

Book of Stuff 9



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ATHEIST REPUBLIC (NEWS)

Atheist Kicked Off Egyptian Show

An Egyptian television host gave the boot to an atheist on public television with a recommendation that the atheist get psychiatric treatment.

The atheist, Mohammed Hashem, was invited on the Alhadath Alyoun TV studio in order to participate in a debate with the former Deputy Sheikh at Al-Azhur named Mahmoud Ashour. Hashem stated, on the program, that there is no scientific evidence of God.

He went on to discuss standard Big Bang cosmology, when Sheikh Ashour began to hurl a flurry of ad hominem attacks at Hashem to counter the claims. The Alhadath Alyoun TV host, Mahmoud Abd Al-Halim, recommended that

Hashem get psychiatric treatment. At which point, Al-Halim suggested that Hashem leave the studio. Al-Halim, the host, then said to the audience that he is sorry for subjecting the audience to “inappropriate” and “destructive ideas” on air.

Some of the dialogue went as follows:

Mohammad Hashem: "I'm an atheist, which means I don't believe in the existence of God. I don't believe in Him."

Mahmoud Ashour: "What? What was that?"

Mohammad Hashem: "I'm an atheist, which means I don't believe in the existence of God. I don't believe in Him. That's what atheism means. I don't need religion to have moral values or to be a productive member of society."

[...]

Mahmoud Ashour: "Why did you become an atheist?"

Mohammad Hashem: "Because there is no scientific evidence for the existence of God."

Mahmoud Abd Al-Halim: "How can you say that? Who created you? Who made you exist as a human being?"

Mahmoud Ashour: "Do you know how you were created?"

Mohammad Hashem: "There are many theories explaining our existence on this planet..."

Mahmoud Ashour: "I'm asking you a question. How did you become a human being?"

Mahmoud Abd Al-Halim: "How come you exist in this universe?"

Mohammad Hashem: "Okay, let me explain. There are theories that try to explain our existence. One theory is that God created us. Okay? But there are other theories, with much more evidence, like the Big Bang theory..."

Mahmoud Abd Al-Halim: "Speak Arabic! You are in Egypt, and you are addressing simple people, so don't use big words for no reason."

Mohammad Hashem: "I'm using these terms because science is conducted in English..."

Mahmoud Abd Al-Halim: "What science are you talking about?"

[...]

"You are confused and unreliable. You deny the existence of God and reject our religion and principles..."

Mohammad Hashem: "Is this so bad?"

Mahmoud Abd Al-Halim: "Of course. You come here to talk about a certain idea, but have nothing to offer. You offer atheism! You offer heresy! I apologize to the viewers for having an Egyptian of this kind on our show.

I'm sorry, Mohammad, but you cannot stay with us on the show, because your ideas are inappropriate, I'm sad to say. We cannot promote such destructive ideas. You have not uttered a single convincing word."

[...]

Harrison Mumia Speaks Out on Atheists in Kenya

The President of Atheists of Kenya, who is the 39-year-old Harrison Mumia, spoke out on atheism within Kenya. Mumia came from a devout, religious family, where they went to church, were baptised, and attended Bible Studies with the other families.

At the age of 24, as a university student, something happened for Mumia, which he explains with a laugh, “Nothing happened to make me stop believing. I wasn’t walking one day and ‘saw the light’.”

Harrison found that the questions on creation, faith, God, and ethics were simply too many and too big for the contents of the religious texts, e.g. the Bible, to suffice for an explanation for those numerous, large concerns and questions that Mumia found in the faith.

Harrison sought answers in the sciences. He found that these explanations from natural philosophy were simply more convincing than the answers provided by revelation and religious authorities.

Harrison became an atheist after the internal conflict between faith and religion was resolved. He considers the question of God and moral separate, where the idea of God as necessary for ethical life and behaviour is simply a non-starter.

Moral values exist independent of the idea of God. This would extend to the whole Biblical canon of characters with the Devil not as being at work in the world and man not as the source of evil because sin, God, and the Devil are fictions.

He does not believe that God created the world from nothing. Another Kenyan atheist, Kwamboka, with the same questions and thoughts said, “I don’t believe in God. There is no evidence that He is there. I’d rather spend my Sundays teaching my children a craft, playing with them, being there for them.”

Kwamboka has children and she is 31-years-old, but her children do not attend church and know what they know about religion from their lessons in school, even though she went to a church and came from another devout, religious family.

She thinks the Bible left her with more questions and contradictions than answers, where neither of these, especially combined together, made things easier. She views the Bible read with a critical mind as an antidote to religious faith because the massive number of type of questions and doubts that will be raised. But many Kenyans are afraid to ask around about these things.

If you look at the demographics of Kenya: “31.9 million Christians, 4.3 million Muslims (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics).”

The atheist community is growing more in Kenya. “Atheism is slowly gaining ground. Consider the WIN-Gallup survey that found that those [people] claiming to be religious dropped by 9 per cent worldwide while atheism rose by 3 per cent compared to when they carried the poll in 2005,” Okello explained, “The number of atheists in Kenya rose from 0 per cent to 2 per cent (South Africa was the only African country with a marked drop in religion, the number religious people dropping from 83 to 64 percent).”

Mississippi Passes Most Restrictive Abortion Law in the US

Mississippi lawmakers on Thursday passed the most restrictive abortion law in the United States at present. It will make the abortive procedure illegal after 15 weeks of pregnancy. There was a 75-34 vote in favour of the measure in the House.

Governor Phil Bryant stated that he will be signing it. The owner of the only abortion clinic in Mississippi has made a pledge to sue. Eventually, the Supreme Court of the United States may take up the case. It is a possibility. Two exceptions are in House Bill 1510.

If a foetus happens to have a health problem that may prevent it from survival outside of the woman full-term, or if the pregnant woman's life is at risk, then abortion is permitted in the Mississippi bill. However, cases involving rape and incest are not exempt.

In appeals court in 2015, a North Dakota attempt to ban abortions after six weeks was struck down. The North Dakota case involved a foetus with a detectable heartbeat. Arkansas would be similar as the two other cases but after 12 weeks pregnancy.

Hillary Schneller, a staff attorney for the national non-profit Center for Reproductive Rights, explained, "The Supreme Court has said and resaid again and again that states cannot prohibit women from obtaining abortions prior to viability, which is what a 15-week ban would do."

Schneller's group, or the one she is associated with, is based on New York City, New York. It advocates for free access to abortion and has made an open call that the bill is a) medically unsound and b) unconstitutional.

Vatican Expresses Concerns to United Nations

The Vatican reported to the United Nations on the potential hostility towards religion with “some nations” seeing “religious pluralism as a threat.”

The Crux reports that the Vatican considers the world more connected and linked up, and that some nations view the increasing religious pluralism as a threat with failures to protect religious minorities and even some attempting to marginalize believers of all faiths (based on reportage from a Vatican representative).

Vatican representative Archbishop Ivan Jurkovic told the UN Human Rights Council that some organizations and agencies on the international scene consider religions at odds with their own agendas.

Jurkovic spoke on March 2 in Geneva to the UN agencies with an emphasis on freedom of belief and religion. Jurkovic made an open quotation of the Pope’s denouncing said international agencies and organizations who promote “modern forms of ideological colonization” in the front of human rights with imposed programs on poor nations.

Jurkovic opposed “freedom from religion” in reportage to the council by Ahmed Shaheed, who is the special rapporteur on freedom of religion and belief. He said the notion reveals a patronization of religion as whole.

He considers this to overlook the integral part religion plays in people’s lives throughout the world as well as the not seeing the wisdom traditions within religions. In the report, Jurkovic explained, “International human rights treaties are reticent on the sort of relationship a state should have with religion or belief. They do, however, impose a duty upon states to be impartial guarantors of the enjoyment of freedom of religion or belief, including the right to freedom from religion, for all individuals and groups within their territory and subject to their jurisdiction.”

He went on to say that the respect for the deepest convictions of society’s individual members is an important part of human rights and an authentic culture. That it is part of a common good, where this can only be achieved through the inclusive dialogue and the seeking of the real meaning of rights and freedoms for each person. He sees this connected to religious experience.

Generation Z, 1999 to 2015, Seen as Post-Christian

There is a claim that this current generation is among the most post-Christian generation, according to CBN News reportage, on so-called Generation Z.

One recent study shows that as many as 35% of Generation Z, or the post-Millennials, identify with the worldview of either agnostic, atheist, or unaffiliated. Could this be the first and most non-religious generation in the history of North America?

The Christian leadership has concerns about this as there has been lots of brainstorming, meetings, and conversations around the best ways to bring the youngest generation into the ‘gospel truths’, according to CBN News.

The Christian Post reported that the youth groups and churches were told to “step up to the plate with common sense and relational response” by Greg Stier of Dare 2 Share.

“The youth groups trend of fun games and short Bible studies have resulted in frail youth groups and shallow young people. And spiritually immature teenagers will not lead their atheistic friends to Jesus,” Stier said to The Christian Post, “And if young atheists have doubled, we must double down, and the first step is to double our prayers.”

Recent information coming from the Barna Group on generation Z, or those born between the years of 1999 and 2015, shows that this generation “the percentage of teens who identify [as atheist] ... is double that of the general population (13 percent vs. 6 percent of all adults).”

Some have termed them “the first truly ‘post-Christian’ generation.”

Stier continued:

We must program the priority of prayer into our actual church services and youth group meetings... Through prayer, we tap into the very power of the Trinity to turn the statistics around in a way that only God can get the credit for.

If we want to reach the lost we must pray for the lost. As it has been said, ‘Before we talk to people about God we must talk to God about people.’

For the Christian community, this appears to be a crisis. For the atheist community, this appears to be an indication of the future for the next two decades of an increasingly secular, non-religious – atheist, agnostic, and religiously unaffiliated – youth sector.

The First Endowed Chair in Atheism, Humanism, and Secular Ethics

The first Atheism, Humanism, and Secular Ethics endowed chair is coming to the University of Miami according to internal sources. It will be the first in the United States and held by Professor Anjan Chakravartty.

According to [University of Miami: News and Events](#), there has been the creation of an endowed chair for the study of “Atheism, Humanism, and Secular Ethics,” which goes to show the advancement of the increase in diverse secular subject matter in the academic realm with even the controversial sentiments about secular, non-religious content in the public domain.

There have been recent studies, according to the report, that the number of the religious is in decline and the world appears to be in the midst of a global secularization. There will be implications for modern life.

The endowed chair was funded through a \$2.2 million donation from the Louis J. Appignani Foundation. Bear in mind, though this is a good step, it is the first chair of its kind in the United States of America. The University of Miami Provost, Jeffrey Duerk, explained, “Atheism is a philosophical position to be explored and analyzed, and since we already address the topic in various departments — including our Religious Studies Department — this chair will add to an already established discourse.”

Anjan Chakravartty, will be the new chair and will join the University of Miami on July 1, 2018. Chakravartty is also a professor of philosophy at the University of Notre Dame.

Otavio Bueno, a philosophy professor, described the timing for the endowed chair a ripe time for the exploration of the complex academic topic of non-religiosity linked to morality. Bueno said, “The U.S. is currently polarized in so many dimensions. Complex issues need to be addressed, and it’s important to talk about them and to have resources to analyze them carefully. ... The university, as a research institution, should address these issues—seeking to understand their sources and why it’s so hard to settle them—in interesting, careful, rational and evidence-based ways.”

Bueno continued to explain the position of Chakravartty as having an “impressive outreach ability” with the intention to and ability to take on discussions in an open manner in order for the comprehension of innately complicated issues to be readily available for anyone.

A professor of philosophy who was the chair of the department for 12 years, Harvey Siegel, noted on his first time of meeting the endowed chair donor, Louis Appignani, 15 years prior, where Appignani made it clear in a Miami Herald article that the primary purpose that drove the donor was to challenge “religion” and advocate for “atheism.”

“We tried to find some kind of way that our scholarly ambitions could meet his own ambitions — and after 15 years we found a way to do that — through the endowed chair,” Siegel said. “He appreciates that the U cannot advocate for atheism, but he also appreciates that it’s of value to study the questions in their full historical and philosophical dimensions.”

Appignani had explicit statements in support of some of the most influential people in the living atheist movement in the world today, including Dr. Richard Dawkins.

Appignani expounded, “Dawkins is probably the most influential educator-philosopher who has been expounding the cause of free thinking, questioning facts, and promoting critical thinking. ... He met with students, went to classes, and gave a final lecture that filled up the stadium with over 4,000 — he really made a big impact.”

Professor Chakravartty will be teaching on science and humanism in the Fall of 2018. He had his own statements to make to the public as well.

“First and foremost, we’ll be looking at an important area of philosophy which concerns values—a number of issues exploring how the sciences and values intersect with and impact society,” Chakravartty stated, “It’s in the context of this relationship between science and society that I would like to engage the idea of humanism.”

Atheism Claimed as Reason for Shooting in Marshall County High School

In January of 2018, a 15-year-old named Gabriel Ross Parker shot two classmates in Marshall County High School. In the midst of the shooting, Parker injured several others as well. Since Parker is now 16, he is being charged as an adult with a few court documents and videos made public too.

There does not seem to be any reason for the shooting, but the carnage took place. Parker may have wanted to see the classmates' reactions and see how the community and police would respond to the "science experiment."

There is a public conversation based on one of the videos that shows County Sheriff's Capt. Matt Hilbrecht of a conversation between himself and two lawyers. Hilbrecht is the person who investigated the crime. He was asked about Parker's motives.

The response from Hilbrecht was that Parker was an atheist and that Parker felt life had not purpose or meaning, and same with other people's lives. He was wanting to make society better through science and had been studying science, Hilbrecht stated in the recording. He thought that since he was failing a science course and that there is no reason to life meant that there was no reason to his own (Parker's) life.

Parker, apparently, wanted to "break the monotony." Hemant Mehta, a publicly known atheist, opined that this meant that Hilbrecht is a professional and was doing his job, but that he was concerned that religious conservatives would use this as "proof" that the morally bankrupt in the world are atheists.

Mehta, in a commentary on the recordings captured and brought to light, noted that atheist does not equate to nihilism and many atheists see meaning in their lives without God. Mehta continues on the note that he does not know the inside of Parker's mind, but does not know how Hilbrecht made the conceptual leap from atheism to a lonely and empty person.

Hemant Mehta concluded on the point that the boy, Parker, did not kill in the name of atheism and those making accusations that the those who have the most atheism kill without meaning in their lives has to explain a more important factor; that the most religious countries in the world have the highest rates of gun violence and the nations that have the least religion and religious fervour tend to have the lowest rates of violent crime.

Swedish Party Proposes Elimination of Publicly-Funded Religious Schools

The National Secular Society reported on the Swedish government's plans to end "free" religious schools.

Sweden's ruling political party is proposing elimination of publicly-funded religious schools within its manifesto or the upcoming election in the Fall of 2018. A press release published by the party, the Social Democratic Party, stated, "Religious influence has no home in Swedish schools.

The Social Democrats want school to provide all children with a good education regardless of their background, gender or religion."

There are more than 70 religious schools in Sweden with the majority being Christian, 11 as Islamic, and a few are Jewish. The Abrahamic religions dominate the publicly-funded dollars for the religious schools.

They are run the local authorities within Sweden as the are publicly funded. The policy would be applied to the publicly funded schools, where they would be required to follow the guidelines given by the government.

The National Secular Society commented that this should be a reminder for the politicians in the United Kingdom to think similarly about tackling religious schools within their own borders.

"We often hear that it's too hard to take on religious interests in our education system," the National Secular Society's Education and Schools Officer, Alastair Lichten, said, "but this is a reminder that it's both desirable and possible to roll back their influence. Politicians in the UK should take note."

The National Secular Society has been at the forefront of the campaigning for an open and inclusive system of education with a transition from faith schools in the public system to their elimination as they comprise as much as one third of the publicly-funded schools in England and Wales.

The Scottish and Irish schools are continuing to have sectarian divides that are split by a line drawn by religion.

The Swedish Minister for Upper Secondary School and Adult Education, Anna Ekström, noted that religious influence in public schools is not acceptable. That faith or not is the choice of the child alone.

Ardalan Shekarabi, the Minister for Public Administration, spoke of Iranian upbringing and the oppression that they did not want to come into the Swedish public school system, where these could be seen in the religious or faith public schools in Sweden because, obviously not in the same but similar way, the schools are promoting and foisting religion or faith onto children without consent.

One Islamic headmaster has openly expressed a desire for a Sharia Law to be allowed in a new school, though state governed. There has been a ruling that gender segregated sports lessons in the Islamic schools "were potentially discriminatory."

"The regulatory framework will be tightened. Those who do not support fundamental values around equality and human rights should be stopped from running free schools in Sweden,"

Gustav Fridolin, the Swedish Minister of Education, said, “No child should be exposed to direct or indirect compulsion to take part in religious activities in any school in Sweden. And all education should be completely free of religious influence.”

Attack Ads Continue Against Gayle Jordan

A short update on the situation with the Tennessee Republicans: they are continuing apace on their smear campaign against the atheist Democratic contender, Gayle Jordan.

Jordan is running for the State Senate. The previous Republican who held the position did not take a position on the current Republican Trump Administration in the United States.

The district that Jordan is running in is a highly red state and Republicans running for the positions will likely win, but she is persisting nonetheless.

The Tennessee Republicans are using one major angle in order to smear and attack the reputations of Jordan based on her non-belief in god or Gods: affirmation of the Judeo-Christian God in particular, which may be the assumption in the ad campaigns speaking about how Jordan is an atheist.

Associated with these attack ads are claims about her being too liberal, pro-choice, and pro-universal healthcare. These are not considered good things to the good Tennesseans.

There have been claims that she is out of touch with the values of Tennessee, which may translate as not Christian and conservative based on the ads from Tennessee. The aim of the Republican attack ads is to equate atheism with anti-theism, as astutely distinguished and pointed out by Hement Mehta.

Mehta notes that the idea is “since Jordan is an atheist, then she must be against theism,” where the assertion of no gods becomes something of an affront and deliberate being against that which she does not believe in but the Tennesseans at large, according to the Republican attack ads, believe in.

Atheist Experiences in Modern Africa from Dr. Leo Igwe

Dr. Leo Igwe, human rights advocate and humanist, wrote on the widespread impression of Africans being both theistic and highly religious. He recounts surveys describe these two facts as pervasive and true.

But he reported on the more limited emphasis on the atheists in the midst of Africa, where this non-religious subpopulation has been largely ignored or poorly treated or misrepresented. Igwe talks about the intolerance and hate, and the psychological and physical mistreatment of atheist Africans.

This, according to Igwe, makes many atheists apparently invisible and compels them to hide their own experiences. He talks about meeting a number of African atheists online and offline. He notes that his own experience has been with some of the first freethought forums in Accra, Banjul, Ibadan, Kampala, Lagos, Lilongwe, London, and Yaounde.

Many people at the meetings never met in person, never met another atheist, but these meetups provide the basis to finally meet another atheist in person. In a 2017 meeting, in Lagos, Nigeria, Igwe pointed out two groups of people: old-timers and first-timers.

By his observation, the first-timers were coming up-close with atheism for the first time as a community and had an aloof behaviour about them. Some were religious people who were feigning atheism because they themselves were on the fence.

They did not want the photographs and selfies. The other people, the old-timers, were more or less the celebrities of the groups who were able to interact more freely as they knew one another and were comfortable in that atmosphere.

Those old-timers were more relaxed and confident in their interpersonal interactions. He found a similar sentiment in social interaction with those gathering in Ghana, Malawi, and Uganda. Igwe had been around, apparently.

People at these meeting would share jokes, laughs, and positive times together with some based on the Muslim Sheikhs and Ayatollahs around the world and even on individual getting excommunicated from the church.

He talked about the experiences of the older atheists and their experiences in coping with the religious pressures and the way those pressures extended into the social environment too, which may make the lives of atheists in Africa difficult.

He described not only conferences but social media as an important outlet for the atheist population in Africa with new media networking technologies as important for the sharing of experiences of religious oppression and discrimination.

One common theme in the piece was the hate towards the non-religious. That religious believers not only disliked them but would not accommodate their belief, or more properly lack thereof. Igwe sees the many of the religious believers promoting hatred, intolerance, and violence against non-believers whilst teaching love and tolerance.

Igwe explained that many atheists were forced to keep their mouths shut during some conversations and that this became a compelled time to suppress their own views and opinions because of the potential for offense against the prevailing religious ideologies in Africa.

Her argues freedom of religion and belief, and thought and expression, are then for the religious, or at least more for the religious, and not for the non-religious as much or at all. Atheist in Muslim majority communities he says are even worse off than the others because it is a capital offense to either criticize or leave Islam.

Atheism is haram and so worth being a capital offense in those communities. The main thrust from Dr. Igwe about many African atheists is that they, in fact, fear the religious because of the environment that has been bred in those areas of the world over the non-religious, where violence and hatred and intolerance against the non-religious is shared by the theists.

Professor Stephen Hawking was an Atheist

According to The Washington Post, The British theoretical physicist and cosmologist, Professor Stephen Hawking, died at the age of 76 in England on Wednesday, March 14 in the United Kingdom.

He often stated that he was an atheist and did not see a reason for a creator. In that, the universe, given the laws of mathematics and gravity, can be explained with the tools of theoretical physics without the need for a divine architect.

In an El Mundo interview, he described science as the tool through which to understand the world with a “more convincing explanation” and before science that God was the natural explanatory filler for the existence of the cosmos. Reiterating, that he was an atheist.

In a Reuters interview from 2007, he said that he was not religious in a regular sense of the term. Hawking was a believer in science as the discoverer of certain laws. Those laws were fixed and found by science.

The laws in nature described the dynamic structure of the universe over time. In those laws and their descriptions, the universe is explained without a God based on the statement of Hawking and the explanatory closure found in the laws of science.

In a book, *The Grand Design*, co-authored with Leonard Mlodinow, they considered, based on the science, that the big bang in standard Big Bang cosmology was inevitable “because there is a law such as gravity, the universe can and will create itself from nothing.”

Hawking and Mlodinow continued in the book, by explaining, “Because there is a law such as gravity, the universe can and will create itself from nothing... Spontaneous creation is the reason there is something rather than nothing, why the universe exists, why we exist. It is not necessary to invoke God to light the blue touch paper and set the universe going.”

He did not believe in an afterlife but, rather, in the brain-as-computer model of consciousness and the mind, where computers do not get an afterlife. As he said, “I’m not afraid of death, but I’m in no hurry to die. I have so much I want to do first.”

The University of North Georgia Will Have New Atheist Student Group

The University of North Georgia Vanguard reported that the university has a new gang in town, the local atheist student group. Jeff Burt, a freshman biology major in pursuit of a second bachelor degree, said, “Atheism is simply the lack of a belief in a god or gods.”

Burt has self-identified as an atheist for some time now. However, he was raised as a Seventh-Day Adventist in his earlier years. Seventh-Day Adventists believe the Earth was created in 6 literal days with God resting on the seventh.

The University of North Georgia, or UNG, has a total of 200 student-led organizations with as many as 29 registered as faith groups and zero as non-religious groups. Their atheist group may be the first one at the university for atheists.

At the UNG Gainesville campus, Burt is in progress of making that a real transition from the no atheist groups to a whopping one.

Burt, who earned his first degree from Full Sail University, has considered himself an atheist for students there. “It is important for other atheists who live here,” Burt said, “and who go to this school to know that there are other atheists out there.”

The founding members of the atheist group are “Jeff Burt, adviser James Grindeland, Jenya Rector, Caleb Brookshire and Mason Carlisle.”

The group held its first unofficial meeting on February 21 where three students discussed “the creation of the club, write a constitution, generate ideas for meeting activities and think of possible names for the organization.”

Some prospective names floating around were UNG Atheists and The Atheist Nighthawks. Some events that the UNG atheist group may hold on the campus may be “Does God exist?” debates and “Ask an Atheist Day,” which is used to reduce the stigma and create more understanding on the part of the student body of atheists.

The group is open to a bigger umbrella of the non-religious with agnostics, skeptics, and others, even those who believe in God too. Burt wants to “know and understand students of all backgrounds.”

Dawkins Books to be Translated and Published Around the World, for Free

Richard Dawkins' books will be open access soon. He wants them to be free for people. Interestingly, if you look at the Arabic translations of the book *The God Delusion*, it has been downloaded 13 million times.

There are people in Muslim-majority countries, apparently, with a need for the taste of atheism. People want atheism. They want science education. They want all of this from Richard Dawkins' books.

Dawkins' organization, the Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science, merged, recently, with the Center for Inquiry. There are plans ongoing in order to advertise the translations and spreading Richard Dawkins' writing around the world for those that are questioning their faith or for those who have lost it.

Dawkins said that he has had a tremendous amount of encouragement from these developments, especially as he has heard in an earlier time that digital or PDF versions of the book were downloaded inside of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Dawkins, based on reportage from Hemant Mehta, will have the books provide in Arabic, Farsi, Indonesian, and Urdu. The books with legally translated editions cannot be offered as PDFs. Nonetheless, those books without his own stamp of approval and not released by the local publishers will get his stamp of approval.

For an author to give away some of his most prized books, most purchased and read books – that have reached literally millions of people, Mehta claims is “unheard of.” Dawkins does this for two reasons: one, get people interested in science; two, have people turn away from religion, likely.

PNN News Executive Editor Thinks Satan Used Hawking

An Executive Editor of PNN News (a conservative news site), Mike Shoesmith, explained his own theory for professor Stephen Hawking's existence after his death, recently and unfortunately.

His explanation for the purpose of Hawking's existence was to oppose the late Reverend Billy Graham. Hawking, argues Shoesmith, was sent by Satan to oppose Graham.

As Shoesmith explains, "The Lord sees his [Graham's] heart, gives him a tremendous ministry, and who do you think is sitting in the background going, 'I have to do something about this, this guy is sold out, I have to do something'? Who do you think is sitting in the background doing that? The devil, right?"

He continues to argue that the Graham ministry flourishing in 1942. His theory is that Hawking comes from a line of atheists and the Devil said, "'OK, this guy was just born and I'm going to use this guy. This guy is already primed to accept my message that there is no God. He is already primed for it, he is going to be awash, immersed in atheism all his years as a child, I'm going to take over this guy's life.'"

Shoesmith thinks Hawking was kept alive, even with the crippling condition for him, by demonic forces. He goes on to say that only if Hawking had submitted to the one true God, the Christian God, then his illness would have been cured. But he didn't, and did not declare his atheism until 2014.

Muslim Teenager Kills at Sleepover Over Ridicule of His Religion

Time reported on the murder of a 13-year-old boy who made fun of religion during a fight. The killing happened during a sleepover.

The situation “had been monitored by federal and other authorities for months.” The murderer, a teen aged 17, was put into a juvenile detention center following arraignment earlier in the week. The charges are first-degree murder and attempted-murder charges.

It is unknown whether the 17-year-old will be charged as an adult. The boy fatally stabbed Jovanna Sierra, who was the 13-year-old, as well as injuring Elaine Simon, a 43-year-old mother of a boy named Dane, and Dane Bancroft, a 13-year-old son.

The sleepover was part of a birthday. The teenager stated that he was upset because one of the boys had “made fun” of his Muslim faith. The boy had read the Quran prior to going to the home for the sleepover.

The lawyer for the teen did not respond to a voicemail in order to find a comment. Law enforcement agencies and the FBI have been aware of the threats made by the teen in the past, as he sympathized with some terrorist groups as well.

Local authorities and the FBI are discussing the pursuit of charges.

The FBI declined comment Friday.

Mission: America Founder Speaks Mind at Convention

The founder of Mission: America, Linda Harvey, provided a speech to the Bringing America Back to Life Convention on the LGBTQ+ community and the pro-life movement.

She considers the LGBTQ+ community and the pro-abortion movement as potentially a “meltdown” in sexual and human identities as part of the judgment of God against Americans for the abortion of “children” or foetuses, blastocysts, and the like.

She claimed that with homosexual or same-sex intimate relations that “there is no life and there is often disease,” adding, “It’s the recipe for personal, societal, cultural, and spiritual disaster. Death is the central driving force for the abortion movement — the death of a person. Death and the absence of new life are also the connection among the LGBT movement.”

Harvey believes, based on the statements, that LGBTQ+ community exists only in negation or opposition, in the rejection of “heterosexual norms – husbands and wives who create babies,” of the heterosexual couplings found in marriage solely devoted to the sexual intimacy for procreative purposes (if interpreted right).

“These are the same people who go on and on about the horrors of some gay people having multiple partners... even though they get equally angry at the thought of a monogamous same-sex couple that wants to get married. They claim babies are central to relationships,” Hement Mehta, everyone’s favourite Friendly Atheist, wrote, “but infertile couples and straight people who just don’t want kids are given a pass. And they assume all forms of gay sex are disgusting... which ought to be irrelevant since the only people who need to be satisfied in a sexual encounter are the participants.”

He concluded that the claim by communities such as Harvey’s is a love of gay people but grounded in acts of abuse and discrimination of those LGBTQ+ American citizens.

Judge Vance Day Denied Marriage Licenses to Homosexual Couples

Hement Mehta reported on the Marion County Circuit Judge Vance Day's punishment by the Oregon Supreme Court with the "longest sentence it's ever given to a sitting judge."

Judge Day refused to marry same-sex couples for three years. He told staff to avoid the "public detection" of his activities in the denial of equal marriage to homosexual couples. For example, if a same-sex couple came to his workplace and asked the staff for a marriage license, the staff would declare that Day was unavailable at that time.

This was not the case for heterosexual or straight couples. Day has been suspended. He will not be given pay. Of 8 claims of professional misconduct, he was found guilty of 6. Vance is a proud Evangelical Christian.

What Day doesn't understand is a simple truth about his office. As the saying goes, he put his hand on the Bible and swore to uphold the Constitution, not the other way around," Mehta stated, "His private beliefs about gay couples go out the window when he's on the clock. Instead, his poor judgment was always on display. It's about time he got punished for it.

Fox News Contributor Opines on Atheism and Christianity

Fox News reporter, Anthony DeStefano, argues that the atheists of today are bullies working to silence the religious with intimidation.

In “Atheists are bullies -- and they are doing their best to intimidate the rest of us into silence” (2018), DeStefano calls the atheists of the modern culture arrogant, dangerous, and ignorant.

Not only this, they are the most of each of those traits on Earth. He points to examples of atheists protesting against religious imagery in public and the mentions of “Merry Christmas.” He points to an example from American Atheists.

American Atheists had a campaign in December, 2017, with the annual billboard campaign with this one saying, “Stay Away from Church—it’s All Fake News.” He took aim at the American Humanist Association with the mention of Christianity and Jesus Christ by President Donald Trump without mention of non-believers too.

The Freedom From Religion Foundation became another target with the late Rev. Bill Graham being laid to rest in the Capitol Rotunda prior to the burial. DeStefano says, “Yes, these atheists are loud, nasty, unapologetic and in-your-face.”

He considers atheists dismissing the vast majority of human beings as being in ignorance for most of human history. He pivots to stating that the greatest contributions to civilization have been on behalf of believers including “Aristotle, Francis Bacon, Leonardo Da Vinci, and Isaac Newton all believed in God” as well as Antoine Lavoisier, Werner von Braun, Wilhelm Rontgen, William Whewell, and others.

He points to the proposal by Fr. George Lemaitre as for the big bang in Big Bang Theory, and to the case of Gregor Mendel, a monk, as the father of modern genetics. DeStefano continues, “Yes, the new atheists have an ignorance of history bordering on madness.”

He asserts atheism can only support an ethic of “ruthless social Darwinism.” Then he moves on to the assertion of religion always being about “economic gain, territorial gain, civil and revolutionary conflicts,” and not religion in general and Christianity in particular, where known wars back to 8,000 BC have been mostly not religious in nature.

He uses Philip Axelrod from Encyclopedia of Wars as the main point of reference. He asserts 360 million people were “killed by atheist governments.” That there is “a profound and frightening connection between atheism and death.

DeStefano says, “The facts are incontrovertible. Between the years 1900 and 2017, approximately 150 million people were killed by atheistic political regimes. 150 million! And it makes perfect sense, doesn’t it? Atheists don’t believe in God, so they don’t believe in any transcendent, objective moral law.”

“Nor do they believe that human beings are made in the image of God, and so they don’t believe humans possess infinite value and dignity,” DeStefano continues, “When you put these two beliefs together, you have a deadly recipe that makes killing ‘problematic’ human beings quite easy and defensible.”

Near the end of the opinion piece, DeStefano says to look the increased numbers or access to abortions, euthanasia, homicide, infanticide, and suicides in “a thoroughly secular and functionally atheistic culture.”

He concludes that the modern atheists are bullies and that believers need to fight back based on the arguments presented by him.

Anthony DeStefano Declares Atheism Religious But Bankrupt

Faith culture reporters view religion as under withering assault as the growth of atheism throughout the world is seen as “growing at an alarming rate across the globe.”

Anthony DeStefano reported that countries in Western Europe and North America have been increasing in atheism in a “very short time.” He notes that the second largest group of the religious demographics are the religiously unaffiliated.

The United States of America is comprised of a quarter of that population, the religiously unaffiliated or the Nones. Within the previous decade, the Nones have overtaken the Roman Catholic Church in the United States as a faith group.

The Nones, according to the Pew Forum, are growing and the faithful have been ridding themselves of faith to become more non-religious for a myriad of reasons. Some of those include the idea that religious belief and rational thought are incommensurable.

People of faith have been behaving in atrocious and domineering ways, bad ways. Others do want the spiritual elements of life but without the formal strictures one can find in the traditional religious denominations within the continents mentioned.

The firebrand atheists found in the New Atheism are seen, by DeStefano, as confident and that this is seductive allure for the younger generations, who he sees as “hedonistic, self-centered, self-absorbed... with no moral truths or commandments.”

Atheists are rejecting the dominant dogmas of the majority religions, which is a concern for DeStefano because the religious beliefs and ethics appear to not have much relevance for their lives. This extends to believers; “they are believers in name only.”

He views them as functional atheist or those who live as if God does not exist.

DeStefano opined, “It’s not an exaggeration to say that the world we live in today is literally facing a crisis of faith. I believe that too many Christians today are sleeping. They live a very comfortable Christianity.”

He considers that Christian is under attack in a “very bold, aggressive, and fearless way.” He asserts, “...the new atheism is a religion that has its own philosophy (materialism), morality (relativism), politics (social Darwinism), and culture (secularism). It even has its own sacraments (abortion and euthanasia).”

Andrew Seidel Comments on a 40-Foot-Tall Cross

Andrew Seidel, Civil Rights and Constitutional Attorney for the Freedom From Religion Foundation, commented in a short letter to The Washington Post about the cross-shaped monument making some of the news as of late.

As Seidel notes in the March 3, 2018, Metro article, the article is described as a cross-shaped monument. Seidel, not one for beating around the bush, said, “It’s a cross. A 40-foot-tall cross. ‘Cross-shaped monument’ suggests that there is some dispute over this or that this massive cross is only incidentally a Christian cross. While there is some dispute over its history and legality, there is no dispute that it is, and was intended to be, an enormous Christian cross.”

He notes that the cross’s presence violates the Constitution of the United States of America with the Metro article being partial and biased with a slant towards those who would violate the American Constitution.

The article, as Seidel with laser eyes points out, “For instance, it said “the Supreme Court ... has not provided clear guidance about displays of religion on government land.” In reality, no court, including the Supreme Court, has ever upheld a cross on public land.”

That is, the Supreme Court has never, ever supported the presentation of a cross, especially a 40-foot-tall one, on public grounds. Seidel claims that Maryland Governor Larry Hogan, a Republican, was wrong to call the court’s decision an offense to every veteran in the country, or “an affront to all veterans.”

“The cross is the affront. There are atheists in foxholes. And Jews and Hindus and Muslims and nonbelievers and non-Christians of every stripe. We owe them better,” Seidel concludes, “Their sacrifice helped secure our freedom just as much as the sacrifice of our Christian servicemen and women. The court got this right.”

Turkish Religious Leader Urges Islamic Preachers to be Careful

Hurriyet Daily News reported that the highest religious body leader recommended that Islamic preachers in Turkey be more careful when speaking of or about women.

Ali Erbaş, the Directorate of Religious Affairs in Turkey, made the comments at a meeting on March 10 in the southeastern parts of Hakkari in Turkey. He argued for the means to prevent the abuse of religion was through providing the truths of Islam.

“Even preachers who speak and work with good intentions and sincerity should be extra careful not to make their comments open to misinterpretation,” he said, “Everyone who writes, talks, or reports about Islam has to be more careful.”

President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan criticized many Islamic writers for their sexist commentaries and then Erbaş made comments shortly thereafter.

Erbaş reflected on the July, 2016 attempted coup, where he considers that the “truths of Islam were misused and exploited.” He connects this to groups such as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant or ISIL.

At the March 8 International Women’s Day event, the President of Turkey opined about the marginal people looking to discount the values of Islam or the country of Turkey. Nureddin Yıldız, the head of the Social Fabric Foundation made some controversial statements about violence against women, which sparked the debate and the need for both the religious leader and the president to comment around the sparked debate as well.

It started with the words from a video posted online by Yıldız, which said, “Women should be grateful to God, because God allowed men to beat women and be relaxed.”

Rick Saccone Considered Those Against Him Evil

According to the Friendly Atheist, the PA Republican House Candidate Rick Saccone considers political opponents to have a hatred for God.

At the time of the report, Conor Lamb was competing against Saccone in a special election. Saccone, according to the Friendly Atheist, is a Christian conservative with a tendency to want to instill the Bible in society rather than the Constitution.

Saccone had blame for a specific set of people, “They’re energized for hate for our president... Many of them have a hatred for our country. I’ll [tell] you some more — my wife and I saw it again today, they have a hatred for God.” In short, those that do not like God.

Hemant Mehta, the Friendly Atheist, hypothesizes that Saccone was pointing to the Trump and Republicans as on the side of the good and Democrats and other opposition as on the side of evil.

In other words, Mehta suggests, “But this sort of thinking — that you’re either with Trump and the Republicans or you’re on the side of evil — is why Saccone and anyone like him deserve to lose. They have no desire to represent everyone in their District. They only care about the people who believe as they do.”

The results of the election: Saccone lost.

Resistance to Atheist Becoming Navy Chaplain

According to Commercial Appeal, there is active work to prevent an atheist from becoming a navy chaplain.

Mid-South senators are taking a stand to block an atheist from becoming a U.S. navy chaplain. Sen. Roger Wicker, R-Miss., sent a letter to the Navy Secretary Richard Spencer and the Chief of Naval Operations Admiral John Richardson.

In the letter, Wicker wanted them to reject the application of a secular-humanist from acquisition of a post as a U.S. Navy chaplain. Wicker is a U.S. Air Force veteran and is a member of the Senate armed services committee.

As many as 22 other senators signed the letter with him. The letter expressed the fear that the U.S. Navy “may expand the Chaplain Corps beyond its clear purpose of protecting and facilitating the constitutional right of service members to the free exercise of religion.”

Tennessee Sens. Lamar Alexander and Bob Corker and Mississippi Senator Thad Cochran did not sign the letter. Prominent individuals who signed the letter were Mitch McConnell and Ted Cruz.

Jason Heap is the atheist trying to become a chaplain in the U.S. Navy. In 2014, he was endorsed by the Humanist Society. Heap sued. He lost.

The letter from the senators said, “The Navy has sufficient authority to create programs for humanist or atheist service members. ... The Chaplain Corps is not the appropriate place. The Chaplain Corps serves religious needs, not philosophical preferences.”

One letter with the endorsement of 45 House members makes similar lines of reasoning. Hement Mehta had commentary stating, “It's an absurd, literal argument that does a disservice to those actually serving in the Navy... Just because atheism isn't a religion, per se, doesn't mean that non-religious soldiers don't have emotional needs. Depriving them of a chaplain who speaks their language hurts our military.”

Atheist Gayle Jordan Loses in Special Tennessee Election

Roy Exum spoke about the Republican values of the Tennesseans in the Chattanooga. A special election was held where Shane Reeves and Gayle Jordan were present.

Reeves is a respected businessperson from Murfreesboro. Jordan is a liberal and atheist activist. Reeves is Republican. Jordan is Democratic. Both people were looking for the District 14 seat in the state Senate, which opened up when Jim Tracy resigned from the position.

Tennessee's District 14 has a deep red and mid-state county set of Bedford, Lincoln, Marshall, Moore, and Rutherford. People in the Tennessean landscape know about the same-sex wedding approvals by Jordan several years ago.

Gay marriage and similar hot-button issues are important topics for the people of Tennessee.

Randy McNally, Tennessee's Lt. Governor, said, "In my 40 plus years in Tennessee politics, I've seen few candidates as dangerous as Gayle Jordan. She is not just out of step with a majority of Tennessee on matters of policy, she is out of step on matters of values and faith."

McNally pointed out that Jordan runs the Recovering from Religion organization, which he sees as at odds with the strong believers who happen to be many Tennesseans. He opined, "This is not the type of person we need in the Tennessee Senate," speaking of Jordan.

Jordan is an attorney that runs a farm in Rutherford County and ran for the State seat in 2016 as a Democrat. This is not a new move in political life for Jordan. Of all Tennesseans, 80% identify as Christian based on a 2014 report.

"I just feel Gayle Jordan's views are radical," Reeves said. "They are out of touch with the district... I am a Christian and that is going to serve as a filter, serve as a moral compass, at how I look at things if I am fortunate enough to get elected."

In the final tally of the recent, March 13, 2018 special election, Jordan lost and Reeves won the vote.

Black People are Monkeys to Chief Rabbi

The Times of Israel reported that Sephardic Chief Rabbi Yitzhak Yosef in Israel referred to black people as monkeys in a weekly sermon.

Yosef was speaking about the Jewish legal aspects of the blessing on seeing fruit trees blossoming during the Hebrew month of Nissan. The context was whether to bless a tree or two in the speech during Nissan.

Yosef mentioned coming across a black person with two white parents in America, which he considered an “unusual creature.” He has been seen calling black people “Kushi,” which is a pejorative term.

Known to spark controversy in his sermons, Yosef used a term meaning “monkey” to describe the black person. Yosef’s office told the outlet Ynet that the term comes from the Talmud. He has gone to court over controversial quotes before. Previous controversies arose during his sermon when he mentioned secular women who dress immodestly are behaving like animals.

In March of 2016, he retracted a statement — announcing non-Jews should not live in Israel — with a defense that the statement was “theoretical.” His general notion was that the seven Noahide Laws, which are “prohibitions against idolatry, blaspheming God, murder, forbidden sexual relations, stealing, and eating limbs off a live animal,” should be followed by non-Jews and that non-Jews in Israel are there to serve Jews alone.

There are two main or chief rabbis in Israel.

“Yosef represents those with origins in the Iberian Peninsula, North Africa, and the Middle East, and David Lau represents Ashkenazic Jews, with origins in European lands of the Roman Empire,” the Times of Israel reported.

Star Wars Borrowed From Christianity, Used by One Catholic Chaplain

The Edmonton Journal reported on modern religious education and how one chaplain in Canada has been incorporating Star Wars into the classroom.

Mike Landry is from Spruce Grove and a Roman Catholic chaplain at Evergreen Catholic Schools. He teaches lessons about the Bible through comparisons with the First Order and the Resistance.

“When you’re sitting in a religion class, you’ve got people from all these backgrounds who come from all these different perspectives,” Landry said, “and you’re trying to see how you can meet all of them where they are without them feeling pushed, or judged, or forced, but inviting them into something that I believe will help them.”

Landry argued for the parallels between the Star Wars universe and Christianity when speaking at the Greater Edmonton Teachers’ Convention last week. Not the first Edmonton chaplain to take advantage of these corollaries, Landry said he is continuing the work of the late Father Michael Mireau. Father Michael Mireau often weaved Star Wars references into his homilies. He would bring Star Wars into his religious lectures and wave a light sabre around from the pulpit. Mireau died of cancer at the age of 42 in 2014.

Landry works at St. Peter the Apostle School and visits an additional 9 schools within his division. Star Wars by George Lucas, the creator and developer of the franchise, was heavily borrowed upon. The Force, the Jedi Council, the Sith, the Jedi, and so on, have been pulled from the mythological world into a modern multi-billion-dollar franchise of Christianity.

“I don’t think they have trouble understanding (religious teachings). I think they have trouble wanting to understand. They want to see that it’s relevant to them.” Landry said, “A Jewish carpenter from 20 centuries ago, what does he have to do with what I’m doing in Spruce Grove today? And sometimes these stories become a nice bridge.”

Islamic School Burns Hundreds of Mobile Phones

One hardline Islamic school in Bangladesh has burned hundreds of cellphones in a bonfire because the mobile phones were distracting students.

The Islamic school is called Darul Ulum Minul Islam and is an Islamic seminary. The school administrators tossed hundreds of cellphones into a fire. The seminar is 123 years old as an institution with over 14,000 students in attendance.

One spokesperson for the school, Azizul Hoque, described the phones as ruining the character of the young. Hoque was pro-technology, but cited the negatives such as ruining the character of young students.

The country is more or less secular, but the religious leaders such as the Muslim clerics have a huge influence and power in particular areas of the country, especially in the more conservative areas. The madrassa in Hathazari (outside the port city of Chittagong) is headed by Ahmed Shafi, the leader of a hardline Islamist group Hefazat-e-Islam.

There have been large and growing movements to turn the Bangladesh secular government into an Islamic theocracy. For example, of the Hefazat supporters alone, hundreds of thousands marched to Dhaka in 2013 “demanding implementation of religious laws including criminalising blasphemy and segregating genders in the workplace.”

The protests created violence with about 50 people dead. There was an accord struck with the movement and the Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. Hasina “agreed to recognise academic qualifications from hardline seminaries, allowing their students to apply for government jobs.”

Hindu Right Increases Religious Battles

According to the Washington Post, a mob of Hindu fundamentalists recently destroyed and dismantled a mosque with pickaxes and rope. Many ended up with bloody hands in order to bring down the mosque.

There was dust and smoke in the air. A series of nearby homes were torched. 16 Muslims were killed with a total of 2,000 dead by the end of the riots across India in the days that followed. Another mosque, Babri, was destroyed 25 years ago in northern India.

This was in an area considered to be the birthplace of the Hindu Lord Ram. This was a blow to the secularism of India. Ayodhya, India, has been synonymous with struggle and strife since that time, as fundamentalist Hindu leaders want no mosques there and instead a large sandstone temple devoted to Lord Ram.

India's Supreme Court has been hearing arguments about the title dispute over the purported holy site. Prime Minister Narendra Modi is a Hindu nationalist, which has an appeal for those of a hardline Hindu approach and conviction.

Modi has a brand of religious patriotism devoted to a Hindi India. With his rise, there has been a rise in the level of religious violence with lynching increasing 16% as of 2017 based on data from the Ministry of Home Affairs.

Many Indian Muslims state that the Hindu nationalists are flaring up tensions along religious lines in order to be able to gain political points and other support. The supporters of the Ram Temple will be having elaborate gold pillars around the temple in a flatbed truck.

The World Hindu Council, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, will have religious ceremonies in towns and villages in order to continue the moment for their movement that wants to see a sandstone Ram Temple erected.

A District Leader for Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party, Smrita Yiwari, described the sense of freedom for the Hindus in India with the Hindu nationalist leadership in government with Modi.

"We used to feel that we had come from the outside and Muslims completely controlled the country," she said, "Now, with Modi in power, things are different. We can unfurl the saffron flag for the first time... Muslims are very fanatical... They only think about their religion. They are not good to us. We don't go to Mecca and claim a place there. Why should they be given the land where Lord Ram was born?"

Hindus and Muslims have been arguing and fighting for over 100 years about the Babri Masjid, which was constructed in order to honor the Mughal emperor Babur from 1528. These enmities go back decades and centuries.

The Uttar Pradesh high court ruled in 2010 that the mosque built on the ruins of a Hindu temple made the land needing to be split into three parcels with two for the Hindus and one for the Muslims. Hindus and Muslims have agreed that the proposed or demanded division of the land into the three parcels is unacceptable.

Religion continues to divide and be highly involved in the lives of Indians. Youth unemployment is high and many peoples have migrated elsewhere from Ayodhya. The fight over the land and Lord Ram will likely continue into the indefinite future.

Hundreds of Churches Shutdown by the Government in Kenya

In Nairobi, Kenya, there is a move to close over 700 churches in the capital city for the safety, noise, hygiene, and other alleged concerns described by the President, Paul Kagame.

In reality, many consider this a way to trample on religious freedom. On March 6, the police detained six pastors with the charge of “conspiring to rally other clergy in defiance of the government’s shutdown orders.”

After he ordered the closures, the Chief Executive of the Rwanda Governance Board, Anastase Shyaka, said this was about ‘honoring God’.

“It means that if we are Christians, where we worship must meet standards showing respect for God,” Shyaka explained, “It means that if we are Christians, where we worship must meet standards showing respect for God.”

Of the 714 shutdown church sites, most were Pentecostal churches such as the ones that have multiplied throughout the continent of Africa for decades. The Lutheran Bishop Evariste Bugabo argues that the closure did not target any particular denomination.

In Kigali, the capital of Rwanda, there are more than 1,300 churches servicing the 1.2 million people there.

“Are these boreholes that give people water?” Kagame asked, “I don’t think we have as many boreholes. Do we even have as many factories? This has been a mess.” One Rwandan international development advocate from Canada, David Himbara, said the official reasons for the closures are bogus because fear and paranoia mount to the real reasons.

David Himbara, a Rwandan international development advocate based in Canada, called the government’s justification for the closures bogus and said the “real reason ... is fear and paranoia.”

“Kagame tightly controls the media, political parties, and civil society at large,” Himbara said, “The churches constituted the last open space. Kagame knows this. The localized community of churches offered a slight space for daring to imagine and talk about change.”

Islamic University Bans Full-Face Veils, Gets Criticism

One Indonesian state Islamic University is facing some heat from Muslim activists and groups because it banned women from wearing the full-face veils based on the fear of radical Islamic ideology spreading on the campus of the post-secondary institution.

Indonesia has the largest Muslim population in the world with most of them practicing as ordinary or moderate followers of the faith. However, in the recent years, there has been an upsurge in the number of the more conservative and fundamentalist, sometimes called literalist, strains of Islam.

This has been seen as a threat to the “religious tolerance and diversity” of the country that has been a cherished value set for a long time. The State Islamic University or UIN in Yogyakarta City on Java Island said that 41 students would have to remove the full veil also known as the burqa if they want to graduate.

One group, the Islamic Defenders Front, is a conservative set of campaigners who look for activities that may be un-Islamic, so that they can then work against them. One women’s rights activist argued this is a restriction on the ability of women to wear what they want.

Lathiefah Widuri Retyaningtyas, the women’s rights activist, said, “Using full-face veils is a choice and we cannot interfere in their choice and their freedom... Female students wearing the burqa, and radical groups, they are disturbing the teaching process.”

Retyaningtyas argued women should be able to wear the headscarves that do not cover the face. One recent social survey found that 1/5th of the high school and university students would support a caliphate over a secular government including the one in place right now.

This data has been an alarming point for the authorities. The Indonesian government has been struggling to keep boundaries on the growing Islamic elements of its own society.

A Religion Saved by Online Dating

ABC News stated that the Zoroastrian religion may be saved by the use of modern technology to couple people up into eventual marriage and family life, which is an interesting commentary international minority religions and the maintenance of the religious community broadly speaking.

Zoroastrianism is an ancient monotheistic faith older than Islam and Christianity, but with far fewer members. It was birthed in Persia. One Mumbai-based mother of two manages a database of Zoroastrian singles, bachelorettes and bachelors.

Her name is Zarin Havewala. She said, “So far, 55 couples have found their partners through my efforts — 53 couples are already married, and two more couples are engaged to be married soon. ... About seven years ago, it struck me very badly [that] a lot of our youngsters are getting married outside the community. ... I thought maybe they are not having enough avenues to know that there are other young Parsis available.”

The database is quite extensive and incorporates ages, careers, email addresses, names, numbers, and qualifications for the single coupled-ness-searchers. Originally, it was an idea for Indian Parsis, but then this extended to the globe with people from “Austin to Auckland and Iran to Oman.”

People simply started contacting Havewala. One woman, Auzita Pourshasb, said, “When you're taught that you're a part of a diminishing community ... you feel like you've got a sense of responsibility to meet a Zoroastrian and to help those numbers grow.”

Based on the census information from 2016, there were only 3,000 Zoroastrians living in Australia, for an example. Pourshasb, herself, married a Christian man. Now, she is 30.

Around the world, the global Zoroastrian community is estimated to only be 200,000 with as many as 30 percent living in India alone. There are converts to some of the communities, but many of the orthodox Zoroastrians do not like the conversions into the faith.

The community is concerned about how best to bring about a maintenance and even growth of the 4,000-year-old faith. What does this also mean for other faiths and traditions with similar small or dwindling global numbers in proportion to the other dominant faiths of the world?

Turkey's Directorate of Religious Affairs Argues Against Islam and Reform

According to Ahval, a Turkish Cleric argued that Islam and reform do not go together. The Turkish cleric is the head of Turkey's Directorate of Religious Affairs.

Ali Erbaş proposed that the Fiqh or the philosophy of Islamic law cannot be updated, as he talked to CNN Türk television. "It is not correct to put the words of Islam and reform next to each other in any way," he said, "But Fiqh is always subject to update and needs to be updated."

Erbaş's statements follow from a call that he had with President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan about the adaptation of the religious practices and worldview within the context of the modern socio-cultural world.

Erdoğan talked at the time when, recently, some Islamic preachers in his own country were speaking in support of violence against women.

"We, as the Directorate of Religious Affairs, reject every kind of interpretation and thought that condones violence against women," Erbaş said, "There is not one single source in either our Prophet's teachings or in Islam that condones violence against women."

The View Host Apologizes to US VP Pence

According to The Hill, one of The View hosts apologized for comments about those who claim to speak personally to Christianity's Jesus Christ.

Joy Behar, the co-host, said, that if you are experiencing Jesus talking to you that this was a sign of mental illness. Bob Iger, CEO of Disney, said that Behar apologized for offensive comments about the Trump Administration and Christians.

Joe Flint of the Wall Street Journal was in attendance at the shareholder meeting in Houston, Texas, and did tweet that Behar had directly apologized to Pence. One White House source, according to The Hill article, confirmed an apology for Pence by Behar.

"It's one thing to talk to Jesus. It's another thing when Jesus talk to you," Behar had said, "That's called mental illness, if I'm not correct. Hearing voices." Vice President Pence criticized the comments one day after they happened (Feb. 13) on February 14.

VP Pence said, "To have ABC maintain a broadcast forum that compared Christianity to mental illness is just wrong. ... It is simply wrong for ABC to have a television program that expresses that kind of religious intolerance."

Jewish Woman First to Head Americans United

The Jewish Telegraphic Agency reported on a the first Jew and woman working to take a US group into the secularist world through advancement of the separation of religion and government.

Rachel Laser, who is 48-years-old, is the Executive Director of the Americans United for Separation of Church and State. Laser is working on something important to her, which is the cause of secularism. Through the Americans United for Separation of Church and State, she will work to separate religion and government.

She said, "I appreciate that 'separation of church and state' is a term of art, but as a Jewish person it doesn't always work perfectly for me as a shorthand." Barry Lynn, the previous director, retired from the organization.

Lynn was a United Church of Christ minister, which makes the switch to a Jewish woman bigger than either a non-Christian or a woman alone.

Laser comes from Chicago and is a lawyer. She has worked with "the Reform movement's Religious Action Center, Planned Parenthood and the National Women's Law Center. Her work has centered on fighting for issues such as women's rights, LGBTQ equality and promoting interfaith relations."

She considers these federal policies and laws the most important and pressing issues of the day because these permit the discrimination against sexual minorities while also denying the safe and equitable access to reproductive health care. Often, religion restricts these.

Laser explained, "We're witnessing an alarming moment in American history, where our country's top leaders are failing to honor America's promise to separate religion and government."

Americans United for Separation of Church and State is concerned about the newer policy from the government that permits taxpayer money to be used for the reconstruction or repair of houses of worship in the case of natural disasters.

Laser came from a home filled with social justice activism and work. She values building bridges between communities. "I entered that work with fear and trepidation, and I ended that work convinced that there is remarkable space to bring unusual bedfellows together," Laser acknowledged.

As Laser is a member of the religious minorities, she works that much harder for the secular ideals of the separation between religion and government.

She has three children with her husband, Mark Davies. Interestingly, Americans United for Separation of Church and State's membership came from the political conservative before. Now, the larger population of the membership comes from the progressives.

"I don't think it's intuitive anymore to a lot of Americans that what separation of religion and government is about is freedom of religion," Laser opined. "[It] is your ability to believe what you want to believe and to practice your own faith or to choose no faith."

Louis Farrakhan Delivers Speech Many Deem Anti-Semitic

Sophie Tatum from [CNN: Politics](#) reported on an allegedly anti-Semitic speech by Louis Farrakhan. Farrakhan has been the leader of the Nation of Islam since 1977.

Often, he is deemed rather extreme in his remarks, especially around Jewish people around the world. He has stated, “The Jews are my enemy.” Also, he has said, “White folks are going down. And Satan is going down. And Farrakhan, by God's grace, has pulled the cover off of that Satanic Jew and I'm here to say your time is up, your world is through.”

Tamika Mallory, a Women’s March Co-Chair, was in attendance at the time. The Southern Poverty Law Center describes Louis Farrakhan’s Nation of Islam a hate group with “deeply racist, anti-Semitic and anti-LGBT rhetoric.”

It often teaches, according to the reportage, black racial superiority. Rep. Keith Ellison has faced pressure in the past because of his ties with the Nation of Islam in the past. In previous years, Ellison had a relationship with the group for about ten years or more.

In December of 2016, Ellison spoke out and said that he “rejects all forms of anti-Semitism ... the right wing has been pushing these stories for years to drive a wedge between Congressman Ellison and the Jewish community.”

When Ellison ran for the DNC Chair, the Anti-Defamation League and J-Street defended him.

Radical Islam Being Fought By Women Quran Experts in Morocco

The nation of Morocco is known as a hotbed for the creation of recruits for terrorism. However, Morocco has not had a significant attack on its country since 2011. The last terrorist incident or attack happened when there was a bombing of Marrakesh café. Many ISIS attackers in Europe have been Moroccan Islamic terrorists. It may feel offensive to some, but this is true.

The only purported survivor of the 2015 Paris rampage is the Moroccan-Frenchman. The Brussel airport and tram bombings were coming from the ethnic Moroccans. Same with the suspected driver of the van who drove over shoppers in Barcelona: Moroccan ethnic background.

Since 2012, 1,600 Moroccans have joined mostly ISIS and some other fledgling terrorist groups. Although it does not compare to the 7,000 coming from Tunisia to join the terrorist organizations, the public debate is around the ways in which to prevent the embrace of radical Islam on young minds.

The Atlantic said, “Germany, Britain, and Belgium have developed programs that focus on further integrating radicals into their community. Saudi Arabia, on the other hand, focuses on finding jobs and wives for recruited jihadists.”

As with gangs, once an individual has joined, it becomes nearly impossible to get them out. They are now part of an organization devoted to extremist ideologies and terrorist acts. Under the Obama Administration, the article states, there was the CVE (Countering Violent Extremism) approach that focused on community leaders and groups rather than government officials in order to combat the extremism and potential terrorism.

The Trump Administration has defunded some of the programs devoted to counter-extremism. But there are many other programs that have taken on the tasks. There are those in Morocco who continue to fund similar initiatives as those found under the Obama Administration with the prevention of extremism and terrorism through the community leaders and groups.

To be clear, ISIS attackers with Moroccan backgrounds are bad. Moroccan initiatives to prevent extremism or terrorism are good.

One Moroccan counter-extremism initiative comes with an emphasis on women. At the elite new school, L’Institut Mohammed VI Pour La Formation Des Imams, Morchidines, et Morchidates, there are religious scholars being training in order to take on the radical Islamist pockets of the country.

Those little enclaves on the Moroccan landscape are known to be prime recruitment ground for disenfranchised youth to join the extremists. It is through the utilisation of spiritual teachings and guidance in order to reach them and prevent further recruitment into the extremist and terrorist organizations.

Each trained woman is a spiritual guide. The program director, Abdeslam El-Azaar, said, “I’ll tell you frankly, the women scholars here are even more important than men. ... Women, just by virtue of their role in society, have so much contact with the people — children, young people, other women, even men. ... They are the primary educators of their children. So it is natural for them to provide advice. ... We give them an education so they can offer it in a scholarly way.”

Harry Shriver on Women Teachers and Guns

Hement Mehta, the best Friendly Atheist around, reported on Alabama State Rep. Harry Shriver considering the arming of schoolteachers as a ineffective overall methodology to protect middle and high school students.

He thinks that since many women are teachers, women are scared of guns, and so teachers should not be armed.

Shriver said, “I’ve heard ... that 75 percent of Republicans support it, [the arming of teachers,] but I was there live and in person and I know what it is like in the schools ... Most women wouldn’t like to be put in that position.”

In a conversation with Al.com, Shriver continued with the same comments. He talked about not all women; but most schools have the majority of teachers who are women. Mehta stated that the right position was taken for the wrong reasons.

In an interview, Shriver said,

“I’m not saying all (women), but in most schools, women are (the majority) of the teachers. ... Some of them just don’t want to (be trained to possess firearms). If they want to, then that’s good. But most of them don’t want to learn how to shoot like that and carry a gun.”

Mehta argues more guns in teachers’ hands will create more gun violence, not less.

Muslim Studies Program Director Argues New Atheists Misrepresent Islam

According to the Tehran Times, the New Atheist writers and thinkers tend to “misread and misrepresent Islamic sources” based on the interpretation of their work by one Michigan Professor, Mohammad Hassan Khalil.

Khalil is the author of *Jihad, Radicalism, and the New Atheism*. He is the Director of the Muslim Studies Program of Michigan State University. He said, “In fact, their [the New Atheists’] portrayals of Islam are sometimes even more extreme than those of violent radicals themselves.”

In a brief interview, Khalil described the New Atheist writers including Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Sam Harris, and Richard Dawkins, as seeing Islam primarily as a violent religious ideology. That members of al-Qaeda and ISIL who engage in the acts of terrorism are acting in the name of Islamic scripture when they commit the acts of terror.

Khalil argues that the terrorists and extremists are in fact deviating from Islamic scripture. In response to a query about the main message of his book, he responded:

My central argument is twofold: (1) Violent radicals cannot be considered "literalists" who adhere carefully to Islamic scripture and tradition. I offer various examples of radicals diverging from and misreading Islamic sources. (2) Prominent New Atheist writers also tend to misread and misrepresent Islamic sources. In fact, their portrayals of Islam are sometimes even more extreme than those of violent radicals themselves.

In other words, first, Khalil argues violent radicals are not “literalists” who deviate and misread Islamic scripture; second, the New Atheists portray Islam in a more extreme way than the radicals or extremists themselves.

Further on the second point, he argues the Western world’s academics who have been influenced by the New Atheist interpretations take the same extremist interpretation approach. Khalil, as far as can be ascertained from the interview, argues against New Atheists’ and the radicals’ interpretations rather than providing a full-breadth alternative.

Anti-Atheist Sign Removed from High School

According to the Friendly Atheist, there exists a common meme. One can see this in social media in general. It states atheism as a non-sense belief, the basic assertion being that atheism does not make any sense. As noted by the article, the intention is to show atheism as a ridiculous belief through a straw-manned representation.

It goes as follows:

Atheism

The belief that there was nothing and nothing happened to nothing and then nothing magically exploded for no reason, creating everything and then a bunch of everything magically rearranged itself for no reason whatsoever into self-replicating bits which then turned into dinosaurs.

Makes perfect sense.

It represents evolution as not really evolution because the gradual steps do not seem implied but, rather, a leap in change is purported over an instant from “self-replicating bits” into “dinosaurs.” Of course, the world is several billion years old and evolution took several billion years to evolve organisms as complicated as dinosaurs.

“Anyway, it’s the sort of statement you expect to see in a Ken Ham lecture or in a sermon from a pastor who didn’t do his homework that week and is desperately searching for material. It’s a cheap laugh for ignorant people,” the article states, “You don’t expect to see it in a public school classroom. Yet a sign with those words was seen inside a classroom at West Stanly High School in Oakboro, North Carolina.”

Somehow, a picture was sent to WSOC-TV in Charlotte. Then the superintendent of the district was contacted, which led to the sign being taken down immediately. Apparently, the superintendent said that “personnel action was taken.”

No person or reason is known as to why the sign was placed there in the first place. Friendly Atheist rhetorically asks, “Imagine if an atheist teacher put up the Christian version of the same sign in a classroom? We’d never hear the end of it.”

Co-Founder of United Atheists of Europe Interview

A representative from The Good Men Project gave an interview with the co-founder of the United Atheists of Europe. It is an organization devoted to the coordinated efforts and community building for atheists in Europe. The co-founder is Nacer Amari, who comes from Tunisia and lives in Europe.

Amari talked about the living in the southern region of Tunisia as a youth; the ways in which religion has its own customs, norms, and traditions.

Amari said, "I grew up in a Berber family with Arab culture where parents are illiterate and not religious... Usually, it has a negative impact on the child's personality, but I consider myself to be lucky compared to the children where I grew up, even though my parents were illiterate and managed to raise me without being affected by religion."

He began to have some doubts as he entered into and during high school. He noticed that classmates would pray during high school while his parents did not pray at all. He noticed the purpose of prayers, religion, and God and began to question them.

"Then I completely lost my faith in God during the 10th class, identifying myself as an atheist," Amari remarked. At some point, he and friend, named Karrar Al Asfoor, founded a social fraternity, United Atheists of Europe.

He described the organization as a means for the secular world and the ex-Muslim community to work together. "In the meantime, it is considered a small-sized social fraternity, but it's open for every atheist who is interested to join. Our future goals are to have the effective means to challenge religions and protecting secularism in Europe and to empower atheists in the Islamic world pushing it into secularism there," Amari said.

Amari, in a small critique on one facet of Islam, Ramadan, described the ways in which ex-Muslims and others protest by not eating during Ramadan, and then explained some of the background. In Tunisia, as an example, people have to not eat during Ramadan. The basis for this is in the constitution but, of course, this relates to the religion as well.

Amari explained, "...there was a ban from the Ministry of Interior requiring restaurants and cafes to obtain touristic permits to be able to serve food and drinks during Ramadan with the windows covered. The constitution has been updated after the revolution with a new chapter, which is called 'the good ethics chapter' giving the ban legal status."

He went on to explain how this started 1,400 years ago with the ancient religious rites. Those rites that exist to this day. Amari said, "This is a holy month par excellence for Muslims. It is one of the five pillars of Islam, as they believe that the revelation of the Qur'an was a 'night of fate' this month, also the only month of which the name appears in the Koran."

So, to be a good Muslim or a good citizen as per the constitution, a person must refrain from eating during Ramadan. Expanding on this point, Amari went into religion in Tunisia in general. That is, the social environments and the borders of Tunisia link to political and religious conflict.

Amari argues this has been the case since the independence of Tunisia. The Islamists took the country over. This led to increases in terrorist activities and assassinations. It continues to this day, even with the critique of religion.

Amari concluded, "The freedom to criticize religion in Tunisia is complicated, because in the new constitution, there is a contradiction in the laws, where we find in the first chapter

mentioned that ‘Islam is the religion of the state’... However, in chapter six, ‘The State protects the religion (Islam), guarantees the freedom of belief, conscience and the exercise of the cults.’”

Boy Scouts for a Religious America

The Boy Scouts of America remains closed to the non-religious population, i.e., the atheist population in the United States.

Over time, especially in recent history, the Boy Scouts of America have begun to accept a broader palette of child and adolescent into their ranks. This includes, increasingly, gays, trans, and girls. They may change their name.

The work is based on pressure to have an inclusive environment. There has been an increase in the tolerance of the organization while also seeing a decrease in the number of people who join in the organization.

In essence, it alienates the evangelical Christians and Mormons of the organizations in the process of greater inclusivity. One large and growing group in the United States is the Nones, the ever-famed and defamed ones.

The Scout Oath mentions the “best to do my duty to God” alongside the Scout Law that talks about a goal of reverence for God. These become the basis for exclusion of atheists or non-believers. Only a few weeks ago, the Boy Scouts of America declared, or re-declared, their belief in the no atheists permitted in the organization policy.

Because it is an organization for a belief in God, essentially. The National Executive Board of the Boy Scouts of America accepted a resolution, stated as follows:

A couple of weeks ago, the BSA doubled down on their pledge to keep atheists out of the fold. At the group’s annual meeting, the BSA National Executive Board adopted a resolution that effectively blocks open atheists from joining. It reads as follows:

Boy Scouts of America National Executive Board Resolution Reaffirming Duty to God

WHEREAS the foundational values of the Boy Scouts of America are reflected in the Scout Oath and Scout Law;

WHEREAS the first part of the Scout Oath declares “On my honor I will do my best to do my Duty to God and my country and to obey the Scout Law;”

WHEREAS the Declaration of Religious Principle in Bylaws of the Boy Scouts of America states that:

The recognition of God as the ruling and leading power in the universe and the grateful acknowledgement of His favors and blessings are necessary to the best type of citizenship and are wholesome precepts in the education of the growing members. No matter what the religious faith of the members may be, this fundamental of good citizenship should be kept before them.

WHEREAS the twelfth point of the Scout Law is Reverent and while the Boy Scouts of America is absolutely nonsectarian in its view of religious training, Reverent means that a Scout is faithful in his or her religious duties and respects the beliefs of others; and

WHEREAS these faith-based tenets have been a part of the Boy Scouts of America since it was

founded and, notwithstanding any changes to Scouting programs, the commitment of the movement to Duty to God is unwavering; Now therefore be it resolved that the National Executive Board of the Boy Scouts of America hereby reaffirms its unequivocal commitment to the Declaration of Religious Principle as a fundamental component of the mission of the Boy Scouts of America.

Somehow, welcoming girls doesn't affect the "fundamental component of the mission" of the BSA, but slightly rewriting the Oath and Law is a bridge too far.

As noted in Friendly Atheist, "They don't want your kid. If you're atheists, they don't really want your involvement, either. It's also why the BSA shouldn't receive government funding or access to public schools. No organization that discriminates on the basis of religion should be rewarded by the government."

The organization continues to open the doors to more and more types of people from diverse identities and backgrounds. However, this area continues to remain closed, purportedly on the need for God and reverence in the Scout Law and the Scout Oath.

"The strangest thing about this resolution is that the BSA has done a good job of opening the doors to more and more people even when it meant changing the very nature of what they've always been. They were willing to break with tradition because the old restrictions no longer made any sense," Friendly Atheist stated.

Roman Catholic Blogger Speaks on Alleged Satanic Plan

LifeSiteNews reported on the American pundit and Roman Catholic blogger Matt Walsh. Recently, Walsh spoke on the alleged plan of the purported Satan.

He spoke on his surmising of the battle plans of the alleged Devil. He asserted the first methodology would be the old school paradigm with the persecution of Christians, who were martyrs. He stated this was a tactic of killing the Christians.

The report stated, “Walsh told his audience that Satan is using this tactic on Christians who are being persecuted across the world on an ‘unprecedented scale.’ Although the media and the Church in the USA largely ignore it, ‘the reality is that the ground all over the globe is soaked in Christian blood.’”

He stated that the Christian persecution and genocide is worse than the rest of its history. Walsh sees this as an “astounding fact.” In America, Walsh stated, the attack on Christians comes from a different angle.

That is, he compares the sacrifices of Egyptian Christian pilgrims who gave all they could for Jesus Christ against Islamic extremists. Walsh asked the audience during the speech about the amount they would be willing to give up for Christ.

“Most of the so-called believers in this country will lash out angrily if you so much as suggest that they give up watching certain TV shows or listening to certain music,” Walsh stated, “They’ll explode in fury if you urge them to change their lifestyles to any degree whatsoever... And yet we think we possess the conviction and the faith to just give up our lives for Christ.”

He continued to explain, from his point of view, that the American Christians would “grovel and weep at the feet of our Muslim captors.” That they would recite the Quranic prayers demanded by these purported captors.

LifeSiteNews asserted, “Therefore, to the Satan, American Christians simply aren’t worth killing, Walsh theorized. These ‘Christians’ are so spiritually lazy and so comfortable with their sinful ways that they aren’t any threat to Satan.”

Walsh went on to elaborate about the Plan B or the second strategy of Satan for the life of the Christians in America. That being, the work to make them subjugated inside of America by the forces of evil.

Walsh asked, “Why would the demons waste their time tormenting someone who’s already walking to hell of his own volition?” He assumes the church in America, broadly speaking, has allegedly been infiltrated by the forces of evil, by the American church’s enemies.

He brings attention to those who argue for acceptance, being welcoming, tolerant, and preach a live and let live lifestyle who do not worry about “sin.”

“Satan himself speaks from the mouths of many priests and many pastors in this country... urging their flocks to conform with the culture, making the orthodox feel silly, or even bigoted, for trying to rise above the standards of this world,” Walsh said.

He notes the ways in which Christians struggle to excitedly go to church. It becomes a chore for them. He views this as a materialistic Christian community in America, who are soft. He asserts this is something that prevents the Christians from meeting God.

Walsh provided a purported cure to this alleged problem with the use of prayer above all. He sees prayer as making us less sinful and more holy. Walsh said that when Christians do drag themselves to church, desperate for guidance, they are given “nothing” from most pulpits.

“... You start to find that a lot of music you listen to, that a lot of shows that you watch...no longer appeal to you... You find that certain sins and temptations have less of a hold on you,” Walsh stated, “That desire [for God]... is kindled, and we know it, and we start to feel it. And that’s the crucial thing: for us to want the right thing.”

The article concluded on the further assertion by Walsh that he considers this to be the truth and a “terrifying reality.”

Younger People Are More Unscientific

Big Think reported on the increasing non-scientific beliefs of the Millennial generation. The blog talked about the wonderful developments in the sciences over the centuries, especially the great minds and mathematicians such as Isaac Newton.

Although, he spent a long time trying to decode the Book of Revelations from the Bible. He also did foundational work in mathematics and physics, and so engineering too -- used to this day as far as we know.

Now, with the era of computers, Google, and the like, we, especially the younger generations such as the Millennials, can search the internet for more information. "Today, we have the entire wealth of human knowledge literally at our fingertips. You'd think that'd pave the way for a cultural renaissance of sorts that might eclipse our 15th-century Florentine forefathers," the article opined. However, when it comes to the numbers of those in fringe informal disciplines long abandoned, the Millennial generation has begun to adhere to them more and more, including Astrology, flat Earth theories, and the denial of the moon landing. Why is this an increasingly common belief system among the Millennials? asks the article implicitly.

"Astrology as a system of belief has been around for thousands of years. It implies that the location of the stars and planets at the time of someone's birth determines their personality and life course. Those astrologers dedicated to the process write horoscopes and claim that they can predict your fate and reveal your true nature through zodiac charts," Big Think stated.

It amounts to an allure, a charm, and lure for the young and naïve, full of youthful vibrancy, who may excitedly grasp as bad explanation rather than no explanation. Younger generations identify less with formal religion and more with the pseudoscientific. It appears to have replaced the formal religious pseudo-explanations of the ways of the world.

After some commentary, the article continues to talk about the citation of a Finnish research study, where question sets were given "to people signed up for adult education classes, explains that those signed up for astrology courses were more prone to have recently experienced more crises in their life."

Astrology and other beliefs, when people lose footing in their lives, become helpful for people to garner some sense of internal locus of control, internal order, in their own lives.

Big Think opined, "Astrology is arguably an inane and harmless belief. Aside from you wild Scorpions butting heads with a quick-tempered Aries, it's safe to say that astrology isn't that big of a problem. Rather, it's the underlying mindset that leads to trouble."

Another phenomenon among the young came in the form of superstitious thought and the idea of all-encompassing conspiracies about the world. The critical thought is important. However, excess skepticism in the wrong degree, applied to the incorrect areas, and not in the right way can lead to all-encompassing theories.

Mono-explanations for the nature of the world, even though no evidence exists or sufficient evidence does not exist for the conspiracy theory. "Challenging questionable status quos of history and scientific inquiry is good for the advancement of knowledge," the article argues.

However, according to the opinion piece, “unfounded claims and arguments that we never landed on the moon and that Earth is flat have tired themselves out to any rational-minded person. There’s really no need anymore to defend against these ridiculous claims.”

The reason for these explanations about the world tend to be powerlessness over personal life. It makes one feel as if they have special knowledge not held by others too. More education leads people to feel more control and so less likely to believe or adhere to all-encompassing conspiracy theories.

“One reason for the pervasiveness of groundless ideas and theories is that they serve as a way to make sense of a chaotic world. People would rather believe that they’re ill-fated by a bum roll of the astrological dice or that a secret order is the reason they can’t get ahead in life,” Big Think explained.

If one can feel more agency in their life and have a greater and firmer knowledge about the world, then that someone can be less inclined to believe in or adhere to the conspiracy theories and pseudoscientific theories.

Dr. Leo Igwe on Religion's Influence on Nigerian Education

Dr. Leo Igwe in AllAfrica states that the influence of religion on education and learning within Nigeria is net negative.

Dr. Igwe talks about the ways in which the religious organizations within the country formed the construction and foundation of educational institutions throughout Nigeria. He notes the Christian and Islamic proselytizers introducing formal educational institutions within Nigeria.

“In fact, today over 80 per cent of the private schools in the country are owned or managed by mainly Christian and Islamic religious individuals or groups. However, little attention has been paid to the negative effects of religion on the educational system, especially the fact that religion undermines academic programmes,” Igwe said.

The almost mandatory incorporation of religion into education has been at times non-promotional of good performance in academics. That is, the religious texts, and so on, restrict good teaching and repress knowledge about the world.

Igwe said, “Recently, students from some universities across Nigeria responded to interview questions on the state of religion and free thought on the campuses. According to one student, campus religiosity had become a nuisance to the environment ... Actually, universities have sections in their premises where places of worship could be constructed.”

The questions remain, however, and Igwe ponders about the reasons for universities, or postsecondary institutions in general, that have not created further order in the institution with the obstructions to student learning, with the places of worship causing nuisances of various forms for different students of different faiths and non-faiths.

Igwe continued, “University authorities should be able to demarcate and ensure a separation between prayer and study/reading/lecture halls. But a student pointed out that such a measure could not be taken because many university lecturers were usually behind these prayer meetings.”

Religion and education in one seems unhealthy. One student connected the highly religious nature of the students to the post-secondary institutions' management also holding deep religious faiths. Then the bias gets replicated throughout employment and admission into the universities.

Religion gets free reign and range for expression and proselytization in these contexts. There is a correlation between the level of religiosity on campus and the amount of noise pollution.

“In fact, some students observed that the noise that emanated from students religious observance could not allow others to adequately prepare for their examinations. The noise from the prayer grounds won't even let students who have come to study understand anything,” Igwe explained.

Then many students do not perform as well in their academics as they could have otherwise. Many students argued that there will be a viable future for atheism and freethought in the campuses in Nigeria, which seems like an optimistic sign for the young Nigerians in the educated classes.

“Religion is used to sanctify lack of academic diligence and intellectual laziness,” Igwe said, “Students noted that this kind of reasoning was rampant and that the spread of atheistic viewpoints would at least mean fewer people subscribing to this mediocre way of thinking; otherwise the university would keep producing half-baked graduates.”

Igwe laments the low ranking of the Nigerian universities compared to the rest of the world and the low-quality graduates coming out of its postsecondary institutions. He views the religious climate as part of the problem.

Where a potential remedy may be the inclusion of the room for freethought for freethinkers and atheists on the campuses, he views the university being full of intellectuals in the 21st century who are highly religious to be “unbelievable!”

Further details in the article link to AllAfrica replication of The Guardian article.

Egyptian Scholar Recommends “The Protocols of the Elders of Zion”

One infamous text in the history of the 20th century and right into the 21st has been the The Protocols of the Elders of Zion. It is widely regarded as a fabrication and a fundamentally anti-Semitic and racist book. It is purportedly, and falsely one might add further, the description of the Jewish plan for world domination.

The whole basis is that the text is a collection of discussions among Jewish leaders about their plan for Jewish international hegemony through the subversion of the morals of the Gentiles alongside the control of the world's economic systems and media.

That leads to a recent assertion by an Egyptian man. According to Memri TV, Dr. Samir Taqi Al-Din, an Egyptian scholar, made recommendations for The Protocols of the Elders of Zion.

He further went on to assert that the fact of Freud being a Jew, a Zionist, and a Freemason were non-coincidental. Furthermore, he extended this to Sartre as being the father of existentialism and being a Jew as well.

Al-Din stated, “... people who came up with the materialistic, secular, atheist ideologies were all Jews ... When you read The Protocols [of the Elders of Zion], you will know that what I'm saying is true.” His address was broadcast on the Egyptian Al-Rahma TV channel on April 20.”

Al-Din talked about how Freud had the focus on human activities originating in sex. That Emile Durkheim being the father of collective consciousness and so on. That the ideas of a democracy, where the people are the final arbiters in a society of the “source of all authorities.”

Freud, Sartre, Durkheim, and democracy as sourced in materialistic, atheistic, and secular ideologies. So, he recommends the text.

Al-Din continued, “Of course, you should read The Protocols of Whatever Zion... I don't want to say 'Wise Elders' because they weren't wise or anything ... When you read The Protocols, you will know that what I am saying is true.”

The book has been used by racists and anti-Semites for some time now.

Please see some of the transcript below as provided by Memri TV:

Samir Taqi Al-Din: "Freud said that all human activities originate in sex. It is no coincidence that Freud was a Jew, a Zionist, and a Freemason. It is no coincidence that Sartre, the father of existentialism, was a Jew too. It is no coincidence that [Émile] Durkheim, the father of collective consciousness... After that, we had democracy – one thing leads to another – in which the people is the source of all authorities.

[...]

"It is no coincidence that the people who came up with the materialistic, secular, atheist ideologies were all Jews. Of course, you should read The Protocols of Whatever Zion... I don't want to say 'Wise Elders' because they weren't wise or anything... When you read The Protocols, you will know that what I am saying is true."

Islamists Murder Freethinkers and Atheists in Bangladesh

The problems for the non-religious community in Bangladesh for blogging continue into the present. The issue has been reported on since at least 2015. As noted in an old but not outdated article by Daylight Atheism, it reported on the problems ongoing in Bangladesh in 2015. There have been recent reports on the ways in which Bangladeshi activists, freethinkers, and humanists continue to be killed simply for exercising one or all of the following rights: freedom of expression or speech, freedom of (ir)religion), freedom of belief, and freedom of conscience.

In particular, the report pointed to the continuing murder of the atheists and freethinkers within the country at the hands of political Islam, or Islamist, followers: those who want to impose theocracy with use of violence, sometimes, fatal, and other means.

One person who died was Shahzahan Bachchu. He was assassinated earlier in June. Now, the Bangladesh government is doing nothing to protect the non-religious activist community against the outright murder of them, including people who have some leverage for providing a platform for voices, e.g. the publisher Bachchu.

The article stated, “Since Bangladesh’s government can’t or won’t protect its citizens, the only recourse I see for secularists is to leave the country. Thankfully, the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU) is making this possible, there and elsewhere, through its Protect Humanists at Risk crowdfunding campaign.”

IHEU is an important and bright light in the work to expose theocratic overreach and abuse of citizens around the world. The campaign by IHEU is intended to provide support for the humanists at risk of violence.

Also, it is intended to help with advocacy and political campaigns for those who are at risk of governmental persecution. This can include blasphemy or apostasy laws. This is all included in a comprehensive research report entitled “Freedom of Thought Report.”

Bob Churchill and others are the brains behind this huge research project. The crowdsourced funding campaign is aiming to raise \$26,000. In 12 countries, the penalty for a belief – in violation of the freedom to believe – or more an affirmation of atheism, is death.

This is based on so-called apostasy laws.

“In many more countries, ‘blasphemy’ laws are used to stop humanists promoting human rights, including women’s rights, LGBTI rights and non-religious rights, when they are accused of ‘insulting religion,’” the report explained. “In recent years, freethinkers have been attacked in countries including Pakistan, Bangladesh, Maldives and India. Humanists have been threatened with prosecution or violence in countries including Malaysia, Egypt, Afghanistan and Iran.”

The state has punished people for purported or alleged crimes including apostasy, the enmity against God, and the promotion of atheism. This has occurred in Iran, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Sudan.

However, if one looks at nations including Bulgaria, Hungary, Moldova, Poland, Russia, Turkey, or the United States, some demagogues and ultra-conservative populist movements work to undermine both democracy and secularism.

In the process, this can harm the rights of the non-religious in general who really need secularism. IHEU may provide a bulwark against these regressions against and infringements on the rights of the non-religious around the world.

The Freethinker talked some more about it. It noted the fatalities connected to the threats against humanists and freethinkers. In 2015, the freethinking community lost Avijit Roy, Washiqur Rahman, Ananto Bijoy Das, and Niloy Neel.

There were coordinated attacks on publishing houses in October of 2015 in Dhaka. Secular activists and LGBT publishers continue to be victims too. Note, this seems clearly religious individuals killing secular people, humanists, freethinkers, and sexual orientation and gender identity minority people.

It does not seem to happen the other way around. However, and to conclude the report, the Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina stated that the attacks against the non-religious activists was because of the criticisms against religion and then the prosecution threatened under the ICT Act, which is an act that makes the hurting of religious sentiments a criminal offense.

If there is not a criminal indictment, then the public goes for its own bloody justice. We should do something about this for their and our sakes.

The Alleged Humbling of Atheists by The National Post

According to an article in The National Post, there has been an alleged humbling of the atheists as of late. Others disagree.

The opinion piece spoke about the event in the O2 arena of London. Here, Sam Harris, world-famous New Atheist and neuroscientist, and Jordan B. Peterson, clinical psychologist and professor at the University of Toronto, sat and had a discussion.

The article stated, “There is a pop cultural title belt on the line, and for the first time in years, the atheist will be the clear underdog. Peterson is a psychologist whose popular appeal is partly based on his repurposing of religious myth for modern life.”

Peterson claims a complicated relationship with the Christian faith in terms of self-identification, where he does not believe in the Abrahamic God but acts as though such a God exists. The argument proposed in the report is that the publications of the New Atheists – Hitchens, Dennett, Dawkins, and Harris – should indicate a declining interest in the questions of religion and faith.

However, the latter 2010s represent a re-emergence of interest in faith-based topics from within the framework of the faith-based topics.

The article accused, “The New Atheists — the hyper-rationalist anti-religious movement of which Harris was once a star — are not new anymore. Quite the opposite. The enlightened, progressive, secular left wing has turned on them as they struggled with their own scandals of intolerance, Islamophobia, sexism, and sophist sloganeering.”

Going on to quote the philosopher of biology Michael Ruse, who opined the movement was akin to a balloon that once “pricked, it went nowhere,” the article reflected on the timeline of observation for Ruse, where the dynamic of atheism into the New Atheism comes with a history.

In particular, a history with the “crisis point in 1982” with Ruse’s attendance in Arkansas as an expert witness for the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). The purpose was to challenge the teaching of so-called “creation science” or, more properly, Young Earth Creationism and Old Earth Creationism – in the majority of cases.

Ruse attended alongside the prominent evolutionary biologist Stephen Jay Gould. Gould considered science and religion compatible insofar as they consist of “Non-Overlapping Magisteria” or independent domains of inquiry or universes of discourse.

That is when one speaks of religious themes and moral narratives, they not contradict the empirical evidence and theoretical groundings of science, for example with Evolutionary Theory, because these are areas that do not mutually contradict one another.

The article covering the case later stated, “It was like the Scopes Monkey Trial all over again. Ruse compared this experience to ‘going over the top at the Somme,’ and said it gives him ‘street credentials’ in the atheism ‘world. More recently, he has found himself using that cred to criticize those who take atheism too far, especially Dawkins, whom he compared to Donald Trump as someone who argues by ‘trivializing the stuff into slogans.’”

Ruse, apparently, sees a shift in the cultural zeitgeist happening since the tragedy of 9/11. The time when the then US President George W. Bush proposed a religious framing for a clash of civilizations. There were fears around then prime minister of Canada Stephen Harper harboring a

Christian agenda and that anti-evolution was being proposed in American schools, all at the same time.

“In those times, there was a countercultural boldness in standing up for atheism. People were especially keen for a coherent opposition to Islamic extremism that was fair and humanistic, distinct from the Islamophobic Christian right wing that was keen to rouse a new crusade,” the article asserted.

Then some of the New Atheist leading lights began to rise and the push back against religious fundamentalism, and pseudoscience became important as a public criticism. With the developments into the present, the article claims that the trend has been a humbling of the New Atheists, where the social meaning or force of New Atheism declines in its “urgency.”

The report continued to note that the prominence of creationism at one time has waned and alongside this decline in urgency of a reaction came the decrease in the prominence of New Atheism. It quoted Ruse once more stating the two sides have been cooling, where it “takes two to tango.”

“Sociologically, the expectation was that religion would decline and atheism increase as science literacy increased, and as older people who were raised with religion at home are replaced by younger people who were not,” the article explained, “But that is not what has happened. On the contrary, supernatural belief in things like miracles and angels seems to actually decline with age, according to recent surveys. Among Canadians who tick “none” for their religion on sociological surveys, which have risen from 10% in 1985 to about 25% today, about two fifths say they believe in God all the same.”

This then leads to commentary by the University of Waterloo sociologist Sarah Wilkins-Laflamme. She commented on the context with the non-religious not being atheists by necessity and the unaffiliated having more than the average amount of religious sensibilities with “individually constructed belief systems and personal spiritual practices.”

That points to the main assertion of The National Post that the individuals involved in the work atheism as a modern movement work within a context of religion and science being seen as more often compatible compared to the prior decade or two.

The article asserts and concludes, “This is why religion has survived not only the progress of science, but also the attacks of atheists. Their arrows miss their mark, and as the dangers of religious extremism fall down the list of cultural preoccupations, so too does movement atheism.”

The Nones on the Rise in Many Places

Baptist Global News spoke on the rise of the Nones, not only in the US but around the world.

They reported that the renunciation of religion does not necessarily limit itself, as a phenomenon, to North America and Western Europe. In particular, the young adult groups throughout the world have begun to give up their faith in the efficacy and veracity of religion.

The Pew Research Center data is cited in the report. In general, the Nones are on the rise around the world. The leaders of most traditions are struggling with a decline in affiliations and memberships in their respective religions.

“In a June 13 study titled ‘The Age Gap in Religion Around the World,’ Pew found that young adults globally tend to be less religious than older people, and that ‘the opposite is rarely true,’” the article reported. “The expansive report delves into a range of factors that predict religiosity. Those include income levels, lifespan, geographic region and social standing.”

It remains a complex phenomenon, but it shows a clear trend in the reduction of religiosity over time around the world and not in the United States alone. One issue noted for the American religious leaders is the disjunction between the old and the young.

The old tend to adhere to a religious faith. The young tend to reject faith. Then the average age for the religious tend to go higher and higher, but the mean age for the Nones remains lower than the average age for the religious.

Not only in self-identification, the young tend not to practice their faith as fully as the older generations even if they do identify with a religious belief system.

The Pew report stated, “But this is not solely an American phenomenon ... Lower religious observance among younger adults is common around the world.”

While there is that split between the generations, it does depend on the country with some countries showing bigger or smaller gaps than others. Some with the adults who are 40-years-old or younger view religion as less important or are “less inclined to view religion as ‘very important.’”

That data arises in Canada, Iran, Nigeria, and Switzerland. Exceptions to that rule exist too.

“While this pattern is widespread, it is not universal ... In many countries, there is no statistically significant difference in levels of religious observance between younger and older adults,” Pew explained, “In the places where there is a difference, however, it is almost always in the direction of younger adults being less religious than their elders.”

About 41 countries have 18-to-39-year-olds who feel less attached to religion.

Pew identified 41 nations where people 18 to 39 years old “are significantly less likely than their elders to have a religious affiliation.” These include Canada, Mexico, much of South America, and the United States of America.

The young do not pray as much. Only Chad and Liberia showed that the young adults prayer two times per day. In 53 out of 102 nations, the under 40s are much less likely to go to a weekly religious service than the over 40s.

However, Armenia, Liberia, and Rwanda were exceptions to that trend in in attendance at weekly services.

The article said, “The gaps between generations are small in many countries. The overall average is 5 percentage points for affiliation, 6 percentage points for worship attendance and 9 percentage points for prayer.”

The US is one of a number of countries where the differences remain larger. Finally, there is a gulf of a minimum of 10% between the old and the young who identify with a religious group, mostly Christian populations, in the Americas and Europe.

Reddit AMA Participant Claims Nazism an Atheistic Doctrine

One Canadian professor has become popular, according to the reportage in The Vermillion, as a popular person among the far-right in the United States.

His popularity extends to the disaffected and insecure men, which, apparently, is a “key demographic in the modern conservative movement.” As with a host of public intellectuals, many will enter into domains outside of their expertise.

The article talks about the lobsters and social behaviour example, which was taken on by some marine biologists. In a Reddit Ask me Anything, the claim by Peterson was Nazism was, in fact, an atheist doctrine. When confronted on the answer with more questions, Peterson reaffirmed the claim.

The article retorts by stating that the Nazi Party and Nazi Germany were “very clearly Christian. By 1939, at the start of the Second World War, only 1.5% of Germans identified as atheists. Even if some atheists were pretending to be Christians to avoid persecution, that’s still a low number compared to the 95 percent that identified as Christian. This fact alone debunks the lie that Nazism was atheistic.”

On the belts of the Nazi soldiers, there was a phrase: “Gott Mit Uns” or “God is With Us.” It started with the Prussian military, but carried over into the Nazi Germany one. Hitler declare that Christians and not the international atheists who are the head of the nation (Germany) at that time.

Hitler, in translation from German to English, said, “I will never ally myself with the parties which destroy Christianity.” Hitler abandoned some beliefs later in life. However, he appealed to the religious sensibilities of the general populace in order to win support.

Germany had an intriguing movement. It was called Positive Christianity. The purpose was to purge the Jewish roots of Christianity to merge state worship and Christianity.

The article stated, “Although its attempts to ultimately separate its belief from both Catholicism and Protestantism makes this sound like a heretical Christianity, it still shows how the Nazi party found religion useful in establishing their dictatorship.”

The Vermillion clarifies. Christians were Nazis, but not all Christians were Nazi – not all Nazis were Christians. Nonetheless, the Nazi Germans leveraged religion to enforce worship of the state. “Blasphemy would be equal to treason, and vice versa. Eradicating dissenting opinions is how one ideology conquers a country,” the article explained.

The author concluded on state and religion separation. That these can “short-circuit empathy and rationality,” which can be some of the most toxic beliefs around us. “When pseudo-intellectuals try to lie about what dictatorships enforce to exercise control, they pose a danger to the rest of us.”

Humberto – Executive Director, White Ribbon

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: What was family background and personal background in terms of becoming started in activism that is against violence against women?

Humberto Carolo: It dates back to my student years. Even as a boy and young man, I have always been interested in social causes and in the helping profession. It is an early interest of mine, back in the early years when I lost my mother when I was 6-years-old.

It led me on the path to begin studying social sciences, studying the gender relations and sociology, human sexuality. I did a lot of volunteer work while I was in university. I got in student council and student politics.

I was the human rights officer for our student council here at the University of Toronto. When I graduated, I started working in the community in HIV prevention. I have gone to White Ribbon when it officially opened up to coordinate initiatives between Canada and Brazil on the topic of engaging men and boys in gender equality and reducing violence against women.

That opened the pathway into this work.

Jacobsen: It is the largest organization of men and boys looking to prevent and eventually end violence against women and girls. With that as its mandate, what is its current status since it was started in 1991 in Toronto?

Carolo: It was created by 3 men 2 years after the December 6th Montreal Massacre. Our founders felt men needed to come forward, step up, and speak out against violence against women. The White Ribbon as a symbol to pledge for men to never commit or condone or remain silent about violence against women.

It was a grassroots movement. It started in Toronto and spread across Canada and the United States. Further from there, today, we counted about 65+ countries around the globe where initiatives of White Ribbon, e.g. campaigns, have been implemented.

Jacobsen: How can people become involved with it?

Carolo: I would encourage everyone to visit our website at whiteribbon.ca, connect with us on Facebook or Twitter. There is a pledge people can take online on our website. Then there are specific campaigns that we ask people to get involved with to make change and accept change for the individual and collective levels.

It Starts With You campaign starts with a series of things including fathers and family members and how they can promote gender equality and healthy relationships, and what people can do in everyday life.

We also provide tools for educators such as male teachers on how to engage students and how to be good role models on gender equality and respecting women in schools, in the community, and in the home.

It is engaging young people and young men on this issue because for us we know that most of the violence committed against women and girls is committed against men, but not all men believe in or use violence.

A lot of men stay violent because they do not know what to do or what to say. We try to encourage everyone and try to give men and everyone the tools and language to speak on these issues in the community, in the schools, in the workplace, and so on and so forth.

We ask people to check out our resources and campaigns to see how they can get involved in a way that makes sense for them. In a workplace, they can organize an event or a working group. Same at the universities with the campaign or starting a club.

They can start a task force and bring in speakers and organize events to help raise awareness. Or in our case here in Toronto, we help organize a Walk a Mile in Our Shoes. We invite everyone to literally walk a mile literally in the shoes in order to show support, raise awareness, and to stand in solidarity with women and girls.

Harry Shriver on Women Teachers and Guns

Hement Mehta, and the best Friendly Atheist around, reported on Alabama State Rep. Harry Shriver considering the arming of schoolteachers as a ineffective overall methodology to protect middle and high school students.

He thinks that since many women are teachers; women are scared of guns; and so teacher should not be armed with guns.

Shriver said, “I’ve heard... that 75 percent of Republicans support it, but I was there live and in person and I know what it is like in the schools... Most women wouldn’t like to be put in that position.”

In a conversation with Al.com, Shriver continued with the same comments. He talked about not all women but most schools having the majority of teachers as women. Mehta stated the right position was taken for the wrong reasons.

In an interview, Shiver said, “I’m not saying all (women), but in most schools, women are (the majority) of the teachers... Some of them just don’t want to (be trained to possess firearms). If they want to, then that’s good. But most of them don’t want to learn how to shoot like that and carry a gun.”

Mehta argues more guns in teachers’ hands will create more fun violence, not less.

Atheists Can ‘Go to Hell’ for Wanting Commission Invocation

According to the Wichita Eagle, one Sedgwick County commissioner stated atheists “[can] go to hell.” This was based on the atheists wanting to deliver an invocation at commission meetings.

One online commentator said, “I heard they're not so closed minded in hell. And there's less Police per capita than Wichita so it can't be all bad.” While another opined, “Some one needs to tell this guy that atheists don't believe in Hell and that's literally the point.”

The commissioner David Unruh stated that atheists can go to hell based on a personal feeling from a letter sent by the Freedom From Religion Foundation or the FFRF. The FFRF argued that the county violated the Constitution with the denial of an atheist to provide a commission meeting invocation.

The FFRF is devoted to the secularist ideals of the separation between church and state. Unruh said, “If you don't believe in (God), that's fine with me... I don't care, go to hell. It's fine.”

Richard Ranzau, another commissioner present, supported the “encouraged Unruh’s remarks,” according to the Wichita Eagle article.

The local publication wrote about the prayers of the county before stating concerns about the exclusion of non-Christians.

The President of Wichita Oasis, Alex Simmons, was surprised by the inability of an atheist to perform the invocation. Oasis is part of a larger network for the religiously unaffiliated to find community of common values.

A local Wichita atheist, Mike Marlett, was offended. He opined, “No atheist wants to sit there and listen to have someone have a prayer and nobody who’s religious wants to sit there and hear an atheist talk about atheism... And that’s OK. This is not a forum for religious discussion.”

“In God We Trust” to Stay on American Currency

A Cincinnati, Ohio, reportage on a federal appeals court decision talked about the rejection of an atheist's attempts to have “In God We Trust” removed from American currency.

The federal court concluded that the phrase is not compelled speech. This was a decision in agreement with the lower court ruling. That the complainants in the case have other alternatives in cash if they do not prefer this motto.

The Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals stated, “Plaintiffs’ complaint does not allege that anyone has ever attributed the motto to them. And the Supreme Court has strongly suggested that the motto’s inscription on currency does not compel speech.”

It continued to talk about the lack of universal access to credit or bank accounts. However, the financial situation for the plaintiffs does not foreclose the opportunity for the access to checks or credit. Michael Newdow has filed several lawsuits to challenge the admixture of government and religion.

He submitted one in the Southern District of New York in March, 2013. He claimed the motto - In God We Trust – violates the Establishment Clause of the United States Constitution. Why? It is a means by which there is a proselytization to the non-religious or unbelievers.

“But in September of that year, U.S. District Court Judge Harold Baer, Jr., nominated by Bill Clinton, rejected Newdow’s arguments, opining that “the inclusion of the motto on U.S. currency . . . does not violate the Establishment Clause [of the Constitution],” the reportage said.

Then Newdow made a case to the Second Circuit Court of Appeals in Manhattan, New York in May, 2014. The court ruled against Newdow once more. The claim by the court is that the inclusion into the design of the U.S. current is a religious heritage reference.

Newdow went to find some plaintiffs. The plan was to challenge the motto of “In God We Trust” from a different angle. Bill Clinton signed the federal Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA) in the 1990s. Newdow filed a suit with 43 plaintiffs. Nine were children.

They claimed the phrase was a burden on the beliefs of atheist, of them.

Their complaint said, “When [the child] is confronted with ‘In God We Trust’ on every coin and currency bill she handles or learns about in school, the power and prestige of the federal government is brought to bear upon her with the message that her father’s (and her own) atheism is false.”

Judge Benita Pearson – on December, 2016 – was appointed to the bench by President Barack Obama. Pearson ruled against the complainants. She argued that a reasonable person would not see the handling of the money with the motto would be an attempt to spread a religious message.

Pearson wrote, “A person does not own the bills and coins printed by the United States Treasury. The government does not require citizens to display money. Money does not exist for the express purpose that it be observed and read by the public.”

Newdow and others then appealed to the Sixth Circuit. This court also upheld the decision made by Pearson. Why? The plaintiffs are not being forced to pay for various purchases with cash.

The three-judge panel said, “Plaintiffs do not allege that they must engage in cash-only transactions; rather, they allege merely that they use cash frequently and prefer to do so. For example, one plaintiff, as an octogenarian, ‘often feels more comfortable using cash rather than

credit cards or checks,’ while one child plaintiff ‘uses money almost every week to buy books, magazines, treats and gifts.’”

The panel continued to say that the allegations by the plaintiffs do not show that the government has forced them to violate their religious beliefs or had any significant suffering as a result.

1956 was the year when Congress passed a resolution for “In God We Trust” to be made the national motto. The U.S. House of Representatives upheld this in 2011 396-9 in a vote.

Spain Elects Atheist Prime Minister

Spain made the headlines with the recent election vote results against the current leader of Spain, Mariano Rajoy, and for the political opposition, Pedro Sánchez. Sánchez has been sworn in as the new Prime Minister of Spain.

Sánchez is the leader of the opposition party called the Spanish Socialist Worker's Party. When Sánchez took the oath to be sworn in as the Prime Minister, there was no crucifix or Bible to place a hand on at the time. By which the report means, Sánchez is an atheist, even though 2/3rds of the country are Roman Catholic.

In a 2014 interview, Sánchez stated, "I am an atheist and I believe that religion should not be in the classrooms, it has to be in the churches, in the classrooms you have to form citizenship, not people with religious beliefs, that corresponds to the private sphere."

When Sánchez gave a godless oath as well, however, he only has 84 members of the Spanish Socialist Worker's Party in the 350-seat Parliament. The question of success for an atheist leader in a majority Roman Catholic Church nation remains to be seen.

In the oath, Sánchez stated, "I promise by my conscience and honor to faithfully fulfill the obligations of the office of President of the Government with loyalty to the King, and to keep and enforce the Constitution as the fundamental norm of the State."

He switched the word promise in place of swear and emphasized conscience and honor rather than Christian Theity who intervenes in the world.

The article concluded, "But when you have someone who looks to evidence and reason for guidance over internal religious dogma, it's at least a good starting point."

Canadian Christian Group Anti-LGBTQ Therapy Event Cancelled

CBC News reported on one known controversial Christian group. It wants to host an event. It acquired critique from LGBTQ or sexual minority activists. Following that, it was cancelled for unknown reasons.

Journey Canada wanted to host a retreat at the Villa Madonna Retreat House. It is operated by the Roman Catholic Diocese of Saint John.

The Canadian group was formerly called Living Waters and based in Vancouver. It is a non-denominational religious sect. It is focused on the healing of the “relationally and sexually broken.” The group has spoken on their values being against those acts seen as violations of God’s bounds for proper sexual expression.

These include compulsive masturbation, mutual masturbation, oral sex, and pornography use. The retreat for the group was scheduled to happen between July 22 and July 28. The Administrative Director for the Villa Madonna, Dianne O’Dell, stated, in an email to the CBC, that the event was cancelled.

The reasons for the cancellation were not given to the CBC. As stated in the article, “CBC News tried the Diocese of Saint John and Journey Canada on Wednesday afternoon but did not receive an immediate response. Critics, including St. Thomas University professor Erin Fredericks, said the courses offered by the group amounted to ‘anti-LGBTQ therapy.’”

Fredericks considered this an organization the community does not want training local leaders. Those local leaders who would work with youth, even working with members of other faith groups. She was happy to hear about the cancellation of the Rothesay event.

Fredericks stated, “We were surprised to see that they were coming to New Brunswick, because they haven’t before, and we’re upset that this message was coming to a province that we believe had made some real steps forward in the last couple years toward supporting LGBTQ New Brunswickers,” Fredericks said.

The concern from Fredericks was the potential ripple effect of the event. In that, the event could inspire the spread of a message of intolerance and even hate. “It’s not just about people who attend the event, it’s about the influence that they have after,” Fredericks opined.

Journey Canada is Living Waters, but Living Waters became Journey Canada in 2015 through a name change. It received \$666,548 in donations in 2017. More than 9,100 people in 42 cities across Canada were ministered based on the annual report for 2017.

The “Voices of Reason” Godless Choir

The Religion News Service reported on the godless choir entitled the Voices of Reason. 8 years ago, a woman signed up for a course in singing at the Santiago Canyon College. It is a community college. She works there in Orange, California. The students had to sing as a choir.

When the hymns and the performances at various religious events were mandatory, the woman, Amanda MacLean, did not like it. The final straw, or song, was the singing of the City of Orange’s Christmas tree lighting three years back-to-back-to-back.

MacLean stated, “I knew there had to be nonbelievers out there who felt like I did, who had no place to sing without being forced to sing about Jesus... I actually thought atheist choirs were a thing.” As she went to look for those choirs, she found Bobbie Kirkhart.

MacLean and Kirkhart founded the Voices of Reason in 2001. One other non-religious person, Michael Jordan, was one of the co-founders. After three years, the Voices of Reason separated. However, one 450-year-old IT consultant who worked for Apple, Yari Schutzer, got a new group of singers together.

Schutzer was one of the original members before the group originally disbanded. As far as the reported from the Religion News Service goes, the Voices of Reason is the “only atheist choir in the United States, its members say, and one of only a very few in the world.”

The merry band of disbelievers spread their cheer and songs at various atheist events, public libraries, science events, and Unitarian Universalist churches. The plan is to do outreach to schools and nursing homes for future performances.

The executive director of the Center for Inquiry-Los Angeles, James Underdown, described the Voices of Reason choir as a good fit for the organization. The purpose of CFI is to foster a secular society. Underdown stated, “There’s a lot of music out there that celebrates religious beliefs... appreciate hearing something that lands in their perspective every once in a while.”

With a rehearsal, recently, one dozen people wrap in stance around a piano with sheet music reading and singing in order to warm up.

The article said, “Voices of Reason members say they don’t simply avoid religious references. They draw attention to their rejection of religion, often picking songs that comment on its shortcomings. They have been in touch with members of Britain’s London Humanist Choir, which calls itself atheist as well, but doesn’t go for the jugular as they do.”

One “quintessential” atheist song, according to Schutzer is the song “Imagine” by the late John Lennon. Also, the “Evolution Chorus” in place of the “Hallelujah Chorus” by Handel. Another favorite is the Monty Python song from Meaning of Life the movie called “Every Sperm is Sacred.”

Schutzer opined, “There’s this fine line between humor and offense and we try to walk that line.” The point, according to the reportage, is not to denigrate religion. The intention is to defend atheism.

An Annenberg Public Policy Center from the University of Pennsylvania stated 1 in 7 Americans, wrongly, hold the belief that atheists do not have the same First Amendment protections as people who are religious. Although, a Gallup poll found that 58% of Americans would vote for an atheist president.

“We’re still human, we still want some sort of entertainment,” Schutzer explained. The Voices of Reason may fill a void in people without the cost of mandatory belief. Many of the choir members spent their youth in religious homes.

Kirkhart stated, “Music is common to all humankind and is extremely important to bonding groups... Church has this way of bringing people together, to sing together and that connect to the person next to you, connect to the meaning of the songs.”

One study in 2016 from the journal *Psychology of Music* found that choral singers had higher well-being than those who were solo singers. It is seen as more meaningful to its participants than those involved in team sport. Other research found singing in a choir can increase endorphins and can regulate the heart rates of those involved in it.

“Voices of Reason is there to build a community,” Schutzer concluded.

Polling Done on Young Catholics

Independent Catholic News reported on Pope Francis' Synod on Youth for this fall. Recent research indicates the change in the faith and lifestyle stances of the young Catholic adult population. There appears to be a decrease in agnosticism and atheism.

The decrease, according to the reportage, comes to about 7% between 2009 and 2017 from 49% to 42%. There has been an increase in the frequency of Mass attendance from 25% in 2009 to 36% in 2017. The data comes from Research Now for the Catholic Youth Ministry Federation and Camino House (strategy consultancy).

The polling was done between September and October of 2017. The results showed about “10% more young adults in 2017 are likely to have experienced stress across a range of factors than the comparable group in 2009.”

Young women Roman Catholics will feel anxiety more frequently than their male peers during the week on all measured factors, especially regarding personal appearance with a 79% for female and 54% for male split in the data.

Also, women felt more anxiety about having enough money for themselves and their families (66% female vs 50% male). 2017 young Catholics view the helping of others as an aspiration and expectation of their lives more than those from 2009.

However, this comes to an attitudinal stance because there was no real change in volunteering or campaigning activity. “Female young Catholics say that they have taken more action on social issues in the past year than their male counterparts,” the Independent Catholic News stated, “whilst young male Catholics are more likely to say that they attend Mass (either regularly or irregularly at 82%) than females (71%).”

The report with the data was called “Complex Catholicism.” It was intended to look into the issues import for the young Catholic population. Their “willingness to identify as Catholic/Roman Catholic, beliefs about Jesus, and maintaining contact with young Catholics through life transitions.”

The identification of the spiritual experiences for the young Catholics showed wide range of self-identified experiences. 10% claimed to sense the presence of an angel.

“Through this research, young Catholics have articulated a strong openness to Christian belief, to social action and to belonging to the Catholic community; but they are also living complicated lives with some perhaps paralysed by pressure,” Matthew van Duyvenbode, the author of the report, explained, “The Church today has an opportunity is to follow the call of Pope Francis to reach out to those on the peripheries and demonstrate an authentic, dynamic and humble expression of Catholicism for the 21st century.”

New Book - Queer Disbelief

Camille Beredjick announced a new book earlier in 2018 entitled Queer Disbelief. She was a former frequent writer for Friendly Atheist back in the day.

Beredjick wrote on the important topic of the rights of sexual orientation and gender identity minorities under the banner of LGBTQ rights.

As noted by the Friendly Atheist article reporting on the announced book, “The book was called Queer Disbelief and it was all about the LGBTQ and atheist communities: how they overlapped, where the comparisons broke down, how religion hurt (and helped!) LGBTQ people, and why atheists couldn’t ignore this issue.”

With June as Pride Month, the cost of book has been lowered now. It has been listed at only \$9.99 in paperback version and \$6.99 in Kindle. This deal, as per the month of Pride, will end at the completion of the month.

If you have not read it, and have a deeper interest in the LGBTQ rights, and the activism and writing of Beredjick, then you may want to take a look into it.

Younger People More Unscientific

Big Think reported on the increasing non-scientific beliefs of the Millennial generation. The blog talked about the wonderful developments in the sciences over the centuries, especially the great minds and mathematicians such as Isaac Newton.

Although, he spent a long time trying to decode the Book of Revelations from the Bible. He also did foundational work in mathematics and physics, and so engineering too – used to this day as far as I know.

Now, with the era of computers, Google, and the like, we, especially the younger generations such as the Millennials, can search the internet for more information. “Today, we have the entire wealth of human knowledge literally at our fingertips. You’d think that’d pave the way for a cultural renaissance of sorts that might eclipse our 15th-century Florentine forefathers,” the article opined.

However, when it comes to the numbers of those in fringe informal disciplines long abandoned, the Millennial generation has begun to adhere to them more and more including Astrology, flat Earth theories, and the denial of the moon landing. Why is this an increasingly common belief system among the Millennials? Asks the article implicitly.

“Astrology as a system of belief has been around for thousands of years. It implies that the location of the stars and planets at the time of someone’s birth determines their personality and life course. Those astrologers dedicated to the process write horoscopes and claim that they can predict your fate and reveal your true nature through zodiac charts,” Big Think stated.

It amounts to an allure, a charm, and lure for the young and naïve full of youthful vibrancy who may excitedly grasp as bad explanation rather than no explanation. Younger generations identify less with formal religion and more with the pseudoscientific. It appears to have replaced the formal religious pseudo-explanations of the ways of the world.

After some commentary, the article continues to talk about the citation of a Finnish research study, where question sets were given “to people signed up for adult education classes, explains that those signed up for astrology courses were more prone to have recently experienced more crises in their life.”

Astrology and other beliefs, when people lose footing in their lives, become helpful for people to garner some sense of internal locus of control, internal order, in their own lives.

Big Think opined, “Astrology is arguably an inane and harmless belief. Aside from you wild Scorpions butting heads with a quick-tempered Aries, it’s safe to say that astrology isn’t that big of a problem. Rather, it’s the underlying mindset that leads to trouble.”

Another phenomenon among the young came in the form of superstitious thought and the idea of all-encompassing conspiracies about the world. The critical thought is important. However, excess skepticism in the wrong degree, applied to the incorrect areas, and not in the right way can lead to all-encompassing theories.

Mono-explanations for the nature of the world, even though no evidence exists or sufficient evidence does not exist for the conspiracy theory. “Challenging questionable status quos of history and scientific inquiry is good for the advancement of knowledge,” the article argues.

However, according to the opinion piece, “unfounded claims and arguments that we never landed on the moon and that Earth is flat have tired themselves out to any rational-minded person. There’s really no need anymore to defend against these ridiculous claims.”

The reason for these explanations about the world tend to be the powerlessness over personal life. It makes one feel as if they have special knowledge not held by others too. More education leads people to feel more control and so less likely to believe or adhere to all-encompassing conspiracy theories.

“One reason for the pervasiveness of groundless ideas and theories is that they serve as a way to make sense of a chaotic world. People would rather believe that they’re ill-fated by a bum roll of the astrological dice or that a secret order is the reason they can’t get ahead in life,” Big Think explained.

If one can feel more agency in their lives and have a greater and firmer knowledge about the world, then that someone can be less inclined to believe in or adhere to the conspiracy theories and pseudoscientific theories.

Bizarre Purported Punishment from God Because of Abortions

According to Dead State, there was a bizarre claim by Rick Wiles about a “brown invasion” as a punishment from God for abortions in America.

Rick Wiles, a well-known fundamentalist conservative Christian radio host and conspiracy theorist, took on a stance associated in the report with Christian-styled anti-abortion/pro-life position tied to white nationalism.

Wiles runs the show called TruNews, where he holds forth on his fundamentalist and conspiracy theorist ideas. In one short reported-on segment, he spoke on what he characterized as a “brown invasion” from Latin America.

This, he surmised, was a punishment of white people for the sin of abortion. He stated that this was a soil soaked in babies’ blood and so the soil is making a cry for some form of justice.

Wiles opined, “Four thousand babies killed every day, their guts, their intestines, their brains, their blood flushed down the toilet in the baby butcher shops ... [it] goes into the sewer system, carried in the sewer pipes under the city streets, into the sewage system. Our country is soaked in blood and the soil is crying out for justice.”

He argued that there needs to be repentance based on these assertions. Otherwise, another people, presumably not white people, will take the land. He is known as an End Times conspiracy theorist who is pro-Trumpism.

He originally considered the people to take over the United States of America would be the Chinese or the Russians. However, he changed his mind. The purported “invasion” comes from those who are from Central America. They are the source of God’s punishment.

“It just hit me in the past week ... We’ve already been invaded. We’re already being pushed off the land. It’s already happened ... The judgment has been underway for years and we didn’t see it,” Wiles stated, “God is bringing another people in to America and pushing the white Europeans off the land ... We have a brown invasion that has come in ... This is the land vomiting the people out.”

Noura Hussein Hammad Escapes Death Penalty

A court in Sudan overturned the prior death sentence of a teenager named Noura Hussein Hammad.

Hammad murdered her husband. The claimed reason for the murder has a background. Hammad was forced into a child marriage and then underwent marital rape in Sudan. When the husband tried to rape her again, she killed him.

The article stated, "Her legal team told CNN on Tuesday that Hussein, now 19, has been given a five-year jail term for killing the 35-year-old man. The court ordered her family to pay 337,000 Sudanese pounds (\$18,700 or €15,970) in "blood money" to the man's family."

The lawyers for Hammad want to appeal the jail term and payment of Hammad, even though she was not killed. She was given the prison sentence and blood money fine. According to Hammad, her family forced the marriage on her at age 15.

She did finish school. Then there was a public wedding three years later. The husband wanted to consummate the marriage. However, she refused his sexual advances. At that point, several of his family members held her down as he raped her.

He raped her again one day later. She went to her family for help, but her family turned her over to the police. She was forced to live with the man. She did not eat or leave her room for the first days of being with him.

Hammad said, "On the ninth day his relatives came, his uncle told me to go to the bedroom. I said no so he dragged me by my arm into the bedroom and his cousin slapped me. All of them tore at my clothing. His uncle held me down by my legs and each of the other two held down my arms. He stripped and had me while I wept and screamed. Finally, they left the room. I was bleeding, I slept naked."

The following day, Hammad recounts, was when he grabbed her, threw her on the bed, and attempted to climb on top of her. She fought back. She found a knife under the pillow. He cut her hand and bit on her shoulder.

The court overturned the decision based on the acceptance of Hammad's recall of the events. One key point of the narrative was finding the knife under the pillow prior to the stabbing. It was not from the kitchen.

The case has garnered the attention of the international world with an enormous number of petitions from around the world calling for Hammad's case to be dropped. The legal marriage age in Sudan is 10. Marital rape is not seen as a crime.

Amnesty International called Hammad's case a need for a call for change in Sudan.

"While the quashing of this death sentence is hugely welcome news, it must now lead to a legal review to ensure that Noura Hussein is the last person to go through this ordeal," said Seif Magango, Amnesty International's Deputy Regional Director for East Africa, the Horn and the Great Lakes, "Noura Hussein was the victim of a brutal attack by her husband and five years' imprisonment for acting in self-defense is a disproportionate punishment ... The Sudanese authorities must take this opportunity to start reforming the laws around child marriage, forced marriage and marital rape, so that victims are not the ones who are penalized."

Patriarch Kirill in Concern About Disappearance of Christian Communities

Christian religious leaders gathered in Russia over concerns of a purported spiritual and moral crisis.

The Moscow Patriarch Kirill (secular name: Vladimir M. Gundjaev) sent some congratulations to the World Council of Churches (WCC) for 70 years of establishment since the original August 23rd, 1948 gathering after WWII. The WCC gained the Russian Orthodox Church, part of the Eastern Orthodox Church and subservient to Putin.

The article stated, "Addressing the WCC secretary, the Norwegian Lutheran theologian Olav Fykse Tveit, and the entire Central Committee, the Russian Patriarch recalled that the Council is 'a major international organization and unique platform for dialogue between Christians of various confessions. For the years of its work, the World Council of Churches has done much to develop inter-confessional dialogue, to promote justice in society and peace among nations.'"

Kirill recalled how this was important to the Christian community because it provided the opportunity for joint efforts to work in international relations. Typically, this will translate into Christian churches working globally to undermine secularism or gain political power.

It continued, "The message also thanks the WCC 'for the solidarity that our brothers and sister shared with us in the desire to overcome the restrictions of religious freedom as a consequence of the state policy formed by the ideology of militant atheism.'"

The phrase "militant atheism" insofar as I know started with the TED Talk presentation by the distinguished science educator and zoologist Dr. Richard Dawkins. Apparently, Kirill was known to speak on the ecclesiastical propaganda used to conceal religious persecution. That raises all sorts of questions about Kirill's time as a young "Soviet" bishop in the Nairobi assembly in 1975. He denied religious persecutions in the USSR at the time.

"However, the head of the Russian Church does not indulge in the re-evocation of those difficult times, but turns instead to future prospects, where the patriarchate of Moscow has every intention of being a leading player," the reported explained.

Kirill argues that the purported problems for religion back in the days of the USSR are no different than the alleged problems for religion today. That is, the asserted existence of spiritual and moral crises that are deviations of the Christian faith's values and traditions.

Kirill argues the world is on the brink of a global war. He continued to state that there is a threat of Christian communities in the region. Apparently, that created the foundation for the meeting of the Roman Catholic Pope Francis and Patriarch Kirill to meet in Havana during 2016.

"The other reason for the rapprochement, in conclusion of Kirill's message, is the gratitude to the WCC 'for the firm position expressed by the Secretary General in his appeal to the state authorities of Ukraine, in defence of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church,'" the article said in its concluding parts.

The meeting seemed as if an attempt to prevent the dissolution of the Christian church religiosity levels seen in the region and then casting people shedding religion as persecution and discrimination against the church. Christian leaders seem on the defensive.

Two Canadian Mormon Men Under House Arrest for Polygamy

In Cranbrook, British Columbia, two men took many wives, some as young as 15.

The two men will not serve any time in jail based on the decision of the B.C. Supreme Court judge. They were given conditional sentences. The two men were Winston Blackmore, 61, and James Oler, 54. They are part of a breakaway Mormon sect.

These became of the first Canadian cases of polygamous arrest in over a century. The judge was Justice Sheri Ann Donegan. She sentenced the Blackmore to 6 months and Oler to 3 months. The men are serving house arrest with the exceptions for work and other necessary errands and medical emergencies.

Blackmore will serve 150 hours in community service work. Oler will do 75 hours.

Donegan stated, "Determining a proportionate sentence is a delicate task ... Sentences that are too lenient and sentences that are too harsh can undermine public confidence in the administration of justice."

Blackmore's relatives cried and embraced with the announced sentence.

"The court heard Blackmore married his first wife, ex-Bountiful member Jane Blackmore, in 1975 and went on to marry 24 more women in so-called celestial marriages. Nine wives were under the age of 18, and four were 15 at the time they were married, Donegan noted in her decision," the article reported.

Oler had five wives, one as young as 15 with another turning 17 at the time of the marriages to Oler. Blackmore and Oler were raised in the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. It is a tradition of some sects of the Mormon church to practice "plural marriage." Men marry lots of women.

There was a schism in 2002, which led to the rival factions growing into what is known as the community of Bountiful in the south east of British Columbia.

Oler had five wives, Donegan said. One was 15, and another had just turned 17 at the time of their marriages. Oler got excommunicated from the church in 2012. He lives in Alberta now. Blackmore lives in the original community.

The judge described both men as hard working and law abiding citizens. But they practice polygamy due to their deeply held religious convictions.

Donegan stated, "He's made it clear that no sentence will deter him from practising his faith. ... The concept of remorse is foreign to him in this context because ... he cannot feel remorseful for his family."

One reference case confirmed the illegality of polygamy in Canada in 2011 but Blackmore continued to practice it. Blackmore failed to heed the fair notice in the reference case. Donegan has no doubt that Blackmore was practising polygamy based on fundamentalist beliefs inculcated at a very, very young age. Therefore, Blackmore feels no remorse for any of the victims or for any harm caused via his offense.

Donegan stated, "He does not feel any remorse for his offense because he feels he did not know any other way of life and sees no harm or victims in his offense."

The maximum prison sentence for polygamy is five years based on the Criminal Code. Only two other convictions have occurred in the history of Canadian law. Those happened in 1899 and 1906. They did not set a precedent.

Blair Suffredine, the lawyer for Blackmore, said, “It’s a light at the end of the tunnel... He’s had 25 years of government coming after him for something he wasn’t sure was a crime and he felt it was only because of his religious beliefs that he was doing it.”

This sentence, hopefully, sends a moderate to strong message to the members of the bountiful British Columbia community about practicing polygamy and how this may result in jail sentences.

On a Bishop and Waning Catholicism Due to Lack of Interest in Religion

According to Rome Reports, Cardinal Antonio Marto argued that the main issue for the religious is the actual lack of interest in religion. It was a short news article on the story of the cardinal and bishop, and his perspective on the waning interest in religion now.

Marto was the one who welcomed Pope Francis to Fatima – his city - in 2017 and the then-pope Benedict XVI in 2006. Coming from a family of deep faith, Marto knows the Roman Catholic religion and theology, and cultural and social life.

Marto was ordained as a priest with a doctorate in Theology with Benedict appointing him the bishop of Fatima, of the city. He was reluctant to take the position; however, the pope, at the time, wanted Marto to be the bishop.

As reported, “Fatima receives thousands of people from all continents every year. For this reason, it's interesting to get his opinion about what should be the Church's priority.” Marto is concerned about the state of the Church. This is someone with authority, education, and influence within the Roman Catholic Church from a Catholic news source.

“At this moment, the priority is to bring God to the hearts of men and women, and men and women to the heart of God, and this is part of the message of Fatima,” Marto opined, “This is because we live in a time of religious indifference. Our greatest enemy is not militant atheism but religious indifference. This indifference is fought with the joyful and convinced testimony of faithful Christians.”

The decline in the global interest in religion – though continued growth in the numbers – remains a concern for the individuals within the Roman Catholic Church including the hierarchs such as Marto.

The article concluded, “It's this issue he hopes to continue working on as cardinal and theological bishop of Fatima one who finds rests by walking in the mountains or spending time with his family and friends.”

The Decline of Canadian Nuns

According to The Globe and Mail, the numbers of the most faithful Christians in the forms of nuns is on the decline in Canada.

The news report spoke of several decades of decline in the numbers entering and staying in the convent. Some monasteries, as noted, go back as many as four centuries in Quebec. One is the Ursuline Monastery in Quebec City.

One woman, Andrée Leclerc, stated, “We know we are going off there to die.... This was my home, where I lived, I slept and I prayed. My whole life is here.”

There has been a massive decline taking place over decades in the numbers of the faithful of the Roman Catholic Church in Quebec. The nuns would run the provincial schools and the hospitals. But those are going away.

The number of Catholic nuns peaked at 47,000 in Quebec in 1961 and now sits at fewer than 6,000. The majority of the extant nuns are in their ninth decade. The numbers, at face value, may not tell the entire story of the religious community.

If one looks at the 76% of Roman Catholic population numbers, and if one then looks at the level of those practising in a serious way, most are not practising in a serious way. It is a secular province and, overall, country and culture.

As reported, “With little new blood, Catholic religious orders are shrinking. The last novice joined the Ursulines in the mid-1990s. Only 215 nuns remain in the order across Quebec today, down from more than 900 in the mid-sixties.”

The origins of monasteries such as this one began as far back as a voyage from France in 1639. It truly is a remarkably long history for the religious institutions of the world, but it is also a story coming to an end or a transformation on many fronts.

“They set up a school that has become the oldest institution of learning for girls in North America. Centuries on, the École des Ursulines’ interior courtyard still rings out with the shouts of uniformed schoolgirls (boys were admitted in 2010 and a secular board took over four years later, a nod to changing times),” the article stated.

One nun, Sister Suzanna Pineau, was a boarder at Ursulines at the age of 8. She is now 82. She said, “We don’t wear makeup or jewellery. We’re not in the latest fashions.” She made some remarks about the Muslim veil, pointing to the 300 years of veils by nuns while no one said anything.

“There are difficulties in all walks of life.... I committed myself to the Lord, like others commit themselves to a marriage or to working for a company,” Pineau opined.

Their average age in the monastery is 87. It is an ancient collective of women who themselves are well into their elderly years. With the decline of religion in Canada, and in Quebec in particular, we are seeing the decreased prominence of once powerful institutional forces including the nuns in monasteries.

The nuns will be entering a modern facility in the fall with a forced downsizing to the Soeurs servantes du Saint-Coeur de Marie. In September, these nuns will make their last trip from the monastery to then begin a downsized life in another one.

Sister Andrée opined, “I’ll miss the soul of this place.... The idea of living differently brings tears to my eyes. It’s physical. It’s psychological. My entire being is affected. When I was a teenager I left my family home in the Charlevoix. Leaving here is harder.”

This becomes the trace of religiosity with the increased secularization of the province and, indeed, the nation of Canada. There are real people behind these declines, who have their hearts in these institutions.

Firefighters Face Religious Discrimination Too

According to Friendly Atheist, there can even be discrimination around religion against particular members of the community who are normally beloved: firefighters.

The report states, “In 2016, atheist Jeffrey Queen filed an unbelievable lawsuit against the city of Bowling Green (Kentucky) based on what he witnessed while working for the fire department. The lawsuit only came after his complaints were ignored, some by Deputy Chief Dustin Rockrohr (also named in the lawsuit), and he was formally discharged.”

The claims are extensive within the lawsuit. Some of them included the referring to non-Christians as pagans. The asking of the person in question on the job if they would like to join the church. Another stating that he should “get right with Jesus.”

Others included that atheists should burn or that a colleague would be damned if they would be atheists and feels glad that “none of those fuckers work here.” The man, Queen, was forced into participation in a Bible study at the fire station. Then after coming out as an atheist, the Captain, Eric Smith, and one other firefighter stated that they would, therefore, burn down his house.

He was called a faggot almost every day, or queer. He is straight and married, for the record. His colleagues would not touch gay people because of their potential for having AIDS – “probably had...” Then there was a statement that if a homosexual works there then they would make sure he dies in a fire; also, they stated that they would chop his feet off.

One man did not get help with chest pain after hearing he was gay. Some firefighters refused to help out. Then African-Americans were referred as “hoodrats” and “thugs” and even the n-word. As reported, “He witnessed members of the Fire Department refer to Muslims as ‘towelheads,’ ‘jihadis,’ ‘ali-babas,’ and ‘sand n——.’ He heard those same people say of Muslims, ‘we need to ship them all back where they came from’ and ‘let the bombs torch them, they are going to hell anyway.’”

Queen took an absence from work due to the harassment. He resigned due to the hostility in the work environment. No one would have known about these instances without the Queen’s whistleblowing. He went public and suffered as a result of it, professionally and personally.

“Since that lawsuit was filed, though, the city and Rockrohr have tried to get the courts to throw it out. They don’t dispute what Queen witnessed,” the article explained, “Instead, they claim ‘that jokes, pranks, and teasing are all part of the fraternal environment at the Fire Department that Queen enjoyed and participated in.’”

However, Queen did not enjoy it; he hated it. The fire department is claiming the harassment on the basis of atheism was not a possibility because they did not know, at the time, that he was a closeted atheist in the fire department.

However, Queen states that the statement about the burning down of his house due to his atheism as a result of the colleagues in the fire department finding out about his atheism.

The article continues, “On Friday, however, a judge ruled that there was more than enough reason for this case to move forward. There’s plenty of information regarding religious discrimination and retaliation that a jury would have to sort out, the judge said, and the reasons for dismissing the case are absurd.”

It resulted in a 14-page ruling on Friday issues by the U.S. District Judge Joseph McKinley that the allegation of a hostile work environment based on religion and claims of retaliation could proceed reasonably to a proper trial.

In a 14-page ruling issued Friday, U.S. District Judge Joseph McKinley allowed the allegation of hostile work environment based on religion and claims of retaliation to proceed to trial.

McKinley stated, “A reasonable jury could find that the harassment and threats were in retaliation for his complaints regarding the workplace.... According to Queen, his work environment got so bad that he had to take a medical leave of absence and eventually forced him to resign.”

License Plate Blasphemy

According to Friendly Atheist, there is an effort ongoing to prevent the mockery of religion by a Kentucky man.

In 2016, the head of the Kentucky Division of Motor Vehicles rejected atheist Ben Hart's request for a license plate. It stated, "IM GOD." He had this plate while living in Ohio. No problem, he lived in Ohio for 12 years. There was no issue there for the same license plate.

But then the Kentucky DMV told Hart that the plate was "obscene and vulgar." Then this changed, "Not in good taste." He then made a formal response in a lawsuit. He argued that this was a violation of his freedom of speech.

"...the DMV's actions were a violation of his free speech. What Kentucky wanted was silly, he argued, because they allow you to buy an "In God We Trust" license plate template. How is that okay while taking a position on God on the plate itself is illegal?" The article stated, "The lawsuit is still working its way through the courts. Earlier this year, the judge rejected the state's request to toss out the lawsuit. This case will be decided on its merits. We await the judge's decision."

Then some intriguing events took place. The DMV is going through all license plates now, or appears to have done so, to tell all those with a previously approved religious message that they are no longer allowed to have them.

This may amount to a tactic for the courts, so that the individuals who are trying to prosecute him can say that they are not simply being bigoted and singling out Hart for his atheism. One Susi Burton has "PRAY4" for her license plate. She had it for 8 years. Now, she is furious.

"... she was stunned the other day — no make that "horrified" — to get a letter from the State Transportation Cabinet telling her that she had 20 days to return her license plate to the Fayette County Clerk's office or the state would cancel her 2016 Lexus' registration," the article explained.

She found this a serious hassle and annoyance. The state law is against license plates that target particular religions. However, the double standard is applied and obvious to Burton.

As the report stated, "Burton said she's offended by the thought of a plate that says "IM GOD," but that doesn't mean the northern Kentucky man shouldn't have it. That lady gets it. What's really ironic in all this is that Burton is demanding Kentucky be more accommodating of her religious views."

The article continues in more depth on the issues of the beliefs of the governor and then Kim Davis. Then also, those who are pushing back against them, but those are direct but peripheral issues to this particular license plate blasphemy news.

Religion as Showing Off

According to Psychology Today, there is an argument to be made that religion is about showing off.

The article states that altruistic acts in some forms have been hard for scientists to explain. These speculations become especially true in the instances of the kinds of self-sacrifice that make humanity seem heroic in some manner.

The people who give to others without a thought for any other hand-back to themselves. This seems at odds with the evolutionary point of view. There is a theory called Costly Signaling Theory. It tries to make some sense of the extreme forms of altruisms.

As reported, “The term Handicap Principle has often been used as a synonym for ‘Costly Signaling Theory.’ This reflects the origins of the theory in research on animal communication. Some animals ‘handicap’ themselves with extremely costly biological features that only individuals in excellent condition can afford to maintain.”

The examples given are the plumage of a peacock or the antlers of an elk. They are handicaps, very materially expensive. The theory proposes that the honest signals of oneself via handicaps can be hard to fake but that this can then have some long-term benefits for us.

It continued, “Costly signaling is very much about truth in advertising. A ‘low-quality’ signaler who attempts to fake a high-quality signal will deplete whatever resources that he may have available, leaving the signaler in such a vulnerable position that the strategy will prove to be counterproductive.”

But if someone is a high-quality signaler, this individual has the resources to burn this signalling. It becomes adaptively beneficially in comparison to the costs of the signalling. The big example is public magnanimity.

Those who are willing to give a lot. It provides the individual a sense of social status among their peers. The argument from Costly Signaling Theory would be that the display shows the person to be of a higher social status than the others, which means the display may not be entirely selfless.

“There is anthropological evidence that individuals who have a history of being magnanimous are rewarded by others when times get tough, and laboratory studies by psychologists have also demonstrated that charitable donations and other acts of kindness are most likely to take place when the behaviors are easily observed and recognized by others,” the article explained.

Many researchers view the conspicuous displays as potential advertisement of personality traits to potential mates. Some research confirmed males display altruism in front of attractive members of the opposite sex. Women did not do the same thing.

The article stated and asked, “It’s no secret that young men are notorious for engaging in foolish, risky behavior. How could this predilection for recklessness have evolved in young men?”

Attention is directed to some of the early human societies, where adulthood comes from a man’s standing in front of the social group. This could not masculinity reset through leaving one group and joining another one.

“For this reason, high-risk competition between young males provided an opportunity for ‘showing off’ the abilities needed to acquire resources, exhibit strength, and to meet challenges to one’s status. Consequently, heroic or even recklessly daredevil behavior was rewarded with

status and respect—assuming, of course, that the young man survived the ordeal,” the article said.

One anthropologist, Kristen Hawkes, founded the Show-Off Hypothesis. It is the idea well-replicated within the hunter-gatherer societies research. The men use the risky hunting strategies in order to garner the greater sexual access to the women of the world.

It is costly and a form of heroism in the sexual selection arena. Many experts in the evolutionary psychology field see apparent true heroism as giving advantage to some individuals. The heroism in war time is one example of this.

More can be seen in the signaling in the capitalistic societies with the wasteful spending of resources not essential to the survival or even for comfort of the individual ridding themselves of the resources in costly displays, signaling.

The article described, “A series of seven studies, confirmed that wearing brand label clothing does indeed increase perceptions of a person’s wealth and status, and that this perception leads to all sorts of advantages.”

Individuals who wear the expensive brands will get more compliance in requests and will get better jobs with higher salaries. They get better outcome in some social scenarios and can be more successful in the solicitation of donations from others. People buy expensive environmentally friendly products to see of higher status in the eyes of others. This then leads to ideas about religion and social status, and costly signaling.

“Religion has long been thought of as a social mechanism for enforcing cooperation within cultural groups. One of the ways in which it may successfully accomplish this is by using religious commitment as a costly signaling device,” the article said, “All religions have rituals, taboos, and other requirements that can be very costly in terms of time, money, or effort. Fasting, tithing, frequent and lengthy prayer and/or religious services, and dietary requirements that are difficult to follow require a good deal of commitment.”

That is, the commitment to religion is a signal to the efforts and values of the group. These become hard to fake within the group. Because the people within or the members of the group want to see you as a worthwhile and contributing member of the group. Analysis of communal societies apparently show this to be true, especially for those to have survived a long time. There are costly memberships with religion as one big cost.

#ChurchToo and Sexual Harassment Training

The #MeToo movements around the world are now impacting the Christian church more broadly with the hashtag #ChurchToo.

A training event for the prevention of sexual misconduct was scheduled to educate church staff about healthy boundaries. This event was arranged by the Mennonite Churches of Eastern Canada (MCEC) and conducted in Kitchener, Ontario by Rev. Dr. Marie Fortune where representatives of 10 denominations of Christianity attended the training in order to begin dealing with the sexual harassment happening within their own ranks. This endeavor is linked to the #ChurchToo movement — which branches off of the #MeToo era which began by exposing predatory male behavior and sexual harassment in enclaves like Hollywood and the mainstream media — and is now spreading throughout the rest of society.

Church Leadership Minister for the MCEC, Marilyn Rudy-Froese, stated, “It’s all over in our society. It’s not just happening in the movie industry, and it’s not just happening in the Catholic Church... It’s the work we all need to be doing: we need to be shifting our culture to be attentive to the voices and stories of victims.”

Fortune founded the FaithTrust Institute in the Seattle area where she was a young United Church minister circa 1979. She wants survivors of sexual misconduct to come forward with their narratives of abuse.

“It’s harder — it’s not impossible but it’s harder — for institutions to ignore anymore,” she said. “That’s always been a challenge in addressing this issue, is they really don’t want to know and their knee-jerk reaction tends to be wrong in terms of institutional self-interest,” Fortune stated.

Rather than be one of the ones who have been ignoring the problem either passively or systematically, Fortune wants to help these Christian organizations move head first into dealing with the problem. She advises them not to fear looking bad to the community.

Fortune emphasizes the need to prevent sexual misconduct within the church in the first place by developing healthy boundaries — especially for sexual predators who “don’t care about education” — to put policies in place so that abusers can be identified, investigated and appropriately punished. The training will focus on both preventing sexual misconduct and also to deal with predators who somehow slip through the cracks.

It’s not about the fear of looking bad, but about the social, and the church’s need to deal swiftly with criminals. Fortune noted the importance of those investigating to be transparent with congregants so the victims feel free to come forward.

Rev. Darren Roorda, Canadian Ministries Director of the Christian Reformed Church in North America, stated, “People in various levels of the church — women especially — are much more comfortable to say, ‘I have an issue with fill-in-the-blank,’ or ‘my history includes some difficulty or challenge or persecution’... People are much more apt to identify themselves. That comfort level is really, really healthy and good. We’re glad about that.”

Supreme Court of Canada Supports LGBTQ

According to Mondaq, there was a Supreme Court of Canada decision on June 15 2018 relevant to LGBTQ rights.

There was a landmark decision on the Canadian limits for their institutional religious freedoms. It amounted to the law school wanted by an Evangelical Christian University in Langley, British Columbia being rejected on legal grounds.

As reported, “The decisions concerned regulator rejections of a law school which required that students sign a covenant prohibiting any form of sexual activity outside of a marriage between a man and a woman.”

Two cases - Law Society of British Columbia v Trinity Western University and Trinity Western University v Law Society of Upper Canada – had the Supreme Court of Canada find both the Ontario and British law societies’ legal decisions to not accredit the law school came from a balanced place.

The law societies made the decision to not accredit the law school for Trinity Western University (TWU). The decision was said to have made a balance between the Law Societies’ mandates and religious freedom.

It continued, “TWU is a private post-secondary institution that provides education in an evangelical Christian environment. While LGBTQ students are not prohibited from attending TWU, all students are required to sign a covenant that prohibits any form of sexual activity outside of a marriage between a man and a woman.”

This limits students. With the covenant, the Law Societies made a vote. The vote determined a proper denial of the accreditation of the law school proposed by TWU. With extensive deliberations, it was decided that TWU was discriminatory against LGBTQ people.

“On judicial review, Ontario's Divisional Court held that the Law Society of Ontario had properly exercised its statutory mandate to act in the public interest in refusing to grant accreditation to TWU's proposed law school because its mandatory covenant was discriminatory,” the reportage stated.

The denial of the accreditation, apparently, violated the Section 2(a) religious right found in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The court was found to have made a proportionate and balanced decision on the equality rights and the Law Society of Ontario’s public interest mandate.

“In contrast, the British Columbia Court of Appeal reversed the Law Society of British Columbia's decision not to approve TWU's proposed law school. The court instead found that the decision's effect on TWU's religious rights was severe compared to the minimal impact on Law Society of British Columbia's statutory public interest objectives,” the article said.

The appeal was then made to the SCC. The SCC made a staggering 7-2 decision to deny accreditation to the TWU law school. Most of the SCC found that the Law Societies violated the communal religious freedom of TWU.

However, with the Charter right invoked for the legal societies’ decision, the SCC used a decision-making framework from some previous decisions. It was the Dore/Loyola framework. It was meant for the balance of the Charter rights and the statutory objectives.

Reportage continued, “The Supreme Court held that the Law Societies had balanced competing interests reasonably and proportionately. As with many administrative decisions, the decision under review did not need to be correct; it was only required to fall within a range of possible reasonable outcomes.”

Two sides were present. The SCC ratiocinated that the religious rights of the TWU community were not limited based on the mandatory covenant because of this not being a requirement of the Christian environment.

The other was that the statutory public interest mandate is to prevent harm to LGBTQ students of law. It means a diverse bar with equal access and opportunities. The decision highlighted the balance between public interest and religious rights.

“In a minority concurring decision, Justice Rowe found that TWU's religious rights had not been engaged by the Law Societies' decisions. He argued that while religious rights protected individuals and faith communities' beliefs and practices,” the article explained, “it did not protect their attempts to impose adherence to others who do not share their beliefs.[9] With no Charter right balanced against the Law Societies' public interest mandate, the decision to deny TWU accreditation was entirely reasonable.”

There was another minority decision happening concomitantly. The Chief Justice McLachlin stated that the Dore/Loyola framework shall be applied. It was commentary from McLachlin on the freedom of association and the freedom of expression.

“She ultimately agreed, however, that the decision of the Law Societies was reasonable as they had a heightened duty to maintain equality and avoid condoning discrimination,” the article stated, “In dissent, Justice Côté and Justice Brown argued that the Law Societies' statutory mandates did not include the governance of law schools.”

There was further commentary by Justice Côté and Justice Brown about the mandatory covenant not being discriminatory. Their argument was that the covenant did not target LGBTQ people in particular and, therefore, this did not comprise any form of standard discrimination.

It, on the implications, continued to state, “The decision serves as a high-profile example of judicial review of administrative decisions engaging Charter rights. The Supreme Court declined to depart from the Dore/Loyola framework, despite criticism in some circles.”

The SCC made balance with the statutory objectives and the religious rights within the context of the Dore/Loyola framework. The decision may show SCC deference to the statutory mandates of administrative bodies.

“The impact of these decisions extends beyond adjudging the quality of various legal tests. The number of interveners (23) across religious and human rights spectra illustrate how personally important these decisions were to groups across Canada,” the article concluded, “As noted above, the Supreme Court focused on interests of diversity and equal access to the legal profession in reaching its conclusions. Many will view these decisions favourably as a continuation of the use of the Charter to advance the rights of LGBTQ Canadian citizens.”

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Richard Dawkins likes Cathedral Bells

According to The Atlantic, Dr. Richard Dawkins spoke on a cultural taste for the bells of cathedrals and a distaste for the calls of ‘Allahu Akhbar.’

Dawkins tweeted an image of himself in Winchester, England on a Sunny day.

Richard Dawkins is at it again.

The famous atheist and bestselling author of *The God Delusion* tweeted on Monday a picture of himself sitting on a park bench and enjoying a sunny day in Winchester, England. For many people, this moment might have been a chance to just kick back and relax. But apparently not for Dawkins.

“Listening to the lovely bells of Winchester, one of our great mediaeval cathedrals,” he tweeted to his nearly 3 million followers. “So much nicer than the aggressive-sounding ‘Allahu Akhbar.’ Or is that just my cultural upbringing?”

Yes, actually, it is, replied thousands of people. Many flat-out accused him of racism, xenophobia, bigotry, or Islamophobia. News outlets from The Independent to Newsweek reported on the public outrage. Even by Dawkinsian standards of provocation, this latest statement felt to many like a shock.

In fact, however, it’s pretty common for native English speakers to perceive Arabic sounds as “aggressive.” So much so that American accent reduction coaches make money off Arabic-speakers by warning them that their native language “may cause [them] to sound harsh or aggressive.” Another adjective often applied to the language is “guttural.” Many people characterize German in the same way.

Sociolinguists, who study the ways people’s cultural beliefs affect their beliefs about various languages, say this is no coincidence.

“A lot of times people’s negative or positive attitudes about a particular group get transferred onto the language,” explained Christopher Lucas, a professor of Arabic linguistics at SOAS in London. “They start to believe that it’s just the linguistic content of the language that is the bearer of those features that they experience as negative or positive, when that is almost never the case in actuality. ... Sounds are just sounds. They don’t have any objective content that you can map onto specific emotional states.”

That’s not to say the perception of sound is entirely socially constructed. “There is some non-arbitrary link between sounds and the meanings people associate with them,” said Morgan Sonderegger, an associate professor of linguistics at McGill University. For instance, he said, it’s pretty well established that words with higher-sounding vowels tend to denote smaller objects, while words with lower-sounding vowels tend to denote bigger things; this is true cross-culturally. He cited a 2016 study that examined words from nearly two-thirds of the world’s languages and found that people everywhere often associate certain sounds with certain meanings. And an earlier cross-cultural experiment found that when people are shown a curvy shape and a jagged shape, and are asked which one is a bouba and which one is a kiki, they overwhelmingly associate the curvy shape with bouba and the jagged one with kiki. Sonderegger noted, however, that although human beings do seem to have some built-in associations, even these are just “raw materials that can be overwritten by cultural biases.”

The linguist Vineeta Chand argues that there's actually nothing inherent in the sounds of a language that make it more or less enticing. Instead, people tend to find a foreign language attractive when the group it's associated with enjoys economic or sociocultural prestige—think of the popularity of French as “romantic.” And the linguist Guy Deutscher argues that people tend to find sounds or sound combinations grating when they appear rarely or not at all their own native language—like the consonant cluster lbstv in selbstverständlich, which is German for obvious.

Lucas added that he believes Dawkins's “vague soup of negative ideas [about Islam] is bleeding into his transcription.” The author's tweet refers to “Allahu Akhbar,” but the proper transliteration would be Akbar, because this Arabic word contains no kh sound (as opposed to, say, the word sheikh). “He's transcribing it as if it's a kh, and for people who are native speakers of a language that lacks a kh sound—like most dialects of English—that is very often felt to be a harsh, ugly sound. People here in the U.K., when you ask them what's your opinion about German, will say ‘Oh, it's ugly! You've got all these kh, kh, kh sounds.’ But there are many other languages with these sounds, like Dutch. And no one in my experience says that Dutch is ugly.”

Dawkins posted a new status on Twitter on Wednesday, after a barrage of intense media attention: “The call to prayer can be hauntingly beautiful, especially if the muezzin has a musical voice. My point is that ‘Allahu Akhbar’ is anything but beautiful when it is heard just before a suicide bomb goes off. That is when Islam is tragically hijacked by violence.”

The tweet, which seemed meant to defuse criticism from the left, reinforces the linguists' point: The words sound “aggressive” to Dawkins, not because of some inherent acoustic harshness, because he associates them with suicide bombers.

Earlier this year, Dawkins made headlines for giving away free copies of *The God Delusion* to Muslims after discovering that millions of copies had been illegally downloaded in Arabic translation in Muslim-majority countries. Yet for the atheist provocateur, taking issue with the Arabic language seems to be something of a pattern. He did it in 2013, 2014, and 2015. His 2014 tweet is especially striking for its similarity to this week's remarks: “I've read that Arabic is the most beautiful language,” Dawkins wrote then. “I questioned that aesthetically & was bizarrely accused of racism. So I deleted it.”

But Dawkins keeps repeating himself. And many of his followers seem content with that: His “Allahu Akbar” tweet collected more than 16,000 likes.

“The people who get away with simplistic ideas about languages are people who don't speak them and haven't lived the experience of those languages being used to express love and anger and hilarity and sadness,” Lucas said. “If you've been exposed to a language a lot, that pretty much guarantees you're not going to have simplistic ideas about it.”

Firefighters Face Religious Discrimination Too

According to Friendly Atheist, there can even be discrimination around religion against particular members of the community who are beloved: firefighters.

The reportage states, “In 2016, atheist Jeffrey Queen filed an unbelievable lawsuit against the city of Bowling Green (Kentucky) based on what he witnessed while working for the fire department. The lawsuit only came after his complaints were ignored, some by Deputy Chief Dustin Rockrohr (also named in the lawsuit), and he was formally discharged.”

The claims are extensive within the lawsuit. Some of them including the referring to non-Christians as pagans. The asking of the person in question on the job if they would like to join the church. Another stating that he should “get right with Jesus.”

Others included that atheists should burn or that a colleague would be damned if they would atheists and feels glad that “none of those fuckers work here.” The man, Queen, was forced into participation in a Bible study at the fire station. Then after coming out as an atheist, the Captain, Eric Smith, and one other firefighter stated that they would, therefore, burn down his house.

He was called a faggot almost every day, or queer. He is straight and married, for the record. His colleagues would not touch gay people because of their potential for having AIDS – “probably had...” Then there was a statement that if a homosexual works there then they would make sure he dies in a fire; also, they stated that they would chop his feet off.

One man did not get help with chest pain after hearing he was gay. Some firefighters refused to help out. Then African-Americans were referred as “hoodrats” and “thugs” and even the n-word. As reported, “He witnessed members of the Fire Department refer to Muslims as ‘towelheads,’ ‘jihadis,’ ‘ali-babas,’ and ‘sand n——.’ He heard those same people say of Muslims, ‘we need to ship them all back where they came from’ and ‘let the bombs torch them, they are going to hell anyway.’”

Queen took an absence from work due to the harassment. He resigned due to the hostility in the work environment. No one would have known about these instances without the whistleblowing of Queen. He went public and suffered as a result of it, professionally and personally.

“Since that lawsuit was filed, though, the city and Rockrohr have tried to get the courts to throw it out. They don’t dispute what Queen witnessed,” the article explained, “Instead, they claim ‘that jokes, pranks, and teasing are all part of the fraternal environment at the Fire Department that Queen enjoyed and participated in.’”

However, Queen did not enjoy it. He hated it. The fire department is claiming the harassment on the basis of atheism was not a possibility because they did not know, at the time, that he was a closeted atheist in the fire department.

However, Queen states that the statement about the burning down of his house due to his atheism as a result of the colleagues in the fire department finding out about his atheism.

The article continues, “On Friday, however, a judge ruled that there was more than enough reason for this case to move forward. There’s plenty of information regarding religious discrimination and retaliation that a jury would have to sort out, the judge said, and the reasons for dismissing the case are absurd.”

It resulted in a 14-page ruling on Friday issues by the U.S. District Judge Joseph McKinley that the allegation of a hostile work environment based on religion and claims of retaliation could proceed reasonably to a proper trial.

In a 14-page ruling issued Friday, U.S. District Judge Joseph McKinley allowed the allegation of hostile work environment based on religion and claims of retaliation to proceed to trial.

McKinley stated, "A reasonable jury could find that the harassment and threats were in retaliation for his complaints regarding the workplace... According to Queen, his work environment got so bad that he had to take a medical leave of absence and eventually forced him to resign."

On a Bishop and Waning Catholicism Due to Lack of Interest in Religion

According to Rome Reports, Cardinal Antonio Marto argued that the main issue for the religious is the actual lack of interest in religion. It was a short news article on the story of the cardinal and bishop, and his perspective on the waning interest in religion now.

Marto was the one who welcomed Pope Francis to Fatima – his city - in 2017 and the then-pope Benedict XVI in 2006. Coming from a family of deep faith, Marto knows the Roman Catholic religion and theology, and cultural and social life.

Marto was ordained as a priest with a doctorate in Theology with Benedict appointing him the bishop of Fatima, of the city. He was reluctant to take the position; however, the pope, at the time, wanted Marto to be the bishop.

As reported, “Fatima receives thousands of people from all continents every year. For this reason, it's interesting to get his opinion about what should be the Church's priority.” Marto is concerned about the state of the Church. This is someone with authority, education, and influence within the Roman Catholic Church from a Catholic news source.

“At this moment, the priority is to bring God to the hearts of men and women, and men and women to the heart of God, and this is part of the message of Fatima,” Marto opined, “This is because we live in a time of religious indifference. Our greatest enemy is not militant atheism but religious indifference. This indifference is fought with the joyful and convinced testimony of faithful Christians.”

The decline in the global interest in religion – though continued growth in the numbers – remains a concern for the individuals within the Roman Catholic Church including the hierarchs such as Marto.

The article concluded, “It's this issue he hopes to continue working on as cardinal and theological bishop of Fatima one who finds rests by walking in the mountains or spending time with his family and friends.”

Atheists Faking Muslim Identity for Safety in Indonesia

According to Friendly Atheist, many atheists in Indonesia fear for their lives and so live under fake Muslim identities.

Indonesia has the largest population of Muslims in the world. The number of Muslims in standard statistics may be misleading because of the fear of reprisal from the community, the family, and even the state. If someone is in fear for their livelihood, then they may simply work to fit into the pack.

As reported, “Living a double life isn’t all that uncommon in Indonesia, where atheists live in fear of being sent to jail (or worse) thanks to fundamentalist religious groups. AFP profiled one of these atheists, identified only as “Luna Atmowijoyo,” about her de-conversion from Islam years ago.”

Atmowijoyo lives with her parents. But still, she wears an Islamic headscarf to simply fit into the family and so the community, and to avoid the backlash, potentially and likely, of her father. She was told to not have friendships with non-Muslims.

She is 30-years-old and still finds a lot of the simple things bother her. Atmowijoyo stated, “Like I couldn’t say Merry Christmas or Happy Waisak to people of other religions,” where other problems involved the treatment of homosexual males and females as in some way dysfunctional/abnormal.

The juxtaposition of the Quran and science were also problems. Then the idea entered her brain, that God may not exist. The reportage notes the Abrahamic faiths’ marginalization of the sexual orientation and gender identity minority communities.

It continued, “But for most of us, going public with that idea will lead to a loss of family or friends. It’s not a death sentence. In Indonesia, atheists who speak out about their beliefs risk their lives and freedom.”

The law of the land in Indonesia does not help, either. It has some purported stipulations about the freedom of expression. However, the freedom expression of speaking about a lack of a belief in God or gods becomes something that places an individual at risk of arrest or killing by the authorities.

The six religions recognized by Indonesia are Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, and others. However, with over 90% of the population believing in Islam, the criticism of religion and a religious Theity, including the Islamic one especially, becomes potentially grounds for public and legal punishment.

It may even be a greater risk for a woman. In 2018, one student was charged for a Facebook post that made a comparison between Allah and some Greek gods, while also stating the Lord of the Rings is comparable in reality to the Quran.

Alexander Aan received 30 months in jail in 2012 for the posting of explicit material of the Prophet Mohammed while also declaring himself – Aan – an atheist. The government will not acknowledge any hypocrisy between allowing someone to be an atheist but only keeping it to themselves, under potential punishment with the force of law.

Abdurrahman Mas'ud, head of the research and development agency at the Ministry of Religion, explained, "Once somebody disseminates that idea, or the concept of atheism, that will be problematic."

The article concluded:

Blasphemy laws are always going to be blasphemy laws. Nobody is falling for this "atheism is legal" nonsense, and there's a good reason some atheists are hiding their lack of faith from everyone in Indonesia. Without reforming the culture and the laws — with the help of believers who truly believe in free speech — nothing will get better in this area.

Faithiest by Melanie Wilderman

According to Friendly Atheist, the author of Faithiest, Melanie Wilderman, has been transformed into a stage play.

In the reportage, the premise of the story is described as an atheist who is from Oklahoma. The atheist survives a tornado. Then the atheist blurts out that they do not believe in God. It is during a live interview on cable news. Her world begins to spiral out of control after that interview.

Apparently, this is a real story fictionalized. It happened to a real woman named Rebecca Vitsmun. Her real life story, in a fictionalized form, will be presented as a stage play in Oklahoma City. The author is a woman, Wilderman.

As stated, “A dramatic comedy, Faithiest tells the story of small-town Oklahoma school teacher Abigail Asher, a well-liked young woman respected as a dedicated educator, church volunteer, and all-around good person. But her standing in the community crumbles as quickly as the locals can yell, ‘It’s a twister!’”

With the tornado, the woman, Abigail, rescues some children and then is given national news coverage. It became an accidental reveal of personal atheist beliefs and convictions. Her friends and every else – even those in family – view her in a different light.

Now, the personal atheism gets blasted on social media. Abigail’s loved ones do not know how to feel about her anymore. It becomes a play of personal belief and then coping in the midst of the backlash against atheism.

The director, Rodney Brazil, stated, “The central theme of the play is being able to have those tough conversations with people that have differing opinions, people who aren’t going to change their beliefs... (The play is about) being able to have a productive dialogue about those differences in belief without it causing an end to your relationship.”

Bad Comedy for Bad People” with Keith Lowell Jensen

According to Laughing in Disbelief, one atheist is bringing his own brand of atheism to the world of stand-up comedy.

There is a clip called The Lock In. In it, there is a discussion around the subject matter of atheism and God, and the connection with the youth world and dating arena for the young people. It is part of a larger special called Bad Comedy For Bad People.

In the synopsis of the special, it describes Jensen began a Twitter account for his daughter. It garnered an international audience: @MaxTheTiger. He did not expect international audience. One usually does not even expect a national audience with a Twitter account for a daughter, or for themselves for that matter.

As reported, “Then again, he probably never pictured having the “death talk” with li’l MaxTheNecromancer as his small, ardent atheist tried to Lazarus a froglet. And even that one wasn’t as odd as learning a thing or two from the comprehensive “sex talk” his wife and several organic, fair trade bananas laid on their nephew.”

With the latest release through Stand Up! Records, he talks about the ethics around homelessness and incarceration. The complexities around veganism and teenage depression. Then he slides into a monologue on the Civil Rights Movement and the music around it.

This then moves into speaking to the gay marriage and the issues of aging with hope for a “better, kinder, future.”

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The New Mythologist and the New Atheist: A Neuroscientist and a Psychologist Dialogue on Truth

According to Psychology Today, a practicing Canadian psychologist and an American neuroscientist discussed religious claims to truth.

The psychologist is Jordan Peterson. The neuroscientist is Sam Harris. It has been an ongoing debate with the New Atheists dominating in the 2000s. They were ascendant and debating the prominent Christian philosophers and theologians.

The 2010s see a different debate happening with many of the prominent New Atheists aging or deceased. The current debate between the two were about religion and true speech with a connection to myths and then also the world of rationality and science.

As reported, “What makes the debate so mercurial is that Peterson himself does not believe in traditional Christian claims such as the resurrection. Rather, he sees religious belief as a Darwinian adaptation that remains mostly unconscious.”

The orientation of Peterson is the potential for a spiritual reality with the truths from the religious myths. That is, human psychology and societal structures can be illuminated through the mythologies of times past.

One evolutionary biologist, Bret Weinstein, moderated some dialogues in Vancouver and Dublin. Then there was one with Douglas Murray as well. Harris and Peterson looked into the roots of religion and the ways in which this relates to truth.

“One illuminating way of thinking about religious belief, evoked in their second debate, involves a loaded gun. If we are taught to treat all guns as loaded, the argument goes, we will be safer in the long run,” the article explained, “Whether or not it is true that a particular gun is loaded or not does not matter—so long as we treat every gun as if it is loaded, we will be more likely to survive. A society that believes that every gun is loaded, then, is more likely to survive than a society which does not.”

Harris spoke the literal truth and the metaphorical truth. The latter as having utility within the world of fiction. Then these metaphorical truths can be more helpful than literal truth in some cases. The thought is that the society built on the assertion of human beings being built in the image of the creator of the universe is better for having a basic purpose.

Peterson argued for the utility of the Biblical stories within the framework of Darwinian evolution. That these stories must have survival significance.

“In his lectures and writings, Peterson describes the story of Cain and Abel as a warning against envy and resentment, and the Tower of Babel as a call for caution against centralized, totalizing systems. These stories, he argues, are ‘metaphorically true,’ even if they are literally false,” the article stated.

Harris pointed to some of the religious narratives containing some moral data. However, they can be useless too. Because these assume gods or a God. It becomes a “misapprehension of the causal structure of the cosmos.”

Peterson’s concern comes in the form of a secular ethic coming from preceding ethics; if we lose those preceding ones, then we lose ethical systems now. We need to know their origins. He

directed attention to human and animal sacrifice. The idea is give something up now for later. He argues for this as the discovery of the future.

Harris argued for the utility of the narratives but without the belief in revelation or the supernatural in essence.

“Here, the debate reached a kind of impasse. Peterson insisted that because so much of our thinking is unconscious, and stories are our way of describing the behaviors that emerge from that unconscious processing, our old religious stories might have far more to teach us about ourselves than we can rationally discern on our own,” the article stated.

Harris argued this was an evasion on the part of Peterson. However, for the three discussions, the main conversation focused on the nature of the truth. Peterson, apparently, echoed the arguments of one Christian philosopher, Alvin Plantinga.

That the adaptively evolved faculties should be judged on the ability for greater survival of the organism. Harris views this as a stretch. That even, in one thought experiment, if humans died off as a species; our fundamental scientific and rational discoveries would still be true.

Peterson stated that if we die based on some ideas then, maybe, those ideas are not true.

The article concluded, “At the end of the debates, the fundamental question of religion and the human mind remains unsettled. But that doesn’t take the joy out of watching two scientists tear out the foundations of truth, morality and culture beneath their feet and try to put them back together again.”

Dialogue with Claire Klingenberg: President, European Council of Skeptic Organizations

Claire has a background in law and psychology, and is currently working on her degree in Religious Studies. She has been involved in the skeptic movement since 2013 as co-organizer of the Czech Paranormal Challenge. Since then, she has consulted on various projects, where woo & belief meets science. Claire has spoken at multiple science&skepticism conferences and events. She also organized the European Skeptics Congress 2017, and both years of the Czech March for Science.

Her current activities include chairing the European Council of Skeptical Organisations, running the "Don't Be Fooled" project (which provides free critical thinking seminars to interested high schools), contributing to the Czech Religious Studies journal Dingir, as well as to their online news in religion website. In her free time, Claire visits various religious movements to understand better what draws people to certain beliefs.

Claire lives in Prague, Czech Republic, with her partner, and dog.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: When it comes to the demographic or sociological analysis movement more broadly or the New Atheist movement for narrowly, I notice one trend. Others notice this trend as well.

That being the greater number of white men compared to most other demographics in the atheist and New Atheist movements. What seems like the source of the disproportionate amount of white men and men in general in the atheist and New Atheist movements?

Claire Klingenberg: I think it stems from history. Men were, white men were, prevalent in the sciences, in high positions, in professor jobs, in everything. This is continuing that. There are more women getting engaged in these issues.

It is going to take some time to change. Having time to do activism that advocates for the change of the bigger picture, and does not precisely deal with the here and now, is a luxury. Both the atheist and skeptic movement do deal with the here and now, but in a much broader sense, which makes them a luxury item. Unfortunately, as we see the demographics in the US, people of color are not always in the socioeconomic position to be able to afford this kind of luxury.

So, we have to work on making our movement more accessible to various different socioeconomic demographics.

Jacobsen: Other than SES or socio-economic status. What other variables seem to play into this split in the community, where far more men than women?

Klingenberg: Seeing your own people in the movement. Historically, the skeptic movement was created by the demographic of older white men. I can imagine some people do not feel welcome when they do not see some of their own within that group.

Fortunately, within the Czech Republic, one of the founders was a woman. She opened the door for us. I can understand why some cannot feel like they can bond with someone seemingly wholly different or that they will not be understood by anyone.

Jacobsen: I like the last note as well. It notes the logical implication. If you did the vice versa, you would find other communities heavily dominated by women or the African-American community in America.

If you look at much of the Christian community represented by comedic people like Steve Harvey and others, you find largely a base of African-Americans. Also, within the atheist movement, you have Thomas Paine, Voltaire, and more modern New Atheists such as Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, Christopher Hitchens... These are white men.

It is having the SES to have a theme to get out of the community and think about these things. But it seems like a dual-based problem, "I am in community. I am comfortable with this."

So, it is an unfortunate fact. Human beings are tribal and connect with each other on base measures of "identity," if I can use that term, of skin tone.

Klingenberg: The skin tone does define the circumstances in which you live and which influence you. Because of that, you may feel "How can these people understand what I am going through?", and especially the feeling "How can these people have the same goals as I do?" This logic or thinking could be another barrier.

Jacobsen: In some commentary that some may give, I notice an underlying tone. That tone being, "People of particular groups should belong in a certain category, should act in such a way."

The common trope is the white guy breakdancing [Laughing]. It doesn't look good. Similar thing in a more serious context, an African-American woman must be religious, must be Baptist, and heavily involved in the community.

That is a stereotype that gets played en masse. If someone doesn't behave as expected based on their ethnic heritage, or their national status as well, they may be coerced or pegged into behaving in one way.

Neil deGrasse Tyson talked about his deep passion for astrophysics and astronomy. Even though he had that, he felt pushed with the undertone of coercion to sports activities. "I am in sprinting, and running, and other things," rather than astrophysics and astronomy.

He notes that he was lucky. He met Carl Sagan. That continued to stoke the fire. That passion pushed through the attempts at coercion away from what he really a) had the ability to do and b) the passion to pursue, which was astrophysics.

It can even be good will and good intentions that exacerbate societal splits along belief lines and eventual outcome lines.

Klingenberg: Last month, I was at a talk by Anna Grodzka. She is a Polish trans woman. She founded a supporting organization for trans people in Poland. She had this beautiful quote, "We live in a world haunted by stereotypes, which do not reflect reality but impose upon us."

I think that it is a beautiful way to summarize all of this. People have these stereotypes in their head, which many times do not come close to even reflecting reality. However, we are forced to live and fight with them on a daily basis.

Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Claire.

Newfound Irreligiosity Around the World

The basic premise within the atheist community or more generally the formal non-religious community throughout the world remains the increase in the number of religious in the global view and the increase in the non-religious in select regions or nations.

In the research done by WIN/Gallup and reported on by Big Think, the number of the self-identified religious is 62% of people – as found when asked if they consider themselves religious people. They surveyed 60000 people across 68 nations. In 2005, the number was 77%.

This represents, in the scale of dozens of countries, a massive ground shift in the perspective of the religious and the non-religious, and the ways in which the international public perceives the categories for self-identification.

This says the overall number of people identifying as religious has been on a precipitous decline since the start of the 21st century. The number of atheists embed within the set of formal non-religious. In other words, the 15% drop in the religious indicates a concomitant rise in the formal non-religious but only a smaller portion of the 15% rise in the formal non-religious as atheists.

The formal non-religious can be brights, atheists, humanists, secular humanists, agnostics, and so on.

As described in the article, “In 2005, just 5% of those surveyed in 2005 considered themselves 'convinced atheists' – the remaining 18% were non-religious or 'don't knows'. In 2017, the fish-nor-fowl brigade had grown to 30%. 'Convinced atheists' had increased as well, but only to 9%.”

It indicates stellar increase in the number of convinced atheists by 80%, from 5% of the total to 9% of it. The opinion in the reportage continued to opine on the beliefs of the non-religious who may see parts of religion as reliable and valuable in some way.

“People may believe in aspects of religion even if they don't consider themselves religious (and vice versa). As other results from the survey show, a higher percentage than those who say they're religious believe in a soul (74%) and God (71%). Inversely, a lower percentage believe in things that many theologians would say are essential to religion, such as heaven (56%), hell (49%) and life after death (54%),” the article explained.

The third property was the aspects of a belief in the Architect of the Cosmos, or lack thereof, and the non-direct association with materialistic belief, and so, potentially, a non-belief in a supernaturalist or metanaturalist soul embedded with the person's body.

Many external factors influence the degree to which an individual considers themselves religious. If someone has a higher income, if someone is older, and if someone is more educated, then this person will more likely be less religious; if the opposite factors, then the more religious.

Geography factors into the belief in God as well. Although, some countries have older populations, more educated populations, and richer populations, which, obviously, may associate with the aforementioned factors.

“For cultural, social and/or political reasons, some countries have a much higher degree of atheism. Europe is a regional hotbed, but even here, direct neighbours may be at great variance,” the article stated, “The most godless country in the world, however, is China. According to the survey, fully 67% of respondents in China considered themselves 'convinced atheists' – more than double the percentage in the world's second-most atheistic country, Japan (29%).”

East Asia remains a major center of atheism, in fact “convinced atheism.” However, the other 18 of the 20 major convinced atheist nations emerge in Europe. Slovenia has 28%. Italy has 8%. Outside of Europe and East Asia, Australia has 13%. Canada has 10%. One African outlier is the Democratic Republic of the Congo at 8%.

Interestingly, 4% of the Islamic Republic of Iran’s population identifies as convinced atheist. (More detailed statistics with images are provided in the link at the preface to the article.) If you look at some of the more in-depth analyses provided in the presentation by Big Think, you will be surprised to note some of the Arab majority states and the level non-religious identifying citizens, even in purportedly highly Muslim countries.

Global “Convinced Atheism” Increased by 80% in 12 Years

The atheist community has been seeing an unprecedented rise in its international notoriety and respect by the wider public, but with this increase in visibility and dignity for the minority community within the non-religious international movements has been the backlash. Regardless, atheists are on the rise globally with differences depending on the nation or the region in consideration.

Big Think reported on the increases in the atheist population, especially in authoritarian China and in Europe in general. There was a survey of 60,000 or more people on 68 nations around the world with comparison from a 2005 survey.

The survey data gathering and analysis was done through the reliable and respected WIN/Gallup group. The number of people who identified as having no religion in 2005 was marked at 77%; whereas, for the survey done recently – in 2017, the number was 62%. A significant decrease, while not a majority, of 15%.

For the members of the atheist community with an interest in the ways in which atheist has continued to garner popularizers, famous speakers, best-selling books, and packed-house debates and dialogues, one is through the global transformation of the religious identification landscape.

For the in-depth analysis of the research, or the deeper reportage on it, please see the link associated with the survey rundown done by Big Think. But the big takeaway from the news reportage is the level of atheism, by which the survey states as “convinced atheism,” is most prominent is China – a huge number of the global population of atheists harboured there – and in Europe with most of the top 20 being in North America.

When looking at the breakdown of the 15% over the approximately 12-year-period, we can see noteworthy increase from 5%, in 2005, to 9%, in 2017, for the global convinced atheist population. That is to report, there has been an extraordinary increase of 80% for the convinced atheist population around the world in only about a dozen years.

The main factors argued for are age, education, and income: more of each means less religion; less of each means more religion. There is a direct negative correlation for these factors.

Atheism, as American as Apple Pie

According to Ron Millar in *The Humanist*, in an ideal implementation of the US Constitution, there would be zero formal or informal religious tests for public office. Indeed, this would not impact the politics of this powerful state actor.

However, one of the big taboos within American politics has been the idea of a non-religious, even atheist, candidate running for public office. If one does it, then they remain rather brave in the face of the stigma and distinct prejudice against these kinds of candidates.

However, Millar notes some of the more recent research is showing that there is a reduction in the former levels of the bias or xenophobia against non-religious political candidates. This is based on research done via a poll.

A poll conducted through the American Humanist Association and the Centre for Freethought Equality via the Lake Research Partners with funding by the Stiefel Freethought Foundation showed some interesting or intriguing results.

As it turns out, there is a distinct improvement of the perception of the non-religious, agnostic, and atheist candidates within the electoral process. Thus, the atheist community, if wanting to run for political office, can begin to square off on a fairer, but not entirely even, playing field with religious candidates.

With the ongoing political costs throughout much of American history for any atheist political candidates, this became the basis for the need of the poll.

As stated, “A candidate in a very red district, where the last Democratic opponent received less than 20 percent of the vote against the Republican incumbent, said he couldn’t possibly identify as an atheist because he couldn’t afford to lose any more voters. He said he automatically lost voters by identifying as a Democrat, more since he is pro-choice, and even more with his support of LGBTQ equality.”

This becomes the grounds upon which atheist candidates lose out. Next, the survey was done. In fact, the survey showed data potentially heartwarming to some of the members of the Atheist Republic community living with the United States or looking at the American Empire from afar in one of our consulates.

In terms of the results of the survey or the poll by Lake Research Partners, 72% of the respondents stated that the atheism does not make a difference in terms of their vote. The “nontheistic, progressive Democrats in non-swing districts,” according to Millar, “should no longer feel hesitant to be public about their religious identity.”

In other words, the taboo is dropping relatively smoothly within the United States. This can be seen in some of the political. More information can be gleaned here:

<http://americanhumanist.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/LPR-Topline-Memo.pdf>

1200-Page Dossier on “Actively Gay” Priests and Seminarians

Newsweek reported on a massive dossier, at 1,200 pages, listing several priests and seminarians who are labelled as “actively gay” in Italy alone.

This was sent to the Vatican via the archdiocese of Naples. Francesco Mangicapra created the document. He is a gay male escort and did not like the hypocrisy of the priests and decided to do something about it.

He said, “The aim is not to hurt the people mentioned, but to help them understand that their double life, however seemingly convenient, is not useful to them or to all the people for whom they should be a guide and an example to follow.”

Now, an Italian Cardinal and the Archbishop of Naples, Crescenzo Sepe, stated that none of the named priests are currently stationed in Naples. Note, this does not deny the veracity of the claims in the large dossier.

Now, this is simply adding to the pile of accusations against members of the Catholic hierarchs around the world but, this time, focused on Italy in particular.

As reported, “Last month, an Italian court issued a 14-month suspended sentence to a Vatican tribunal judge for sexual molestation and possessing child pornography. Monsignor Pietro Amenta, a judge on the Rota (a court that hears mostly family cases), was arrested last March for publicly fondling an 18-year-old man in Rome.”

With the examination of the computer, the authorities found pornographic images of the young on the person computer. Then there was a plea bargain accepted by Paloma Garcia Ovejero, Vice Director of the Vatican Press Office. In an email from the Catholic News Service, it stated that he had “resigned as the prelate auditor of the Roman Rota.”

Canadian Atheists Win Discrimination Case

In a recent discrimination case, the atheists won it, which was in British Columbia, Canada.

The British Columbia Human Rights Tribunal awarded \$12,000 to the based on a daughter of a couple being “kicked out” of Bowen Island Montessori School (BIMS). It was labelled discrimination by the BC Human Rights Tribunal because the school, as stated by the BC Human Rights Tribunal, “...treated them differently from every other parent at the school, and sought to suppress their expression of concerns about the nature of the curriculum that were grounded in their race, ancestry and religious beliefs.”

That is to say, discrimination for lack of belief in the prevailing mythology. The parents are Gary Mangel and Mai Yasué. The child was enrolled in 2014 and Mangel sat on the board of directors. Then the school wanted to know the way in which to celebrate the holiday time properly.

One person recommended “clay elf ornaments.” But Mangel rejected this idea, as this, to him, promoted a Christian holiday. One asked if a Hanukkah activity may be better. But Mangel rejected this too.

But Mangel was rather rude in the email correspondence:

I don't think it's appropriate to celebrate Christmas, Hanukkah, or any other religious/political event at preschool (including Remembrance Day). [My child] is three years old... [and] cannot consent to being involved in decorating military wreaths or Christmas trees or lighting Hanukkah candles. Having the kids do these things seems inappropriate, given their absolute inability to understand the religious and political symbolism associated with those acts. As Richard Dawkins (author of The God Delusion) has written, there is no such thing as a Muslim, Jewish, or Christian, etc... baby/toddler/child. They are simply too young to be making these sorts of decisions.

Other board members argued the important of a “cosmic education” through the inclusion of different religious imagery included into the school, as this was important to the philosophy of the Montessori folks at the school.

Mangel stated that there should “atheist Christmas ornaments.” Things escalated from there, more explicit details can be gleaned from the link. Mangel wanted none of the celebrations while the board want as many as possible or, at a minimum, the major traditions to be represented.

No one changed their minds and there was something like a “reality TV show,” according to Mehta.

Things really came to a head when “Mr. Mangel responded, ‘I’ll sue them too’ and then began doing the Nazi salute and marching around while he sung a different version of O Canada in which he substituted his own lyrics.”

The arguments continued over the holidays. Then the school wanted the atheists to sign a contract that stated that “Multiculturalism, including the observation of a wide variety of celebrations is important to us.”

The atheists refused to sign it. Then the school took this as a basis to not re-enroll the daughter of the atheist parents. The atheists being belligerent was not the legal complaint but, rather, the response to the signing, i.e., the refusal to sign it.

BC Human Rights Tribunal member, Barbara Koenkiewicz, stated, “I find nothing in the evidence that could justify the refusal to register [the child] unless Dr. Yasué and Mr. Mangel essentially agreed that they would be significantly limited in their ability to raise issues about the cultural aspects of the BIMS program.”

The school was ordered to pay \$5,000 per parent and \$2,000 for the child/daughter.

Link to the source material:

<https://friendlyatheist.patheos.com/2018/12/13/atheists-win-discrimination-case-against-bc-school-that-kicked-out-their-child/>

Atheist Refugees Doubly Vulnerable

The refugees in Germany can be atheists, apart from the image of Muslims and other non-Christian religions coming into the country. These are atheist asylum seekers fleeing persecution; sometimes, simply for their lack of belief in the dominant mythology of the culture in which they were born.

As reported by DW, “Mahmudul Haque Munshi's name was on a hit list in Bangladesh. After five of his friends and associates were murdered, the authorities warned the blogger: ‘There's nothing more we can do for you.’ Munshi had to leave the country in 2015.”

Oftentimes, these refugees or asylum seekers will have to travel through several nations simply to find some destination of safety. Some have seen what is labeled a “Global Hit List” of some listing, formal or informal, of the nonbelievers or those who left their faith that need to be killed.

Some names include people of Bengali descent and who are refugees. Many refugees fear being killed not by a God but simply by other refugees or others who feel personal resentment and need for retribution for individuals who leave religion, often common within the Islamic faith. If someone leaves the faith, or publicly speaks out against some of the theocratic intents of some of the faiths, this becomes the basis for the reactionary violence against people simply for not adhering to the dominant faiths of the culture.

One refugee organization is devoted to the plight of the non-religious and is titled the Atheist Refugee Relief organization. It has helped 37 nonreligious refugees since November 2017 and continues to do important work for them.

Dittmar Steiner of Atheist Refugee Relief stated, “Conservative Muslims criticize women who go around without headscarves... We are actually dealing with assaults, exclusion, threats and violence.”

A 31-one-year-old, Worood Zuhair, stated this as a common experience for herself, who is a biologist from Karbala, Iraq. She is under police protection and continues to receive death threats because of the lack of personal religious belief.

These prices are often paid with lost time in life or in blood for the nonbelievers or the non-religious around the world. The refugees among them will be far more vulnerable to the attacks against them that are not beholden to others within the community.

As reported, “The physical and mental abuse has left Zuhair deeply traumatized. “When your own father gives your soul to Azrael, the angel of death, that is enormously painful,” she told DW. “He did it so often. I couldn't take it anymore.”

Now, Zuhair speaks about the multitude of abuses against women refugees, including those who need asylum because of their religious criticism and work for the rights of women where she “supports the (OWFI) Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq.”

For too many women refugees and women atheists, this poor treatment and abuse is common. Islamists are one such group who wish to punish individuals who criticize or leave the faith.

But it can go even deeper than this, as noted about Munshi, “Munshi attracted the wrath of Islamists when he founded the Shahbag movement in his home country in 2013. The movement called for the punishment of those responsible for war crimes committed when Bangladesh fought for its independence against Pakistan in 1971. Roughly three million people died during that war.”

In this, we can see moral acts of courage being socially punished with the threat of retribution permitted by culture. With a prominent blog and network, Munshi garnered about half of a million followers. There were mass protests in the streets with subsequent death threats.

The main struggle for these atheist refugees is for freedom from religion. The ability to live apart from the enforcers of religion and the cultural enforcement of religion on them. But these refugees live a life on the run while fleeing in a manner of speaking.

Atheists aren't the majority of refugees and are not the vast majority of the world's population, but atheists are a struggling group within the global and refugee population based on fear and stigma by the religious and motivated by ignorance and hatred to create problems for them around the world.

The report states, "According to a statement by the country's Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF), origin from a particular country or a particular reason for fleeing, such as religious affiliation or atheism, does not automatically lead to a protection status."

Thus, atheism can become a specified indication of a person's need on their sprint in life. Steiner stated, "The number of people affected is increasing... A year ago it was two to three requests a week — now it is between seven and nine a day."

Turkish Atheism on the Rise

There has been a continuous growth in the number of non-religious people in the Turkey, which, by some reckonings, has been quite dramatic via the increase in the number of atheists within the theocratic state known for working via the state to keep evolution out of the classrooms

Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan continues to have a theocratic politics with the ongoing encouragement of Islam to the Turkish people. But, at the same time, we see this rise in the number of atheists within the country. Those for whom religion simply doesn't take or didn't take.

As reported, "According to a recent survey by the pollster Konda, a growing number of Turks identify as atheists. Konda reports that the number of nonbelievers tripled in the past 10 years. It also found that the share of Turks who say they adhere to Islam dropped from 55 percent to 51 percent."

The official directorate of religious affairs in Turkey, Diyanet, declared in 2014 that 99% of the Turkish public identifies as Muslim. However, with recent survey data from Konda, this has created heated debated within the country.

Ahmet Balyemez, a 36-year-old computer scientist, stated, "There is religious coercion in Turkey... People ask themselves: Is this the true Islam?... When we look at the politics of our decision-makers, we can see they are trying to emulate the first era of Islam. So, what we are seeing right now is primordial Islam... Fasting and praying were the most normal things for me."

Cemil Kilic, a theologian, considers both statistics correct. In that, 99% of Turks identify as Muslim but only identify as such from a cultural and a sociological perspective. Kilic, here, is making a distinction between cultural Muslims, as in cultural Christians, and spiritual Muslims.

The theologian Cemil Kilic believes that both figures are correct. Though 99 percent of Turks are Muslim, he said, many only practice the faith in a cultural and sociological sense. They are cultural, rather than spiritual, Muslims.

Kilic stated, "The majority of Muslims in Turkey are like the Umayyads, who ruled in the seventh century... The prayers contained in the Koran reject injustice. But the Umayyads regarded daily prayer as a form of showing deference towards the sultan, the state and the powers that be... Regular prayers have become a way to signal obedience toward the political leadership... And prayers in mosques increasingly reflect the political worldview of those in power."

Kilic explained how the lack of a formal religion, in this case Islam, does not negate a moral compass of the individual, as he states that some atheists are even more ethical and conscientious than a great number of Muslims.

One of the facts floating around this issue of Islam and atheism on the rise within Turkey is that fact that President Erdogan has been in power for about 16 years, as prime minister until 2014 and then president onwards into the present.

Kilic argued the state admixture with religion is part of the problem and the atheists may, in fact, be more consistent in their beliefs than the Muslims at times. Ateizm Dernegi, the central organization for atheists in Turkey, has, through its leader, Selin Ozhoken, stated that the desire by Erdogan to produce devout Muslims has, in fact, failed miserably in a number of ways.

Dernegi explained, “Religious sects and communities have discredited themselves... We have always said that the state should not be ruled by religious communities, as this leads to people questioning their faith and becoming humanist atheists.”

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