitans have some such authority. Beyond that, when Luther rejected the authority of the Pope, he rejected all authority, including his own. We may ask the Pope what it means to be Catholic, and poll the Patriarchs to find out what it means to be Orthodox. Beyond that being Christian is whatever any one claiming to be a Christian teacher says it is. Yesterday, a particularly hate filled man claiming to be a Baptist Minister spread HIS VERSION of Christianity at the funeral of Mary Lauterbach. It should be noted that no one claiming to be a Baptist authority took the trouble to contradict him, and not one WWJD practitioner spoke out to defend his savior. One must assume, on the principle that silence gives assent, that Christians, Baptists, and WWJDers accept that the Reverend Phelps does speak for them.

Islam has the same problem. While there are Muslim clerics, mullahs, and ayatollahs who claim some authority to interpret Koran, anyone who can attract a following and claim to teach the Koran can be a mullah. Because of that, until Islam begins to take control of itself, Islam is whatever any Muslim, mullah, Mahdi, or other leader says it is. It is everything that everybody who claims to be Muslim says it is, including Elijah Muhommed and his successors.

That means that Islam IS what Osama bin Laden says it is, and what any authority who decides that a twenty year old woman who refuses to marry her cousin is an adulterer and can be stoned to death... Until some authority imposes order on Islam, Islam is most definitely a religion where women are property, terrorism is acceptable against infidels, and infidels are liable to all of Sharia, including Infidel Westerners in secular states.

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