

HUMANIST VOICES: COLLECTION VI

SCOTT DOUGLAS JACOBSEN



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Scott

Humanist Voices

Join Humanist Students in Building Its Community!

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

April 7, 2018

The lovely and funny Hannah Timson, President of Humanist Students (associated with the also eternally optimistic Hari Parekh, President Emeritus, and the absolutely philosophical Angelos Sofocleous, President-Elect), put out a call for building the humanist community for students.

There is the Humanist Students — Building Our Community. Humanist Students have confirmed the Dr. Julian Baggini for the keynote speech. Baggini is a patron of the growing and prominent humanist organization Humanists UK.

Baggini has written on atheism, ethics, and humanism. The celebratory theme will be the building of humanist community, which is becoming a more viable lifescape for so many young people, especially students, around Europe.

There will be a bunch of people involved in this event including “the Chief Executive of Humanists UK Andrew Copson, Co-founder of Faith to Faithless Imtiaz Shams, Audrey Simmons of London Black Atheists and Rabia Mirza from British Muslims For Secular Democracy.”

The event is “Humanist Students-Building out community at Lift Islington, 45 White Lion Street, London, N1 9PW on April 14th 2018, 09:45–April 15th, 16:00. You can book here for the free event.

The event is intended for Humanist UK’s student members alone.

GoFundMe for Dr. Leo Igwe's Critical Thinking method

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

April 9, 2018

There is a GoFundMe for Dr. Leo Igwe. It is for the getting some finances in order for the his methods to be taught to students.

Igwe has a Critical Thinking method, which this will help fund for students in Ghana and Nigeria. Igwe will receive 5% of the funds for the GoFundMe. His critical thinking method is considered valuable by participants.

The GoFundMe campaign is here:

<https://www.gofundme.com/critical-thinking-nigeria-amp-ghana>

The campaign is open ended and intended to help spread critical thinking in Ghana and Nigeria. Please help spread the word.

Chat with Ralph Alvin Ace Rapadas — Member, Humanist Alliance Philippines, International

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

April 11, 2018

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: How did you find the humanist community within the Philippines?

Ralph Alvin Ace Rapadas: I found HAPI because I was a member of Philippine Atheists and Agnostics Society (PATAS) where a lot of HAPI's members were originally from. I found out about PATAS in Facebook the summer before I started my 1st year in college way back in 2011. I actually became really active and revived/founded a freethinker/humanist organization in my University. Things have slowed down with my involvement in these organizations but I still keep in touch with the people I met.

Jacobsen: What was your early experience with religion in life?

Rapadas: I've been raised a Roman Catholic. When I was still residing in the New Jersey, I attended after school church programs. During my 6th grade in elementary school, I was certain I wanted to become a priest. I enrolled in the University of Santo Tomas High School, the Catholic University of the Philippines. Ironically in my 2nd year, I became an atheist after learning about biology and the incompatibility of science and religion.

Jacobsen: Do you think that religion is a net benefit or not negative?

Rapadas: I strongly respect and support an individual's rights to have a religion. There is no doubt that religion has helped many people overcome their hardships in life however, I believe that religion is unnecessary especially in the advancement of society. I view religion as outdated and preferably obsolete in terms of how we understand the world through science and the societal norms encompassing morality.

Jacobsen: How does religion influence politics in the Philippines?

Rapadas: For a secular country, religion plays a major part in influencing politics in the Philippines. The Catholic Church once campaigned for and against certain candidates depending on their stance on the then Reproductive Health Bill which is now a law. Another example would be the bloc voting practiced by members of the Iglesia ni Kristo (INC) wherein leaders of their church would dictate who their members should vote for in elections.

Jacobsen: What is the nature of religious faith to you? What is its core aspect?

Rapadas: For me, religious faith deals with the human need for emotional support and it also conveniently provides "answers" to life's questions. Why are we here? What is my purpose? It also addresses the human fear of mortality by selling the idea of an everlasting life. In a nutshell, religious faith for me can work in a manner similar to a placebo but is ultimately unnecessary.

Jacobsen: If you could advise youths about humanism, what would you advise?

Rapadas: Try to develop a strong understanding of philosophy and ethics. Be proactive in seeking out new information. Do you think that there is an ultimate meaning to life or that we

make her own meaning of life? I think that we make our own meaning out of life. For myself, I am currently leaning on the epicurean/hedonistic philosophy.

Jacobsen: What books do you recommend about humanism from Filipino authors? Who is the Filipino hero for you?

Rapadas: I currently don't know any humanism books from Filipino authors.

Jacobsen: If you could reference one quote or statement that best represents humanism, what would it be?

Rapadas: An Atheist believes that a hospital should be built instead of a church. An atheist believes that deed must be done instead of prayer said. An atheist strives for involvement in life and not escape into death. He wants disease conquered, poverty vanished, war eliminated. - Madalyn Murray O'Hair This quote is for atheists but mostly applies for humanism.

Jacobsen: Do you think ordinary humanists or the stars of humanism are the best people to speak on it?

Rapadas: In other words, those who talk about it in a high level or those who live it day to day. I think both have a right and authority to speak on it. The stars may have a bigger following but it doesn't necessarily relate to expertise in humanist philosophy.

Chat with Distinguished Professor Gordon Guyatt on national healthcare and young people

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

April 13, 2018

Professor Gordon Guyatt, MD, MSc, FRCP, OC is a Distinguished University Professor in the Department of Health Research Methods, Evidence and Impact and Medicine at McMaster University. He is a Fellow of the Canadian Academy of Health Sciences.

The British Medical Journal or BMJ had a list of 117 nominees in 2010 for the Lifetime Achievement Award. Guyatt was short-listed and came in second-place in the end. He earned the title of an Officer of the Order of Canada based on contributions from evidence-based medicine and its teaching.

Here we talk about national healthcare, I intend this as a gratitude piece as a young person who has been served well by the public healthcare system.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: When it comes to having national healthcare coverage in Canada, when did it start? How did it develop? What would it be like if young people did not have national healthcare?

Professor Gordon Guyatt: There was a national hospital insurance program. That started in the late 1950s. The subsequent big change was bringing in physician services under a national program. That we now call Medicare. Tommy Douglas, when Premier of Saskatchewan in the early 1960s, brought in a provincial program to cover physician services.

The physicians were very unhappy. There was a physician strike. They had to bring in people from England to fill in the gaps, but, eventually, the physicians lost that battle. There was a Medicare program for physicians' services in Saskatchewan.

It is for this reason that some people see Douglas as the father of Canadian Medicare. A few years later, the Pearson government passed legislation that enabled the national Medicare program that we have. Now, medicine, medical services, in Canada are a provincial responsibility, so that the federal government could not bring in their own program.

They had to persuade the provinces to bring in the program that met federal standards. The way they did that was to say, "If you bring in a program that meets our standards, then we will pay 50% of the cost." That was a carrot that was very enticing to the provinces.

Legislation was passed in the late 60s. By 1971 or 1972, all of the provinces have bought in. Now, we have effectively national public insurance for physicians as well as hospital services. Canadians have been the beneficiaries.

It is perhaps less important to young people than to older people because young folks are healthier. But, periodically, even young folks, they develop serious illnesses: sometimes catastrophic and sometimes accidents.

If you want a picture of the difference, you would only have to look south of the border. You come from a high-income family. Your parents in the States have probably purchased insurance from you, or can pay if you have problems. If you are low income or middle income, and not fully

insured, which would be the case for a lot of young people who say, “Okay, I am low-risk. Why should I pay these very high insurance costs?”

You are in big trouble. That is a worry and a burden that you are free of in Canada. It makes a big difference to our quality of life. The feeling, “If I fall into problems, then I have a system there. That will deal with me. That I will not be constrained from it because of cost.”

Jacobsen: Would younger Canadians who did not have our national healthcare program be feeling a more precarious sense of their security of health?

Guyatt: I think inevitably. If you had been in the United States, you would either have one of two choices. You pay insurance. There are varying levels of insurance. You pay the basic insurance. That you might be able to afford, but that means if you get sick then you have additional payments that you can’t afford.

Or, you say, “I am going to risk it. Then if you get sick, then you will be in real trouble.” In terms of underinsurance, the number one cause of bankruptcy in the United States in health cost, associated with getting sick. Most people who go bankrupt have some insurance.

But they are underinsured. There is a whole level of insurance, where to be well-insured costs a lot of money. So, the choices facing young people in the United States who are not from very affluent families is not a cheerful one.

Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Professor Guyatt.

Talk With Alain Sayson Presillas — Member, Humanist Alliance Philippines, International

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

April 18, 2018

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: How did you come to find the humanist movement in the Philippines?

Alain Sayson Presillas: I only found out about humanism online. By joining atheist groups and eventually leading me to the humanist movement.

Jacobsen: What have been some of the major obstacles in personal and professional life as a humanist in the Philippines?

Presillas: For me, I cannot just go around telling everyone that I am an atheist but somewhat comfortable telling people of being a humanist. My job as a teacher somewhat keeps me at bay because most of my colleagues are very religious and closed to the idea of being an atheist or humanist. Even our department of education has a motto of “maka diyos” which means for god. Our values and decisions in the department are fashioned of being that of the biblical principles. And anything that is bible based is considered not good.

Jacobsen: What have noticed in terms of the law that discriminates against humanists there?

Presillas: Not really discrimination, but from documents and everything else, being religious and religion plays a role or a requirement, which in I find it unfair and self-serving only those who are religious.

One thing to be considered is, I cannot write humanist in my birth certificate because it is not a religion.

Jacobsen: What about discrimination in culture and social life as general rules of thumb?

Presillas: Individuals who are not religious are considered evil or has no morals for the most part. If your family ties and culture are engrained in religious principles it is difficult to make a decision that is not religious based, the parents have a say, religion has a say and community has a say to decisions that you make in your own personal life.

Traditional and religious people tend to discriminate on you because you are viewed as somewhat free spirited and cannot be controlled by those who are older than you are.

Most good and quality schools are run by religious order, which is the curriculum is driven by religious dogma, even though you have an option not to take such subjects.

In every social event, that I attend, prayer is always a starting point before anything else

Jacobsen: How does religion have social privileges in society, especially Christianity?

Presillas: Majority of Filipinos are Christian, holidays, documents, etc. favors only one religion. It makes only the rest of the religion as a second choice and those that belong to that religion they're not considered part of bigger privileges. It widens more the gap of Christians and not Christians.

Jacobsen: How can Christians be prejudiced against non-believers?

Presillas: My experience is mostly in treating non-Christians, I am referring to Muslims and other religions. For the atheists, they are considered evil and wayward individuals because they lack the morals and the Christian values.

Jacobsen: What is the relationship between religion and the state there?

Presillas: Very closely related, the constitution says it and part of it. Leaders are somewhat guided by the fact that their religion plays a role in important political decisions.

Jacobsen: How did you find HAPI? How does it provide a refuge for you from the mainstream religion and life?

Presillas: I found out about HAPI thru online. I was able to prove to myself and to others that we can help each other without religion, that we don't need religion to be good and of service to humanity.

Jacobsen: What are your activist hopes for humanism in the coming few years?

Presillas: I am hopeful that humanism will flourish in the Philippines for the coming years as more of the Filipinos do have access to information and more advocacies in HAPI that others will actually value what do and somehow do get influenced by us.

Chat with the Founder of Black Nonbelievers on Community Building and Public Engagement

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

April 23, 2018

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: There are a lot of terms that float around with regards to formal non-religion. Those who are often termed “the Nones” or “the religiously unaffiliated.” They can be “Brights.” They can be “atheists.” They can be “agnostics.” They can be “humanists” and so on.

Within a humanist context, so as a particular example today, what does atheism tend to mean to you?

Mandisa Thomas: Atheism is simply a lack of belief in any gods, spirits, or supernatural beings. That is the simplest definition. It comes from the rejection of such gods dependent on your upbringing. Or it just means that you don’t believe in them.

Jacobsen: That provides a one-time blanket denial. In other words, what people do not believe, how does humanism healthily build on that foundation — because most humanists are atheists — to provide certain affirmations about what people feel are appropriate values in their lives?

Thomas: Let me say, that they aren’t necessarily mutually exclusive. Because one is an atheist doesn’t mean one is a humanist, even as you said most humanists tend to be atheists. Humanism, in the context of coming to terms with identity as an atheist, means looking for ways to still do good as a human being.

That incorporates atheism and their humanism, how they are able to do good without the ideas of divine intervention as well as applying religious tenets to it.

As an atheist, I am able to give up a lot of stigma and indoctrination. My atheism has allowed me to care more about human beings regardless of who they are. It has allowed me to become less stigmatizing of the LGBT community.

It has allowed me to look at things differently. I have found that I can do more to help others simply based on myself as a person. Once people come to terms with their atheism, they are still looking for ways to help improve either on societal issues or community-building. So, we should be able to do good without that stigma or fear.

Also, there is this idea that the religious hold the monopoly on community and caring.

Jacobsen: There is a general ethos for an ethic for humanists, and atheists for that matter too. But there are different emphases based on concerns or issues they may have in their community, or individually.

If you look at the American context, or your local context of Atlanta, even as specific as a state, what are the general concerns that American humanism tends to take on?

If you look at the younger humanist generations, how do they tend to orient themselves and their ethics?

Thomas: In a way, that is starting to shift. A lot of humanists take on a lot of church-state separation issues. But now, the younger and people of color are getting involved in more Black Lives Matters issues, LGBT issues, reproductive rights issues, and so on.

Also, there is, recently, in the United States the issue of gun control and safety in schools.

Jacobsen: There are some important voices that are within the black non-believing community in the United States, such as Anthony Pinn, Sikivu Hutchinson, or Sincere Kirabo. Who seem like some leading lights to you?

Thomas: I would say Sikivu Hutchinson. Also, Alix Jules who runs our Dallas affiliate. Also, Bridgett Crutchfield who is our Detroit affiliate and is on our board for Black Nonbelievers. Those are the main ones that come to mind.

Jacobsen: Your experience with building community and being in hospitality industry. These are skills crucial for any set of communities- or theme-based movements. So, how can people build and organize for particular humanist or nonbelieving activist activities in their locale?

Thomas: I hope to be working on this in the future, e.g., developing workshops for engagement and communication. If individuals are working, if they have jobs that incorporate customer service, these help engaging with more people.

There is a period of self-reflection needed by people. Our sense of identity as people does not have to preclude not thinking of others. There is a way for us to become comfortable with ourselves all while being mindful of how we engage others.

I think that is something in the community that we do not encourage. There have certainly been codes of conduct implemented at larger events and at some of the local events too. That is a good place to start. I think there are plenty of online classes that people can take as far as people engagement.

We can build upon this area for people to come together and develop those skills. We can look at the model of the church too: How welcoming they are but without the manipulation, guilt, and fear.

Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Mandisa.

Thomas: No problem!

Waleed Al-Husseini on Support and Sanctuary for Ex-Muslims

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

April 24, 2018

Waleed Al-Husseini founded the Council of Ex-Muslims of France. He escaped the Palestinian Authority after torture and imprisonment in Palestine to Jordan and then France. He is an ex-Muslim and an atheist, and a friend. We have published interviews in Canadian Atheist (here, here, here, and here), The Good Men Project (here), and Conatus News (here, here, and here). Here we talk about support and sanctuary for ex-Muslims in France.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: How can the international youth humanist community help provide a minimum online community and sanctuary for the ex-Muslim community?

Waleed Al-Husseini: If you mean just online, to open for our voice and show the suffering of ex-Muslims in their countries, for more on these issue, people can support our freedom of speech and freedom of expression.

I don't think it's hate speech because it's our right to criticize Islam as a set of ideas and beliefs. They can support us or make our voice heard more and more, protecting us from having the removal of our accounts.

Because for many of us, using fake accounts are a solution to be ourselves, some of us can't be real online because all the dangers and threats take us out of all political issues. We are just ex-Muslims.

Jacobsen: How are the humanist and non-religious communities failing the ex-Muslim community?

Al-Husseini: Most of them in the name of humanism call ex-Muslims Islamophobic just because ex-Muslims criticize Islam. They avoid us too because they don't want to offend their Muslim friends.

I don't generalize, but most of them are like this. I am fed up with many of them who call themselves humanist and then close their eyes of the killings/murders and arrests of the ex-Muslims just because he doesn't want to offend his Muslim friends.

Jacobsen: Is it hard for ex-Muslims to find asylum in other countries?

Al-Husseini: Yes, for sure, we have a lot of stories about that, but life is going. We never give up.

Jacobsen: Once an ex-Muslim finds an escape into another country away from the traditionalist and conservative society, community, and home, how hard is the transition into typically Western, secular life?

Al-Husseini: It's not hard at all because he escaped to live these values. These values are inside himself, so when he comes to these countries. He breaths the freedom. He can feel that he was born-again, because in that other society he always feels as if he died. I'm speaking through my experience too.

Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Waleed.

The Satanic Temple in Preparation For a Religious Discrimination Suit

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

April 26, 2018

The state of Arkansas in the United States of America erected a monument of the Ten Commandments. Some have deemed this illegal and discrimination, for example The Satanic Temple.

Arkansas, about a year ago, erected a Ten Commandments monument, which was controversial and taken down by a self-professed born again Christian. A replacement monument is in the process of being or has been installed on Little Rock Capitol Grounds.

The Satanic Temple will be suing the state of Arkansas over a rejection of the placement of a satanic monument. The Satanic Temple founder, Lucien Greaves, stated, “As soon as other invested parties file their lawsuits disputing the constitutionality of the Ten Commandments monument, we will file an ‘intervenor,’ essentially merging the cases.”

The placement of the Abrahamic monument, of the Ten Commandments, comes from the efforts of Stanley “Jason” Rapert. Rapert passed a bill favoring the monument in 2015. Greaves considers the display a violation of constitutional principles.

That is, also, the monument abuses the public office of Rapert.

“Rapert is obviously a mindless tool for theocratic interests originating outside of Arkansas, as his bill utilized the exact language used in failed efforts to maintain a Ten Commandments monument at the capitol in Oklahoma,” Greaves continued, “legal language that the simple senator was unable to comprehend.”

Bulgarian Disregard For the Istanbul Convention

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

April 27, 2018

Bulgaria in-progress violation of European treaty devoted to prevention of violence against women. The Bulgarian Helsinki Committee (BHC), a human rights group, described it.

The Bulgarian authorities withdrew from the Istanbul Convention. The convention is an important part of the movements to prevent violence against women.

In particular, the first legally-binding document was the Istanbul convention. For the ruling GERB to back away from the ratification of it, it indicates a path.

A path the country may be heading down in a deliberate way. It was not ratified because of opposition from the allies and religious organizations.

These include the Bulgarian Orthodox Church. A BHC coordinator, Dilyana Angelova, said, “The Convention guarantees the highest standards for the prevention of violence against women and its rejection is a serious regression in the field of women’s rights.”

This amounted to a “total disregard for the serious and systematic attacks on women.” Angelova said.

Prime Minister Boyko Borissov described Bulgaria as progressive and open-minded. Especially with its time as chair of the EU, EU Council meetings to be chaired until June 30.

Borissov referenced lack of political party support, such as the junior coalition partner. The junior coalition partner called United Patriots. It is a nationalist party.

The BHC continued in its critique. It referenced the hard tactics of media freedom suppression and prevention of dissent. Tactics extended to monitoring of critics, online harassment, and the sowing of mistrust.

Everything facilitated via propaganda. As BHC’s Yana Buhrer Tanvanier noted, “Last year we witnessed a drastic deterioration in freedom of expression, media censorship and unprecedented political pressure.”

Journalists have been personally threatened or attacked. Also, the government allocation of EU funding showed a lack of transparency.

Bulgaria, in Reports Without Borders, dropped to 111th out of 180th place. That is the placement on the world press freedom index.

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Argentinian Women's Rights at Stake Through Abortion Debate

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

April 27, 2018

Argentina continues in internal struggle (and strife, as they say,) for women's rights. Two women head federal government ministries. 20 exist in total. A ratio of 9:1, men to women.

That amounts to a significant disparity. Argentina has been Roman Catholic Christian. It continues to be Roman Catholic Christian. One longstanding controversy exists around abortion.

If a woman got pregnant, and so became a mother, and if the new mother's health was at risk, abortion became allowable. Also, this would come in the conversation if the pregnancy was the result of rape.

President Mauricio Macri had a Congress that debated a bill for women's rights. A woman's right to have a terminated or aborted pregnancy in the first 14 weeks.

Furthermore, the termination would be free and within the Argentinian universal health system. Argentina has a universal basic health system.

In the World Economic Forum gender equality index. Argentina ranks 34th out of 144. Not bad, no one compares to Iceland, often.

March 8 was a historic leap for Argentinean's 200,000 women marched for International Women's Day. Many made an open call for legal abortions. Illegal abortions poses to women throughout the world.

Not because illegal alone but because of derivative effects. Women still get abortions but in unsafe conditions instead of safe ones. Important to note: most abortions in Argentina amount to illegal now.

Women become criminals while risking health and life to get an abortion. That is even in the case of a rape-based abortion. Think about that.

Within reading this article and grabbing a coffee, an adolescent girl became a mother. Argentina has this problem. This becomes poor mothers, children, and families.

This can create generations of poverty. The lack of female leadership may prevent compassion on this issue. Compassion, not generally but, based in experience.

Biological females differ from males in extraordinarily subtle and overt ways. Pregnancy is one. Women and mothers in leadership may bridge the gap.

The bridge strong enough to be able to say, "No." A strong negation to the strong-arming by allies of a traditionalist government. A government, too, beholden to pressures of the Roman Catholic Christian Church.

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Conversation With Bryan Valentino — Member, Humanist Alliances Philippines, International

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

April 28, 2018

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: What's your background regarding religion?

Bryan Valentino: I was raised as a Catholic and I got introduced to other religions as well so I'm familiar with how most religions work and what they teach here in the Philippines.

Jacobsen: What was your first introduction to HAPI?

Valentino: I was invited to the group by its first lead convener Mark Janeo. I was a bit familiar to the organization already and I like it because aside from it being a discussion group, there are also some humanist events that people can participate in.

Jacobsen: If you could make one on the spot, what's the better argument for humanism?

Valentino: My understanding of humanism is that it's a better approach to a better world because it puts "faith" in or requires human action rather than waiting for a miracle to happen.

Jacobsen: What is the community of Humanists like for you?

Valentino: So far it has been fun because there are a lot of people who share the some of the ideals that I have. Also, most of the humanists that I know are people who you can have an intelligent conversation with so it makes me understand the world a little bit more.

Jacobsen: How does religion influence political and public life generally in the Philippines?

Valentino: Religion in the Philippines greatly affected legislation before but I believe Filipinos are slowly becoming more secular in the way they see things. For example, it was unimaginable before for a same sex marriage bill to be filed in congress but I think it was early in Duterte's term last year that someone proposed the bill. Unfortunately, it was turned down both by congress and Duterte but nevertheless it's still implies that the people's opinions are gradually changing for the better.

Jacobsen: What is a major reform Filipino law could undertake to have more equality for the irreligious?

Valentino: I think it would be nice to have the separation of church and state in the constitution clearly defined so that we can demand secularism from schools and not be required to attend or participate in religious assemblies or subjects.

Jacobsen: Does the current government pose a threat to the free practice of humanism in the Philippines?

Valentino: Well, hindrances or challenges have always been there even before the current government came to be such as the lack of laws to enforce secularism and discrimination against the irreligious but with the power of social media and the fact that the technology here in the Philippines is improving, I think we will be able to make more people understand what humanism is faster.

Comfort Woman Statue in the Philippines

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

April 29, 2018

A comfort woman statue was erected in the Philippines. The statue was built in honor of comfort women who lived through WWII.

Comfort women worked in brothels to ‘comfort’ the military men. The statue was moved from a seaside promenade in Manila. Women’s groups in the Philippines are not happy with this development.

The Manila City Hall, in a statement, declared that the bronze statue will come back once drainage work is complete. The bronze statue represents a blindfolded Filipina, which points to comfort women in WWII.

No time frame was claimed for the project. This armed activists. However, the Japanese government put pressure on the Philippines government to remove the monument.

The co-founded president of a Chinese Filipino group, Teresita Ang See, said, “What happened is that we kneeled down to the Japanese. ... That’s why it’s shameful, so shameful.”

Professor Michael Charleston “Xiao” Chua called for the public to fight for the return the symbol. The statues represent an important point of the Philippine national narrative based on this call for activism.

Seiko Noda, the Japanese minister for internal affairs and communications, regretted the construction of the monument in January of 2018. *Kyodo News* reported on the Japanese Embassy in Manila.

The Philippine government informed the embassy of the intent to move the statue. The topic of comfort women remains a dilemma for both governments, Japan and the Philippines.

Filipinas suffered from 1942 to 1945 as comfort women due to Japanese occupation. Chinese-Filipinos donated for the construction of the bronze statue of the blindfolded Filipina.

20,000 to 200,000 women in Asia — many Koreans — got forced into sex with the front-line soldiers from Japan. Many Japanese nationalists argue the comfort women were voluntary prostitutes and not forced into sex.

Japanese gave \$18,000 (2,000,000 yen) to 280 women in the Philippines, South Korea, and Taiwan. South Korean and Filipina women demand full apology by the government of Japan along with compensation.

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Saudi activist Ghada Ibrahim on Deconversion, Women's Rights, Belief, and Conservative Culture

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

May 1, 2018

Ghada Ibrahim is a Former Muslim and Saudi Activist. In particular, an activist for the rights of women in Islam and talking about her former faith. Here we talk about growing up in a Saudi Muslim family, family life, aspects of Islam, well-being of women and men in Islam, and the net analysis of Islam in Saudi Arabia and the MENA region.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: What was the moment, or were the moments, of deconversion from Islam for you?

Ghada Ibrahim: The first moment came when I was in high school. I wanted to be more religious and understand my religion more, so one Ramadan I decided to read the Quran for understanding, rather than just skimming through it the same way we did every year just to get through it. I took my time until I reached the infamous 4:34: *Men are in charge of women by [right of] what Allah has given one over the other and what they spend [for maintenance] from their wealth. So righteous women are devoutly obedient, guarding in [the husband's] absence what Allah would have them guard. But those [wives] from whom you fear arrogance — [first] advise them; [then if they persist], forsake them in bed; and [finally], strike them. But if they obey you [once more], seek no means against them. Indeed, Allah is ever Exalted and Grand.*

After reading that verse, I began my research. The traditional and most accepted interpretation was that men had the authority to discipline their wives if they feared disobedience from them. But what really bothered me was the start of the verse: “men are in charge of women” or in Arabic “Alrejal qawamoon ‘ala alnisa” The translation isn’t exactly “in charge of”. That is what many like to think it means. That the word “qawama” in Arabic only refers to who pays the money in the house, but that is not true. The sentence right after it says “By what Allah has given one over the other AND what they spend from their wealth”. So it isn’t just spending. This translation also doesn’t mention that word used was “Faddala” which means “preferred” and not “given”. In the most traditional and mainstream accepted interpretations, in both Sunni and Shia Islam, this verse is interpreted as “Men are in charge with women because they have been given preference by Allah with physical and mental strength AND because they are charged with spending”. Western or liberal Muslims like to think that this is only the extremist or Wahhabi interpretation, but it is not. THIS is the mainstream and most accepted interpretation for the verse. It was also the interpretation taught to many Muslims ALL OVER the world.

I’ve read other interpretations by so-called “modernists” and “Muslim feminists” and they completely gloss over the fact that Allah gave men authority to discipline their wives. They concentrate more on how the word “beat” doesn’t really mean “to hit” and how this verse is taken completely out of context. They gloss over the verse that describes what women do with their disobedient husbands, a few verses after 4:34 in 4:128: *And if a woman fears from her husband contempt or evasion, there is no sin upon them if they make terms of settlement between them — and settlement is best. And present in [human] souls is stinginess. But if you do good and fear Allah — then indeed Allah is ever, with what you do, Acquainted.*

As you can see, there is a huge difference in how women treat their disobedient husband (A civil settlement) and how a man treats his disobedient wife (discipline). This got me to reject the divinity of the Quran, which was the first step into deconversion. Right afterwards, I began to question the validity of the hijab and why I had to wear it in a scorching heat while my brothers walked around in baggy shorts and T-Shirts, and I took off the hijab. Slowly, little by little, I began to reject other parts of the religion. I began dating and touching the opposite sex instead of avoiding any kind of physical contact with them. I had a sip of alcohol. Then one day, I realized, that I did not believe in any of it. I woke up one morning and as I was getting ready to perform a prayer, I stopped and thought to myself, “I don’t even believe in any of this. Why am I praying?” And I never looked back afterwards. That was about 7 years ago.

Jacobsen: What is the status of women’s rights in most of the Muslim-majority countries?

Ibrahim: Depending on where you are, it varies from extremely bad (Saudi Arabia and Iran) to moderately bad (Rest of the GCC, some parts of North Africa), to not too bad (Turkey, Tunisia). The worst part about women’s rights in Muslim-majority countries is Family law. Marriage needs a father’s permission if it is a first-time marriage, divorce needs the husband’s permission, custody of children automatically goes to the husband after they reach the age of 7, inheritance is unfair, etc. In countries with forced modesty like Saudi Arabia and Iran, dress codes are imposed on the women. In Iran, it’s mandatory Hijab. In Saudi Arabia, it’s mandatory “modest” clothing in the form of plain colors, baggy long-sleeves, and no display of affection.

Jacobsen: How do you, or others, work with the change in a fundamental belief structure? I would assume the combined feelings of exhilaration, disorientation, anxiety, and fear at once.

Ibrahim: When I first admitted to myself that I no longer believed in Islam or a god for that matter, it was one of the scariest things I’ve felt. It wasn’t because I thought that now I was going to hell like many Muslims like to believe, but because I no longer had a structure or purpose for my life. I had all of this free time now that wasn’t invaded by prayers. I had newfound freedoms that are up for exploring. The fear I felt was of the unknown. I fell into a deep depression in the beginning and went through a sort of existential crisis.

Jacobsen: Leaving a faith, reconciling with the change of belief structure, then not only negating the beliefs but also finding a new life in newly affirmed principles — paving your own path in the world, this is no small task or set thereof. How did you do it?

Ibrahim: I filled the void, in the beginning, with reading classical literature. I saw that even in books written in the 18th and 19th centuries, there were characters that had doubts about their religious beliefs or questioned the existence of a god. They were still able to build something out of their lives in a world that still executed people for blasphemy (a lot like my own world back in Saudi). It was during that time that I realized that my “purpose” was whatever I wanted it to be. I also found someone who was like me. Though he did not grow up in a fundamentalist household, he still lived in Saudi and was still an atheist in a Muslim-majority country. Having someone to talk to about it helped.

Jacobsen: When in a very conservative culture and then leave it, “I do not have the tools. I can make my own mistakes. I could not make them before.” You leave it and can make your own path.

Sometimes, you use the wrong material, take the wrong path and fall, and some get discouraged and some continue going. How do you build yourself back up, keep going, and maintain the new self and sense of empowerment?

Ibrahim: For me, it was the reminder that this life is the only chance we got. I remember how I felt after making several mistakes, one after the other, a few years back. I lay in bed and thought to myself that all I wanted was to die to make the pain go away, to make the thoughts of failure stop. Then I remembered that if I die, that would be it. There is no “second chance” for me. If I died, I would have died without being able to achieve what I wanted to achieve, and for me, it was just to be able to live a normal life. I was stuck in a country that crippled my freedom in every way. I couldn’t let that be the only life I led. Sure, it hurt to fail. It really sucks when you think you’ve made the right choice, only to find out how horribly wrong you were. It is discouraging, but that is just how life is. It’s a roll of a dice. Sometimes you get the number you wanted and sometimes you roll the wrong number. It might be different for others, but accepting that everything that happens in this world is random and that the only way to go forward is to attempt life as many times as you can was how I was able to do it. I’ve accepted that I had no power at all on what life threw at me, but I do have power over how I react to what it throws at me.

Jacobsen: Any feelings or thoughts in conclusion?

Ibrahim: Leaving a fundamentalist religion is a lot like finding yourself free of a cult after years (in my case, close to two decades) of indoctrination. It is difficult to build your individual self after living in a collective mentality. There is no life hack that’ll make life easier afterwards and there is no one-size fits-all fix for it. It really depends on the person and how they react to different stimuli. For me, it required a lot of reading and a lot of cognitive-behavioral therapy to change the way I react to different stimuli. But worked for me, may not work for everyone. Don’t be afraid to try. Making mistakes is not the worst that can happen.

Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Ghada.

Chat with Angelique Anne Villa — Member, Humanist Alliance Philippines, International

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

May 5, 2018

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: How did you find out about HAPI?

Angelique Anne Villa: I found out about HAPI through J-rik, he introduced me to other HAPI members: Rayd, Alvin, and Zenki.

Jacobsen: What made the humanist message initially appealing?

Villa: The book released by HAPI made a lot of sense, “From Superstition To Reason”.

Jacobsen: Who has been a guide for you, as an exemplar of humanism living by example?

Villa: I’m new to humanism, but I lost faith since I was 13. I’m still trying to know more about the people involved and how they established it.

Jacobsen: What do you see as the differential treatment for nonbelievers in the Philippines?

Villa: A big yes, even my mom was like “what happened to you?” but she didn’t make any violent reactions though. I can feel how other family members look at me with disgust when I talk about not believing in their god. It’s been just hi-and-hello between me and them since 2010.

Jacobsen: Also on the sex and gender front, how are women treated by the major faiths?

Villa: I haven’t experienced any discrimination yet, to be honest, but I feel bad for a friend back in high school that her mom wouldn’t let her join the volleyball team because they’re Christians and she was advised that it’s better for my friend to sing in their church.

Jacobsen: Does humanism provide a more modern and respectful message?

Villa: For me, yes it does. I know a lot of Pinoys would find it disrespectful if it contradicts their beliefs they’re most likely going to hate it.

Jacobsen: Does religion seem to be more or less compatible with human rights, women’s rights and reproductive rights, and so on?

Villa: Religion is less compatible in terms of reproductive rights, with the LGBT community, and more. Although I haven’t personally experienced this, I see it on the news and it’s so off. The irony between the “love thy neighbours and respect thy neighbours” and ousted gays, lesbians, trans, and the rest is simply not making sense.

Jacobsen: What are you hoping to see as a change in the nature of the public image of humanism in the next few years?

Villa: I don’t expect to see much in the Philippines, I’m not under estimating Pinoys but the fight to push humanism in the country is going to be hard when every family’s foundation is religion. I just hope to see they’d be more reasonable in the future so politicians can stop using religion as their back-up if they feel like losing the elections.

World Humanist Day Supporter Pack and Crowdfunding

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

May 5, 2018

The International Humanist and Ethical Union is counting down World Humanist Day.

It is on June 21. IHEYO is counting down with them. This year, IHEU launched Humanists At Risk as a crowdfunding campaign. this will help raise awareness and support for humanist concerns.

They helped raised, in a similar campaign before, about £10,000.00 “to help defend, protect and support humanists at risk around the world,” as noted in an email.

This is currently an annual crowdfunding campaign to ask for financial support. This financial support will go to helping raise awareness and to hopefully, eventually, support humanists who are at risk.

You can download the supporter pack here:

“We’re in!” — Download the supporter pack

IHEU continues to be a beacon, and umbrella, for humanist activities. The goal is to advocate for human rights, help at-risk humanists. Also, to help document discrimination, this can help catalogue the issues for humanists around the world.

World Humanist Day, in this view, becomes a great means and mechanism to support humanism and humanists around the world.

That’s why World Humanist Day is the perfect moment to harness solidarity within the global humanist community and get behind the vital work of the IHEU.

This supporter pack “includes graphics, a poster for events, news story copy for your website or press release, and template messages for social media.”

The Urgent Case of Noura Hussein Hammad

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

May 10, 2018

Sodfa Daaji is the Chairwoman of the Gender Equality Committee and the North Africa Coordinator for the Afrika Youth Movement. Here we talk about Noura Hussein Hammad's urgent case. The hashtag: #JusticeForNoura. Daaji's email if you would like to sign: daajisodfa.pr@gmail.com.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Hammad is a young woman. We are young humanists. What are some things we can learn from this current urgent, crisis of Hammad?

Sodfa Daaji: I think that there are mainly two things that we can learn from Noura's case. The first one is that injustice is prevalent, exists, and we can find cases of injustice even around the corner. We do not have to go on the other side of the world, and we must pay more attention about what happens every day. The second lesson, the most powerful to me, is the power of people. On the last hours we are mobilizing from different countries, and everyone is trying to give its own contribution. If we gather together, we can do remarkable things, and the power of solidarity will give for sure impressive results.

Jacobsen: Is this common for young women in many countries around the world?

Daaji: Unfortunately, yes. UN is advocating with organizations, activists, and governments to achieve the SDGs on 2030, but the truth is that in some countries forced marriage, marital rape, gender-based violence are something normal, and all these forms of violence are justified with tradition, culture, and religion.

Today Noura has been condemned to death, but two days ago a woman has been killed in Sudan by al-Shabab fighters. According to the journalists, the fighters are applying a strict interpretation of Sharia, but my question is: why those kinds of interpretations are always affecting just women?

It is time for us, academics, advocates, organizations, member of civil society to have a clear distinction between religion, culture, tradition and how they are used — especially by men — to dominate women and to have power on their bodies.

Jacobsen: How do the government and religion restrict the movement, equality, and consent of women in various aspects of their such as marriage, sex, children, and the legality around those same issues?

Daaji: Sudan has a bad record of accomplishment on human rights and having Sharia Law does not help when it comes to freedom. Death penalty is applied also to atheists, apostasy, or for changing religion and belief.

The fact that we have heard lately about Noura's case show how Sudan is restricting freedom of speech and religion. Nahid, the woman who is following Noura personally, director of SEEMA, has been jailed multiple times, and one of Afrika youth movement's volunteers.

To overcome this, youth need to change the narrative and reverse what is perceived as traditional and normal. Luckily Sudanese youth are aware and have a deep knowledge about their rights, and they are not afraid to fight to get and build a better future.

Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Sadfa.

Founder of the Kasese United Humanist Association on humanist curricula and educators

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

May 12, 2018

Robert Bwambale is the founder of the Kasese United Humanist Association (KUHA) with “the goal of promoting Freethought in Uganda.” The association is affiliated with the extremely active Uganda Humanist Association (UHA). In March, the UHA held a conference in Kampala whose theme was Humanism For a Free and Prosperous Africa. The Kasese United Humanist Association is a member organization in the IHEYO Africa Working Group, and has participated in humanist conferences. He is also the director of a few primary schools set up to encourage a humanistic method of learning.

Jacobsen: How does a humanist education work for young pupils?

Robert Bwambale: Humanist education empowers young people with critical thinking skills which allows them to think, ask and analyze questions and answers among themselves.

Jacobsen: What are the core mandates of humanist educational institutions?

Bwambale:

- Welcome children of all beliefs.
- We do not indoctrinate our learners to anything whether humanism, atheism or to any particular belief.
- We tolerate people’s beliefs after all what brings us together is to offer knowledge to the pupils.
- We are not a place of worship but a center for knowledge.
- There is deep respect of people’s human right freedoms, no to corporal punishments, homophobia.
- We observe secular holidays and stipulated national holidays.
- There is no discrimination of any nature whether on race, color, sex, religion or tribe.
- We teach the national curriculum as stipulated by the Uganda government but spice it with humanism to enlighten the masses on who we are.

Jacobsen: How are religion and science taught in those classroom environments?

Bwambale: Religion education as per our curriculum is taught basing on Christianity or Islam, so our students are required to take one side to study and normally the majority learn Christianity. Here our teachers cover all the course units as specified.

On a different note we inform our pupils that these two are not the only religions under the sun, so we expose to them other religions as well. What we need in this is that we want them to know that there exists scores of religions both foreign and indigenous ones.

We dig deeper in religions and sometimes we do have debates or seminars on beliefs and why we think people believe.

Jacobsen: What makes a good humanist educator?

Bwambale: Must be honest, committed, tolerant, transparent, determined, passionate and ready to serve in educating the people.

A good educator should mind a lot about the needs and welfare of his staffs.

A good educator should be able to help over-burdened parents, needy or vulnerable children.

Jacobsen: For young people who want to enter into the humanist education, what should they bear in mind in terms of their post-secondary education oriented towards the teaching professions?

Bwambale: I think it would be a great experience to those who would want to attain more knowledge about humanist education to study in some of the humanist schools we have in Uganda. This will expose them to the alternate mind which they can copy to equip them with ideas about appreciating the goodness of human potential and effort in making this world a better place.

Young people should first of all accept to learn, question, act, and serve.

Young people should accept that we are in a changing world and that science advancement and technology can enlighten us more about the known and unknown.

Young people should know about the dangers posed by religious bigotry and how it manipulates and instill fear, hate and division among humanity.

Young people should try as much as they can to take deeper interest in learning more about humanist values and how best they can incorporate them in what they learnt in colleges.

Jacobsen: How can people get in touch with you?

Bwambale: I am available on facebook <https://www.facebook.com/bwambale.robert>

My cell phone: +256700468020

Email: kasesehumanistschool@hotmail.com

Mailing address: Kasese Humanist School, P.O.Box 58 Kasese — Uganda.

Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Robert.

Interview with Jean Karla M. Tapao — Member, Humanist Alliance Philippines, International

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

May 12, 2018

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: How did you find HAPI?

Jean Karla M. Tapao: HAPI was introduced to me by Ms. Marissa T. Langseth, the founder of HAPI (Humanist Alliance Philippines, International). I have known her for years because of my brother, who is an atheist and activist.

Jacobsen: Was there a family upbringing within a religious framework?

Tapao: Yes. I was born as Catholic but I was raised an agnostic. My parents are both Catholics. We usually go to church every Sunday, I read biblical books and I do pray etc... but I was raised as an agnostic maybe because I love science since I was in grade school and my Science teacher was really good in Science and I was surrounded by people who have different views and beliefs about life. I have a catholic sister but she converted herself to Muslim religion, I have two catholic brothers, who are faithful but not really religious, and the person who introduced to me the world of science, my atheist brother. So, because of that, I have learned a lot of things not only about religions, politics and science but also to be a humanist. My siblings and I were living in one roof since birth so even though we have different views and beliefs we make sure our limitations to maintain the harmony and strong bond in the family.

Jacobsen: How did you come to formally claim yourself a humanist if at all?

Tapao: Since I was young, my family and I are already helping the needy but it's not only about helping and it will never end there. Everyone could become a humanist but the consistency of being a humanist is a life time action. I am a humanist in mind and heart and that's the most powerful key that I have right now. I want to open the hearts of every one to humanism because being a humanist could change the world.

Jacobsen: What seems like the summary statement on a good humanist or humanist ideals?

Tapao: A good humanist for me could help the people in short period of time but humanist ideals is for a lifetime. To inspire everyone and to continue what we have started could make a lot of changes. We, as humanists of HAPI can do good without divine interference.

Jacobsen: How does science provide a more robust and reliable framework and epistemology for understanding the world than religion?

Tapao: To be available to compare both sides, we should have a great knowledge about science and religion. Science is based on reality and it was undergo through process with facts and evidences. If we only engaged in one side, it is really hard for a person to defend his or her side to particular matter, it's just like you are closing your life in one box, but once you go beyond, you gain more knowledge and better understanding to your questions and it became clearer and clearer and that's the time that you can tell which is reliable or not.

Jacobsen: How does religion influence politics in the Philippines?

Tapao: People are molding their lives according the way they wanted to be. What I am trying to say is, if we go back to the history of religion and politics in the Philippines, you can see the changes. We all know that most of the population in the Philippines are Catholics. To be able to have what you wanted in life, you must have the courage to fight for it because of the surrounded obstacles, and that courage will lead you to build your own power, the power to create new ideas, environment and people. Once you get that power it will spread into different angles, it could be good or not. The current situations we are facing right in the Philippines were brought by our own history.

Jacobsen: Could the government ‘crack down’ on irreligious activists and humanists?

Tapao: Yes, if they wanted too. Government has the most powerful weapon in the world but without its people it will be useless.

Jacobsen: What are your hopes for the coming years of the irreligious movement in general and the humanist movement in particular?

Tapao: As a humanist, we know what is wrong and what is right, we know how respect other’s views and beliefs, and even though we are different from one another we should know our own boundaries. If I can live with harmony in one roof with my Muslim sister, Catholic brothers and Atheist brother so why can’t do it in our own country?

We cannot have the changes we are aiming right now but I am hoping that today’s little steps could make everyone happy in the future. :)

I am Ms. Jean Karla M. Tapao, a Teacher, a Girl Scout master and a HUMANIST.

Thank you Scott. :)

Marieme Helie Lucas on Noura Hussein Hammad

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

May 14, 2018

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Noura Hussein Hammad is a new case of a woman with the death penalty. What is her brief story?

Helie Lucas: She has been given in marriage by her tutor (*wali*) (in this case, her father — as this is legal in Sudan) at age 16, against her expressed will. She even fled her father's house and lived for three years at her aunt's, hundreds of kilometers away to make it clear she was not accepting this marriage... This actually means that her father signed a marriage contract with the husband to be, eventually out of the presence of the bride to be. The consummation of the marriage may take place at a different time during another ceremony.

After three years, the father sent a message asking her to come back home, stating that he abandoned the idea of marrying her off against her will. He lied about it. When she arrived, she found out that everything was ready for the 2nd stage of the ceremony. She was then forced to go to her husband's house, where she steadily refused to allow for the consummation of the marriage, for several days. The husband then requested several male family members to hold her down and he raped her in their presence. The day after, he tried to rape her again, but she ran to the kitchen and defended herself with a knife. He died.

She then went back to her father's place, but he disowned her and took her to the police. She admitted the facts.

She has been judged and sentenced to death by hanging, for murder.

This is a case of child marriage, forced marriage, gang rape, and killing in self-defense. Sudanese law as well as international law both criminalize forced marriage of underage girls. Rights defenders are calling for an annulment of the judgment and a due process, taking into account all the mitigating circumstances that surround the husband death, including human rights abuse, rape, forced marriage, child marriage. They also ask that the state of terror and mental instability in which she must have fallen after the gang rape be considered.

Jacobsen: How can people help her in particular and others in similar situations in general with advancing their ability to fight theocratic laws and violations of human rights?

Helie Lucas: Sudan is a signatory of several international treaties and conventions regarding human rights. It must be held accountable vis a vis international law. It seems that this is the best avenue at the moment to save Noura's life. On the ground, Sudanese rights groups are creating a climate of awareness for women's rights and children rights. There is also a growing mobilization in Muslim countries in support of Noura, which denounce a fundamentalist interpretation of Islam as well as contradictions inherent to the discrepancies between the constitution and some institutions like that of *wali* (tutor), which deprived women of a number of rights otherwise guaranteed under the Constitution. Internationally AI is demanding a revision of the judgment and due process taking into account the specific circumstances of the husband's murder and the various forms of violence and human rights abuses suffered by Noura.

It is absolutely crucial for supporters outside Sudan to understand that they should first and foremost support the efforts for justice from within. Women's and rights groups in Sudan know

how to best fight for Noura's life and for women's and children's rights. They should keep the lead in this struggle. The mere existence of such progressive forces need to be given visibility, their courage in fighting for justice and human rights in such dire circumstances should be given a well-deserved appreciation, and their expertise fully acknowledged. We should also publicly acknowledge Noura's courage, for resisting all pressures and for, in the end, not turning to self-destruction but to self-defense. In similar circumstances, many young women commit suicide or fall into mental illness. She is one of these rare cases, publicly fighting for her freedom and that of other women and girls till the end.

Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Marieme.

The Demographics and Transition to Humanism and Scepticism with Nsajigwa I Mwasokwa (Nsajigwa Nsa'sam): Founder, Jicho Jipya/Think Anew Tanzania

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

May 19, 2018

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: We have been colleagues and friends for a decent amount of time now. I wanted to explore some of the irreligious youth community in Tanzania. What is the general picture for irreligious Tanzanian youth, i.e., the statistics and demography?

Nsajigwa: While the general statistics for chief religions in Tanzania (based on *The World Almanac* and *Book of Facts 2009*), they are:

- 35% Traditionalists
- 35% Muslims
- 30% Christians

It is understood (based on projections of 1960s) that a small percentage between 0.5 to 1 of the general population of adults above 18 years of any African nation are irreligious.

It gets complicated because many of that minority percentage are in the closet. Each (lonesome) one thinking s/he is alone, and has never met the like-minded! Two challenges emerge from this:

- One, there is a need to do research to comes out with current data.
- Two, the need to “unearth” these individuals and connect them.

Jacobsen: How much less religious are they than their parents and grandparents?

Nsajigwa: Hard to tell for now, specific statistics are needed; however, the forces of secularization, modern education, exposure/globalization, dialectic dynamics, and accompanying existentialist realities of constant transitions of modern life have been quite impactful, 50+ years since Uhuru, independence, of which the entrance of the internet (2000) has been a phenomenal game-changer.

Based on that, we could conjecture that irreligion has risen for this generation compared with those of the past, though research on that would be needed to confirm.

Jacobsen: How can Tanzania society move from the superstitions into the scientific worldview, and so modern education, rights, and technological movement?

Nsajigwa: The coming into being of Jichojipya Think Anew as an entity is the answer to that very question!

Thus, objects of Jichojipya includes to instill, inspire, and nurture book reading as a habit into a culture, the love of studying (rather than have phobia for) philosophy qua philosophy independent of theology, to nurture and develop Socratic elenchus — that is sceptic, inquisitive habit that question phenomenon — nature and man-made.

Also, to “Think Anew” in a rational empirical-based manner. To fight against abject poverty that makes people gullible when given hope to escape from it, encouragement of STEM — that is, Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics — from the grassroots.

Jichojipya is working hard to establish itself as an institution working for (and in defense of) the rise of rationalism, secularism, and humanism as an outlook (replacing superstition) in Tanzania. Man “is the centre”, measure of everything, as the dictum from Protagoras of ancient times stated; all the way to Renaissance age to our own Founding Father of the Nation popularly known as “Mwalimu”, a sage, teacher, who taught likewise. It is an ideal of the nation worthwhile for the youth to pursue.

Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity and your time

Nsajigwa: Thanks back to you, you are welcome, Karibu.

On the Non-Religious and Religious Youth, and Dialogue, with Prof. Imam Syed Soharwardy

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

May 20, 2018

Prof. Imam Soharwardy is a Sunni scholar and a shaykh of the Suhrawardi Sufi order, as well as the chairman of the Al-Madinah Calgary Islamic Assembly, founder of Muslims Against Terrorism (MAT), and the founder and president of the Islamic Supreme Council of Canada. He founded MAT in Calgary in January 1998. He is also the founder of Islamic Supreme Council of Canada (ISCC).

Imam Soharwardy is the founder of the first ever Dar-ul-Aloom in Calgary, Alberta where he teaches Islamic studies. Prof. Soharwardy is the Head Imam at the Al Madinah Calgary Islamic Centre. Imam Soharwardy is a strong advocate of Islamic Tasawuf (Sufism), and believes that the world will be a better place for everyone if we follow what the Prophet of Islam, Muhammad (Peace be upon him) has said, "You will not have faith unless you like for others what you like for yourself." He believes that spiritual weakness in humans causes all kinds of problems.

Mr. Soharwardy can be contacted at soharwardy@shaw.ca OR Phone (403)-831-6330.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Although, humanists, as young people, want to find community and dialogue. That can come in the form of dialogue in community with young people who are from religious communities.

With respect to the Canadian Muslim community, what are some ways the young humanists and the young Muslims can have a respectful debate or dialogue, or a sit-down coffee to know someone of an opposite worldview to see where they are coming from and see that there are people behind these beliefs?

They are not simply beliefs.

Imam Syed Soharwardy: If you attend my congregation, especially the youth groups, you will see the lively discussion that I have with our students. There are teenage boys and girls up to 20 years old, or 18 or 19.

I have a son. I have a daughter. I have always asked my own son and daughter not to be a Muslim because your parents are Muslim. You want to be a Muslim because you believe in Islam and through your own conscience.

That is what it is. Being a Muslim and following the holy book, the Quran, in almost every volume of the holy Quran, it says, "Why don't you ponder? Why don't you think? Why don't you explore?" It says, "Why don't you explore the world?"

It says to question everything in the Quran, then you will get the answer. We must not be a blind follower of the religion, or humanism, or any belief, whether naturalist or spiritual belief.

We need to understand why we believe. Is our belief system natural, normal, common sense or not? That is why I love to talk anyone of any age, young or old, girls or boys, and answer their questions.

Islam, in my opinion, and, of course, people disagree with religion; I follow a natural, normal, common sense of way of life. Yes, there is a belief system. There is a concept of God. There is a concept of life after death.

However, the steps to those make sense in intellectual discussion, not simply blind following or blind beliefs because I was born into a Muslim family. It is because it is a natural, normal, and common sense religion.

Our boys and girls have lots of questions. I never say, "You cannot question."

I never discourage any youth who have questions in our congregation. You can question everything, every personality. You can question every symbol in Islam, but there is an explanation.

What happens, Scott, you talk to someone who does not understand his or her own religion. When the person him or herself is confused, somebody goes and asks the question, but the person cannot explain properly.

People think, "This is a stupid or a bad religion," because they do not know what they are believing in. But, by the Grace of God, I am not bragging about myself. I hope that when somebody will talk to me that I should be able to answer their questions in a normal, common sense way.

Jacobsen: I like talking to you. I find the conversations enjoyable.

Soharwardy: Thank you.

Jacobsen: With raising children within the Islamic context where questioning is allowed and encouraged, what can a young person do who happens to, unfortunately, not be encouraged in a home setting?

Where the faith is forced on them and no reasons are given except that the parents happen to believe it? I notice this in Canada. The two bigger faiths are Roman Catholicism and Protestantism.

I would assume in Sunni or Shia Islam. In many households, it would be akin to that, where the questioning is not encouraged and the young person may not have developed the capacity.

They may not have had capacity be encouraged to be developed to question those things. If they have a faith, they have a robust faith. If they do not have the faith, they feel okay and comfortable with their family in not believing.

Soharwardy: I completely agree with you. There will be families in the Muslim community who do not allow their children to question the faith. Some of the people and families are rigid. They have been told some things and simply follow it.

In my opinion, that belief is against Islam. It is against what the Quran teaches believers. That you should be pondering, exploring, and seeking. To be a blind follower, that person loses the spirit of Islam.

Some families, they do not allow thinking. It causes a serious harm to the boys and girl who have been forced to follow a belief system. Their heart is not in it.

In Islam, it is a requirement of Islam, a requirement of faith, to practice Islam based on your heart. In Islam, no good deed is accepted by God. Unless, your heart is in it. Prophet Muhammed (peace be upon him), he has said it. In one of his sayings, the acceptance of your actions depends on the intentions behind the actions.

If my intention is not to pray 5 times a day, but I have been forced to pray five times per day, that person should know, according to Islam, their prayers are not accepted.

Jacobsen: Wow.

Soharwardy: Nobody should be forced to pray five times per day or fast during the month of Ramadan. It is absolutely non-Islamic that somebody is forced to follow Islam. Islam does not recognize a person's faith if that person has been forced.

I always say that it bothers me, sometimes, when the newspapers talk about these terrorist groups. They are forcing people to convert to Islam. If people are forcing people to follow Islam, and if there is no compulsion in religion, then Islam does not recognize that person as a Muslim.

If I am forcing my children to pray five times per day because it is a requirement of faith, and if they do not want to because they do not have their heart in it, they may pray today and tomorrow.

When they grow up, they may develop a rebellion against the traditions, rituals, and prayers, which were forced on them while they were young. Why do we want to do these things while when they become adults, they will be against it.

I think it is very important for parents to teach their children explain, answer questions, let their children think and question. I remember, Scott, I had a debate with Irshad Manji. I think you know of her.

Jacobsen: Oh yes!

Soharwardy: She wrote a book, *The Problem with Islam Today*. I had a debate with her in her home in Toronto. She wrote that when she was a small child in B.C. Her mother sent her to a mosque to learn Islam.

When she had questions, the teacher said, "Shut up! Do not ask. This is in the Quran, follow it." This is Irshad Manji as a small child. It was normal for her as a child to ask those questions. The teacher messed her up.

The teacher could not answer the questions. What happened? She developed the attitude of rebellion against the faith. If people, if the Muslim parents, continue to do these things, then they will lose their children.

Their children will lose Islam. We should let them get the answers. If they do not want to do it today, then let them be as they are, God willing, once they understand, they will come back.

Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Imam Soharwardy.

Conversation with Bede Daniel Garcia — Member, Humanist Alliance Philippines, International

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

May 28, 2018

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: How did you become a humanist? I guess it was a very long process. I am, after all, a son of a devout Roman Catholic mother and an Ex-Priest... And I did live in a predominantly Christian country... I did not know anything about Atheism nor humanism when I was very young... I was, however, always curious. I would read on Philosophy and Epistemology during my math class. I would engage myself in topics where everyone else in my age group would not have done otherwise.

Bede Daniel Garcia: When I was in college, I met a girl who would “strengthen my faith in the Judeo-Christian Religion” ... I remember going to church every day of the week from 4pm — 8pm (Afternoon prayers, consecration of the blessed sacrament, Rosary, evening mass, and vespers) ... I would also stay over up until 10pm on Saturdays because I was the lead Bass for the church’s choir. I would come back Sunday morning to attend mass and sing in the choir....

It went to a point where I was being invited by the priests to join the seminary....

I guess, it all started when my mother was diagnosed with Cancer... I suddenly questioned everything even more... I went through the very same questions that every agnostic or atheist would go through... I won’t go into detail as the arguments become very repetitive....

I then started delving into humanism as a means for me to find an anchor/compass if you will... I was so used to being “guided” by doctrine that my psyche was not able to function without one...

humanism became my religion...however, i do not treat it as one... I treat it as a guiding principle. One that I would base my actions with.

....

Jacobsen: What is your own personal goal in the humanist movement?

Garcia: Sad to say, I have gone quiet... I have lied low...

My only goal is that I educate the people who I am surrounded with... those who have the interest to learn.. In my opinion, I will have started to act like the hypocritical religious folks who try to force you into believing what they believe in... If i force them into understanding and following what I think, then I would be no better than them...

Jacobsen: How did you stumble across HAPI? Who was your first contact? What was the interaction like?

Garcia: I was introduced to HAPI by Ms. Marissa Langseth....

I have know Ms. M during our previous conversations when I was still with another group called PATAS (Philippine Atheists and Agnostics Society)... But in my personal opinion, once a group becomes too grounded, they start to become very political...and that is why I left and became inactive...

Jacobsen: Why is humanism the correct view to you?

Garcia: Well...because humanism is tangible... when it comes to support, solving problems, anthropological issues...everything becomes very attainable because everything is limited by the simple fact that we are human...

i find solace in knowing that my support comes from my family and friends... i find comfort in knowing that what i do creates the meaning in my life... that all the problems are man-made and therefore needs man-made solutions... that I am who I am and that this is the only life that I can live...and that makes it even more precious... that my goal in life is to be happy and to create an impact to those closest to me...

Jacobsen: What are your hopes for the humanist movement in the Philippines in the coming years?

Garcia: With all due respect, when I held atheistic views. I have always thought that religion was the enemy. However, being a humanist... I only hope that people are guided with one single principle that I have learned throughout the years and throughout all the religions that i have studied... To always be kind to others and to treat them the way you want to be treated... To love humankind as this is the only thing that is certain in life...

Religion is a personal thing... and so is humanism and any other world view... the wonderful thing about being a humanist is that we see the beauty and good in all manmade precepts... religion, opinions, politics, and whatever else there is in the world...everything has had its beginnings and its end... I just hope that people begin to open their eyes and to act accordingly and to aim in the betterment of humankind... that is it...simple and straightforward... i do not wish ill on theists, agnostics, or atheists... i just hope that everyone will get along... everyone will find the common denominator that will bind us all together.. and that is being human... the finite nature of being human, to my mind, must be enough to bring us all together...

Conversation with the Co-Founder of the Upcoming United Atheists of Europe

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

June 1, 2018

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: How are sexual and gender identity minorities treated in the Muslim majority world?

Karrar Al Asfoor: They are treated in a very bad way. Their life is really miserable. They are considered evil individuals and less humans.

Jacobsen: How is this reflected in cultural representation and the social treatment?

Asfoor: They could be insulted, beaten or even assassinated. They suffered many large assassination campaigns by the religious militias in Iraq during the past years.

Jacobsen: What are some reflections of this in law in places like Iraq?

Asfoor: If someone is caught having sex with a same gender mate, they could be sentenced for five years of imprisonment and usually the judge sentences them five years and one day so that the 3 months' reduction from every year would be useless for them.

Jacobsen: Do these laws violate the UN Charter and rights of said sexual and gender identity minorities?

Asfoor: I would start with article one of the universal declaration of human rights, which states that all human beings are equal to each other. That's enough to have the same rights of other people, but these laws clearly violate the declaration. There should be more effective actions taken by the international community to protect those people, like sanctions for example.

Jacobsen: Who are some Iraq vanguards and spokespersons for the rights of the sexual and gender identity minorities?

Asfoor: Given that the Iraqi society is very strict, not only because of religion but also because it is a tribal society that consider "not being man" as a shame, many people avoid to talk even about the subject of the rights of the sexual and gender identity minorities.

Therefore, we are left with no one to speak for them, except very few not so famous social media activists. I am one of them. It is a really tough task because there is no tolerance for these minorities even among the Iraqi atheist community.

I would also mention Jaafar Al Qaraghuli who is an Iraqi poet and rights activist. He wrote several poems defending their rights.

Jacobsen: What are some books by Iraqi authors that speak about these issues in depth?

Asfoor: To my knowledge, unfortunately there are none.

Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Karrar.

Asfoor: It is such an honor for me to participate in this interview with you, many thanks, Scott.

An Interview with Scott Janis — Previous Officer, University of Wisconsin Whitewater's Secular Student Alliance

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

June 3, 2018

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Was there a family background in secularism and activism for it?

Scott Janis: There was not much background in secularism or secular activism in my family that I know of. Strictly speaking I was raised Christian, but religion was never a commanding influence on my life. My parents believed that I should be able to come to my own conclusions about religion, but I had read the Bible and even helped to teach Bible Study.

Jacobsen: What was your official position in the University of Wisconsin Whitewater's Secular Student Alliance?

Janis: I was the president of UW Whitewater's SSA chapter from the winter of 2014 to the summer of 2015.

Jacobsen: What tasks and responsibilities came with the position?

Janis: My official responsibilities were to lead meetings, reserve space for events, keep the officer team organized, maintain connections to possible speakers and activist groups, and to present justification for continued funding from SUFAC. It was also important however to make sure that everyone had a place and a voice in the group. That meant keeping up with members and their perspectives.

Jacobsen: What are your concerns for secularism on campuses now?

Janis: The big challenge for secular activism on college campuses is in my experience that active interest in groups like SSA can be ephemeral on smaller campuses like UW Whitewater. Even though there are plenty of people who believe in secularism, devoting an evening 2–4 times per month to focusing on secular activism is usually not enough to motivate students. For most active students, there are other groups with more visible missions that are also secular that compete for their time. The students that tend to be drawn to the SSA tend to be young people who have been brought up in families whose foundations are based in strict religious adherence. There seem to have been fewer students with that background on campus. I consider those to be points of evidence that college secularism is doing fine.

Jacobsen: What about in society at large (concerns for secularism)?

Janis: If you asked me this last year, I would say that I am not terribly concerned. Now I am becoming more concerned as I see more religious fundamentalism in positions of power and in no ambiguous terms focusing on instituting policy either to emulate or enable mandatory religious adherence on the grounds of some American spiritual identity. On the other side, I am concerned that secularism is becoming more of a peripheral issue to other causes. The example that comes to mind is Atheism+. However noble it may have been, it created division amongst secular activists that did not actually need to be there by packaging secularism with other causes and philosophies that a substantial portion of the movement either disagreed with or did not understand sufficiently

to be confident in. This has created multiple in-group/out-group relationships between activists that previously worked together very effectively. When groups have tried to incorporate these initiatives at the same time, it excludes those who are unwilling to disagree as friends and dilutes the potency of any one event or group to the point that it becomes white noise to the people we are trying to reach. I do not see us making any impact until we drop the politics of activism and just focus on coming together for whatever we can all agree on at the time.

Jacobsen: What were some, at the time of your tenure, activities run through the Secular Student Alliance at University of Wisconsin Whitewater?

Janis: During my time as the president of UWW SSA we had Robert Price as a speaker, participated in Ask an Atheist Day, and did an event for Easter where we handed out secular philosophy quotes in Easter Eggs. There was a debate with Dan Barker who appeared on behalf of the SSA, but that was run through the UWW Philosophy Club.

Jacobsen: What is the importance of building those mentor and mentee relationships for intergenerational ties among secular activists?

Janis: The reason that mentor and mentee relationships are so important is not just the guidance through old challenges, but to provide a context for where we are today. Many of the people who have mentored me had developed under far more hostile conditions to atheism than I experience today. It has helped me to appreciate how far we have come as well as why it is so important to protect that progress. The most useful mentorship that I received though came from my predecessor. It is difficult to come into a new group of people and attempt to lead them. When affiliation renewal and SUFAC budget forms started showing up, having the former president to walk me through it all made a world of difference.

Jacobsen: What are some possible future initiatives for the SSA at University of Wisconsin Whitewater?

Janis: I have kept in touch with a few people and have left the channels open for anyone looking for advice in the future. I left the group in the hands of a very capable student who has already demonstrated her ability to plan events and maintain regular meeting times. I have not heard of any plans for future events since graduating however.

Jacobsen: Any feelings or thoughts in conclusion?

Janis: There are two points that I can think of.

In a United States that has seen a tremendous advancement of secularism and scientific acceptance, it is important that we do not give into prejudice against those whose perspectives seem irreconcilable to our own. Free thinkers thrive best where we are encouraged to consider any idea without fearing ridicule or shunning. While it may seem fun to pull a “gotcha moment” on someone, these are ideas that go to the core of who we are. To force someone to defend a belief to protect their own identity is cruel and counterintuitive.

Lastly, I have some advice to anyone who may be considering joining an SSA chapter: it is a team effort. Officers can do the research and correspondence necessary to plan events and create opportunities to create real change to help people who may not have the privilege to spend an evening with fellow atheists, agnostics, and sceptics. To those trying to start or lead an SSA chapter: it is a challenge that takes a lot of work to rise to, but even when it doesn’t go perfectly it is still worth it. You are asking people that you do not know to have confidence in your leadership

and your ability to enrich their lives. The needs and interests of your members should inform your priorities as a leader. It is your job to find a way to meet those needs and advance along those interests together. Remember that your job isn't done just because you weren't re-elected or you graduated. Make sure that your successor knows that you are a resource for guidance, and be mindful to step back and let them lead.

Jacobsen: Thank you for your time, Scott.

10 Saudi Women Get Driver's Licenses as a Prelude to Equal Rights to Driving Access

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

June 4, 2018

The *National Post* reported on the driver's licenses for Saudi women.

10 women were issued their first driver's licenses in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The kingdom is in preparation mode to eliminate the ban on women driving. This will occur in about three weeks.

This amounts to the only ban of its kind in the world. Some Saudi women who protested were arrested and remain under arrest. The 10 licenses, interestingly enough, were issued to women who already held driver's licenses from other countries including Canada, Lebanon, the United States of America, and the United Kingdom.

They underwent a driving test and eye exam prior to the issuance of their driver's licenses. The General Department of Traffic in Riyadh — Saudi Arabia's capital city — issued them. No media from other countries were present at this event.

Women around Saudi Arabia have been preparing for the right to drive. This event will occur on June 24. Women have been attending female-only college campuses.

"Some are even training to become drivers for ride hailing companies like Uber. Saudi women had long complained of having to hire costly male drivers, use taxis or rely on male relatives to get to work and run errands," As noted in the reportage, "The surprise move to issue some women licenses early came as activists who had campaigned for the right to drive remain under arrest, facing possible trial."

17 people, according to Saudi Arabia's prosecutor, were detained in the prior weeks because of the suspicion that they may be working actively to undermine stability and security. Activists claim prominent women's rights campaigners were targeted.

The *National Post* stated, "The prosecutor's statement said eight have been temporarily released, while five men and four women remain under arrest. Among the women held since May 15 are Loujain al-Hathloul, Aziza al-Yousef and Eman al-Nafjan, according to people with knowledge of the arrests who've spoken to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity for fear of repercussions."

Those three women were among the most outspoken and known women's rights campaigners in the country. They risked arrest in order for Saudi women to be able to have the right to drive like men.

They have been calling for the guardianship laws to be abandoned. It gives the male relatives in the women's lives the final statement in who the women marry and how or when and if they travel outside the country.

"Three other veteran women's rights activists were briefly detained at the onset of the sweep. They had taken part in the first protest in 1990 against the kingdom's ban on women driving.

Nearly 50 women took part in that first driving protest some 28 years ago," the article said.

Many were arrested, lost jobs, had passports confiscated, and faced severe discrimination as well. This is all part and parcel of the increased movement for more equality and democratic progression.

“Promoting Humanism in the Modern World” by Humanist Students

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

June 7, 2018

The new event of the summer is out from Humanist Students. It is called “*Promoting humanism in the modern world*” it will look at the ways in which to capitalize on the increasing number of young non-religious people.

Those who have humanist values. Those who do not. However, those who do have them should be better understood by the general public and especially on their campuses throughout Europe.

Michael Sani, the Chief Executive of Bite and the Ballot and an award winning campaigner, will be speaking at the evening. In fewer than 10 years, Bite the Ballot inspired numerous young people to be able to get excited and so involved in the democratic process with voting.

A record number of young people have been registering to vote in the 107 General Election. Sani will talk about the necessary steps for the construction and maintenance of a successful campaign in order to effectuate positive social change in line with humanistic values.

WHAT: Promoting humanism in the modern world

WHERE: Aberdare Hall, Corbett Rd, Cardiff, CF10 3UP

WHEN: 14 July 10.15–16.30

The event will be open to the Humanist UK students. Friends or members of other related societies can [join for free now](#). It is free. However, RSVP ASAP. There is some minor accommodation for a limited few who may be travelling an extended distance for the event.

Please contact the Humanist Students Student and Youth Coordinator, Sean Turnbull, at sean@humanism.org.uk for more details.

A Cello Concert to Honor the Bangladeshi Bloggers

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

June 8, 2018

Activism comes in multiple forms. Art can be a form of self-expression, where the expression comes in the activist flavor. Many nonbelievers in Bangladesh write for their cause.

In solidarity and support of their activism, others perform musical performances for them. The composer Dorian Wallace did a premier of a new work.

Wallace dedicated the work to those who have been killed. The Bangladeshi bloggers being killed for words, for ideas, for expressing their views, and seeking to do so freely.

Religious terrorists who killed secular writers or bloggers. The cello concerto is called manusa. It incorporates Bengali rhythms and music played at some funerals.

Christian Author Argues Christians Should Keep Quiet About Church Abuse

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

June 9, 2018

The *Friendly Atheist* talked about the recent #ChurchToo movement building on the #MeToo movement. It is riding the proverbial coat tails of it. Many men “gain from defending toxic churches and preachers.”

However, some argue women and, of course, others should keep quiet about the abuse happening in churches. One woman who thinks so is Lisa Bevere. She is a best-selling author of Christian-oriented books.

Lisa Bevere is married to John Bevere. Her position, as summarized by *Friendly Atheist* is “stop talking about your sexual abuse. It makes the church look bad.”

Lisa Bevere quoted *The Godfather* and said, “You never go against the family.”

Bevere continued, “When we attack the church on social media, we are taking our mess-ups to a mob. Jesus already promised that the world is going to hate us. This does nothing but confuse the issue.”

The article argues that the exposing of abuse in the church does not amount to attacking the church. That churches working to hide the abuse of its staff in order to protect their reputation deserve exposing.

One reason may be to protect those going to that church or who may think of going to that church.

“Second, Jesus told his followers to expect to be hated in a time when being a Christian — that is, worshiping something or someone other than the Roman emperor — was punishable by death,” the *Friendly Atheist* explained.

Bevere wrote a post on Facebook to explain the importance of abuse victims going to the police. However, she considers the airing of dirty laundry a bad thing for the church.

The article concluded, “I can’t think of a single church that’s been affected by the #ChurchToo movement — that’s been exposed for harboring an abusive leader — that shouldn’t have been. They all deserved the reckoning. For once, churches should embrace more transparency. It’s better for everyone.”

Conversation with Brian Dela Masa — Member, Humanist Alliance Philippines, International

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

June 11, 2018

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Was there a family religious environment?

Brian Dela Masa: I wouldn't consider it as a religious environment. We just went through the motions like most Christians do. We try to go to mass every Sunday. We pray the rosary every Halloween.

Jacobsen: How did you come to find religion as not for you?

Masa: I started having doubts while watching bishops lie through their teeth about contraceptives on TV. I found a group in facebook that was also frustrated as I am about church leaders. It got me into researching about religion.

Jacobsen: Why do you think people are drawn to religion?

Masa: People can't help it. They were raised with some form of religious belief.

Jacobsen: What is the best argument for humanism?

Masa: We only have each other.

Jacobsen: How did you find HAPI?

Masa: I was a part of PATAS before it branched off to HAPI.

Jacobsen: Why is the organization important in a largely religious country?

Masa: People should know that there are alternatives to religion.

Jacobsen: Does religion have sway over politics there?

Masa: Yes. It took an eternity to pass the reproductive health bill. And we're the only country in the world without divorce.

Jacobsen: Is there a way in which religion can be weakened and more tolerable, and so away from the fundamentalisms that it is prone to?

Masa: People should be aware that religion and politics does not mix. That not favoring any religion would ultimately be beneficial to all religions.

Jacobsen: How many people believe in the devil, angels, ghosts, and so on in the Philippines?

Masa: Most Filipinos.

Jacobsen: Any final feelings or thoughts?

Masa: A person's beliefs is only a part of the person. We should always find the middle ground for us to get along.

Interview with McJarwin Cayacap — National Events Director/PR Officer at HAPI — Humanist Alliance Philippines, International

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

June 13, 2018

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: How did religion influence your own family background? What was it?

McJarwin Cayacap: I was baptized a Catholic as an infant. My mother was a devout Catholic; my father, so-so. But my aunts who lived with us were more devout than my mother. I was sent to schools run by Catholic orders — the Dominican Order, the Order of Saint Benedict and the Missionaries of La Salette. As a kid, I was a member of ‘Kids for Christ’ of the local diocese, while my parents were members of ‘Couples for Christ’. Other couples would come to our house, and organize prayer meetings and bible studies. My sister and brother were born in a Catholic hospital. When I had to get some stitches, my mother would send me to the same Catholic hospital, and would let nuns pray over me during surgeries. I did say that my father was a so-so; he left for South Korea when I was 5, so I have no idea of his religious practices when he worked there.

Jacobsen: How did religion enter your young life if at all?

Cayacap: The schools I went to had a general course for Religion or Christian Living Education. We would study passages and stories from the Bible, the Seven Sacraments, the Ten Commandments and the Eight Beatitudes. We would memorize prayers and litanies. We were expected to identify every piece that is on the Eucharistic table. We were required to attend Sunday mass and write a reflection paper about the homily. I was also a member of the school choir. I would give Bible readings at the lectern during school mass. We were required to dress up for the first Friday mass every month. That’s how religion entered my young life, and I accepted it whole-heartedly because I did not know better.

Jacobsen: Do you recall any moments of explicitly identifying as a humanist or an atheist?

Cayacap: I started intentionally missing the Sunday mass and not saying a single prayer. I felt it was a burden to make sure I do this and that on Sundays, before meal and before sleep. “Why can’t I just be good to myself and others?”, I asked myself. Whenever I was stuck in traffic, I would stare blankly at the window and think of the highs and lows of my life. Then, it dawned on me that something never made sense. When I had the opportunity to study the times of King Henry VIII of England and Pope Alexander VI, I grew disappointed with the Holy Mother Church. It was in 2014 when I first identified as atheist, but learning about secular humanism was the turning point of my life.

Jacobsen: When did you find the formal humanist community or at least the non-religious community in general in the Philippines?

Cayacap: Since I identified as atheist, I had been looking for people like me. I remember following Filipino Freethinkers and attending one of their film screenings in 2010. But since they mostly do meet-ups, talks and podcasts, I decided to look elsewhere. That’s when I found

Humanist Alliance Philippines, International. But I did not sign up immediately. I was giving it much thought because I was very busy with work, too. It was not until 2017 when I finally had the time to busy myself with something other than work.

Jacobsen: How has Marissa Torres Langseth been an inspiration for you?

Cayacap: I met Marissa after I met HAPI. I signed up as a volunteer who was eager to learn how else he could contribute to humanity. I never thought the founder nor any of the leaders would have reason to talk to me until my first assignment in December of 2017. I was sent to a city outside Manila for a few days to represent HAPI. The city was having its first LGBT summit, and HAPI was a donor. I took photos and wrote an article about it, and that was how I got Marissa's and the other leaders' attention. Eventually, I and Marissa started chatting and learned about each other's life story. What has inspired me is her courage to make HAPI happen and keep it despite a history of treachery and misgivings. She never lost the heart to protect her fellow Filipinos from the age-old misery disguised as religion. It is no easy undertaking but she still does it no matter what.

Jacobsen: What seem like some of the more important moves needed in the non-religious activism in the Philippines for increased equality of the humanists, atheists, agnostics, and other freethinkers?

Cayacap: There are a number of secular groups in the Philippines, but I must say it is a shame that they never have a united voice when asked about issues and policies that concern the common Filipino. We have, however, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines. The conference speaks for the Catholic faith about almost every issue and policy there are, and that is exactly what HAPI would like to have beginning in Manila, the nation's very capital. Soon, humanists, atheists, agnostics and other freethinkers can formally convene. Like the Congress, there will be representatives and committees as well. On a side note, HAPI has been offered to seek party-list representation in the Lower House. We are studying this offer very carefully now. All of us are on the same secular side; all we have to do is come together.

Jacobsen: What are your hopes for the future of the movements in the Philippines and elsewhere for that matter?

Cayacap: I hope that there will be a way for all secular groups to know each other and collaborate on a grand scale so we can approach every part of the world the appropriate way, and eventually get to the hearts and minds of many societies. In a decade or so, we expect to see more people identifying as non-religious. We can only attribute this to recent breakthroughs in science, and a more critically thinking generation of humans. Just the same, I hope for a united voice throughout the world.

Jacobsen: How can people start to get involved in their local non-religious community?

Cayacap: At HAPI, we walk the talk. We even act more than talk, and that is how we think people can best involve themselves in us. So, if a person is willing to volunteer time and effort for a good cause in spite of a rather busy schedule, then he or she is ever welcome in HAPI. For those who are not comfortable with physical activities, you can still join HAPI, especially in Manila, as we will do regular meet-ups to discuss important issues beginning this month of June. And for those not in the Philippines, know exactly what you can do — your natural talents and acquired skills — and find a local non-religious community where you can use some or all of those. That is

how you get to love what you do while inspiring goodness. That is how I am having a great time now with HAPI.

Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity and your time, McJarwin.

Bangladeshi Humanists in Defense

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

June 14, 2018

The Bangladeshi bloggers and writer, many of whom are quite likely humanists in some form or other and most probably non-religious, continue to gain international attention due to their difficulties.

Humanists UK reported on Shahzahan Bachchu. He was a poet and writer. Bachchu focused on secularism and huumanism. The past tense is used because Bachchu was shot dead.

He was in his home village at the time: Kakaldi, Bangladesh. This amounts to one of a number of humanist who have been murdered around the country throughout the last five years.

He is dead. Others are dead. Most by murder. People were murdered for their beliefs. In particular, the smarter and more intellectual members of the community with moral integrity in more difficult circumstances than those in West.

Dr. Norman Finkelstein seems correct in the examination of the West. It can be a synonym for soft: soft people. Not necessarily bad or pejorative, but softer and less resilient, especially if finding ourselves in similar circumstances.

The campaign of murders has taken several lives over the course of five years. Bachchu was known for writing books and publishing poetry. He published about freethinking and other things through the publishing house called Bishakha Prakashani.

He was the purportedly the Munshiganj district unit general secretary of the Communist Party.

“Reports of the attack state that four men on two motorcycles shot Shahzahan dead as he sat at a tea stall in his home village before fleeing the scene. Militants and religious extremists had made numerous deaths threats to Shahzahan for a number of years,” Humanist UK stated in an emailed updated, “Speaking to the *Daily Observer* in 2015, Shahzahan said: ‘Initially I ignored the threats... But after the killings of Washikur Rahman Babu and Ananta Bijoy, I took the matter seriously. Basically my family has become afraid’.”

Since only 2013, murders and attempted murders have been rampant on humanist bloggers — writers more properly — with gunshots and machetes, up close and far away in other words. Humanists are not safe, if public, in Bangladesh.

The email continued, “The Bangladeshi Government has been unable to provide adequate protection to humanists, has been reluctant to bring criminal charges against perpetrators, and in some cases has given in to the demands of Islamists by prosecuting non-religious individuals for blasphemy.”

The Foreign Commonwealth Office stated that there was condemnation of the attacks. Andrew Copson, who is the Chief Executive of Humanists UK, stated:

We are devastated that the spectre of violence has returned to the freethinking community in Bangladesh. Every humanist writer and secular activist and freethinking publisher who has been killed in recent years has been a defender of the rights of others, a lover of humanity and reason and justice. Their murders stand against all these universal values. We once again call on the government of Bangladesh to root out the Jihadi networks

perpetrating these crimes, and on the international community to bring pressure to bear on Bangladesh to protect and defends its humanists and human rights defenders.

Today as we mourn Shahzahan Bachchu, I would also like to pay tribute to others within the Bangladeshi humanist community who have suffered such violence including Asif Mohiuddin, Ahmed Rajib Haider, Sunnyur Rahamna, Shafiul Islam, Avijit Roy, Washiqur Rahman Babu, Ananta Bijoy Das, Niladri Chatterjee, Faisal Arefin Dipan, Ahmedur Rashid Chowdhury, and Nazimuddin Samad.

Humanism Can Unite the World, Or Parts of It

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

June 19, 2018

WalesOnline reported on the possibility of Humanism providing for the need of unity and tolerance in the modern world.

Especially with the increasing divisions seen in the world with the increase connectivity of globalism and the onslaught of technological advances, we can only move forward with the encroachment of the Fourth Industrial Revolution and the knowledge economy.

These changes seem inevitable. The question is less if and more when, and the answer: sooner than later. As the article states, "...it is sometimes easier to become entrenched in narrow beliefs and to ignore the expanse of thought and imagination that there is in the world and the commonality of libertarian belief that there is in the world whether that be related to a belief in God or a rational belief in none."

However, argues the article from the perspective of Humanism, it can give scientific and rationalist basis for the development of creativity, free thought, and the proper framework for the affirmation of modern human rights for people, for individual human beings.

"Humanism is ethical; it affirms the worth and dignity and autonomy of the individual and the right of every human being to the greatest possible freedom compatible with the rights of others," the article explained.

The purpose is to use the developments of science in a humanistic framework with compassion to direct the neutral tools and technologies of science more towards their constructive future.

Democracy and human rights become the societal and universal versions of these with the solutions to the world's problems from them. Do theocracies advance democracy? No. Are they humanist? No.

In this, humanism does more readily support democracy and human rights than some of the other belief systems. Historically, this does seem to be the case.

"It believes that with personal liberty comes social responsibility. It is undogmatic, imposing no creed and is committed to education free of indoctrination," the article reported, "It is like, ethical socialism, a lifestyle, aimed at maximising fulfilment through the cultivation of ethical and creative way of living and offers and ethical and rational means of addressing the challenges of our times."

The inequities of the world in terms of the division of resources continue to separate with the wealthy outpacing the themselves in avarice. "We live in a world where it is predicted that by 2030 50% of the world's wealth will be in the hands of 1% of the population. Half the world flourishes whilst half the world starves," the reportage stated.

The societies of the world become less stable and the nationalism arise for various reasons with one being the continued discontent of the individuals involved in this endeavor.

Humanism may provide a framework upon which to provide for those needs, at least as a tacit philosophy embedded in universal human rights, science, and compassion. It would necessitate the reduction of the global inequality seen in the modern world.

Humanism and AI

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

June 20, 2018

The modern technological landscape continues to alter. The world with it. There has been use of the term “Humanism” to describe the orientation of giant technological companies in the development of artificial intelligence.

The *Washington Post* stated, “Tom Gruber of Apple describes Siri as “humanistic AI — artificial intelligence designed to meet human needs by collaborating [with] and augmenting people.”

Satya Nadella, who is the Chief Executive of Microsoft, said, “Human-centered AI can help create a better world.” In short, the rhetoric around artificial intelligence amounts to the utilization of the terms “humanism” and “humanistic,” or “human-centered,” to substantiate the mission of the AI development.

The *Washington Post* argues the terms such as the aforementioned emerge in the conversation around the bringing of humanity together. However, some important points come in the form of the rhetorical aspect and the connection to the reality of it.

“The word “human” crops up in conversations across the technology industry, but it’s not always clear what it means — assuming it means anything at all,” the article opines, “Intuitively comprehensible, it sounds nonthreatening, especially in contrast to alienating jargon such as ‘machine learning.’”

The orientation of the larger companies is proposed to be for ergonomics. The development of technologies by and for human needs and wants. This becomes the basis for the use, even abuse, of the terms humanistic, argues the article.

“But calling the results “humanistic” is ultimately rhetorical sleight of hand that suggests much and means little. Unless these companies reconsider their underlying approach, their words will remain empty,” the reportage continued, “Among the big tech companies, Google has voiced the clearest expression of the idea of humanistic AI. In March, Li, chief scientist for AI research at Google Cloud, penned a New York Times op-ed.”

Google did not renew the Department of Defense contract and set forth ethical guidelines for the development of technologies not for weapons. AI weapons would be a bad future, a non-positive for humans’ future.

However, is this the case? Does the non-renewal of the contract and the orientation of the technological curve make for a humanistic technology movement?

The *Washington Post* explained, “Consider computer vision, a type of AI that was key to Project Maven (and is central to self-driving cars). Photographic images from cameras mounted on drones are widely used to gather visual evidence and provide forensic truth value for military decision-makers.”

The work requires a huge amount of human labor to make sense of the information collected. There are many cases in which a drone has misidentified a target. The question is the human value framework.

Although, as a small interjection, people have different values from one another. Thus, the conception of a single human-values framework implies a universalization of human values.

What if these human-values and humanistic values purported to represent all humankind simply reflect the orientations of the billionaires and technology companies?

Chat with Isaiah Akorita — Head, Media Campaign Team, Atheist Society of Nigeria

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

June 21, 2018

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: If you could take a single person in Nigeria who has spread humanism the most, who is it? Why them?

Isaiah Akorita: Leo Igwe. I choose him because at the time when most of us were still finding our feet in this highly religious atmosphere, Leo Igwe was already championing the fight against child abuse in the form of witchcraft accusations and taking his activism into the international community.

Jacobsen: How do the youth view religion in Nigeria? Is humanism more of a minority belief system than the others?

Akorita: Religion is still a very huge part of the life of the youths in Nigeria. Our university campuses are filled with religious fellowships. Humanism is still a tiny minority in Nigeria.

Jacobsen: Are the youth more likely to reject religion than the older generations?

Akorita: Yes. We have accounts of many youths who have started questioning their religious upbringing due to contact with Humanists and atheists on social media. We can't say the same for the older generations.

Jacobsen: How do the irreligious in Nigeria mobilize and bring themselves together for a common front in the light of the massive 'lobby' for the religious in the country?

Akorita: We are only just starting to take our activism beyond social media into the offline socio-political sphere. We hope to have a powerful voice soon and so far; it is looking good for us.

Jacobsen: How does religion influence politics in Nigeria?

Akorita: Oh. Our politics cannot be separated from the two major religions here. Christianity and Islam have a firm grip on the policies of this country.

Jacobsen: Any final thoughts or feelings?

Akorita: I think the Humanist movement in Nigeria is starting to gain serious traction and I'm hopeful we'll start to make serious impacts soon. With the formation of the Atheist Society of Nigeria and the soon to be approved Humanist Association, we're definitely on the right track.

Jacobsen: Thank you for your time, Isaiah.

Akorita: You're welcome.

Humanism, Technological Advance, Globalization, and Cultural Milieu

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

June 23, 2018

WalesOnline reported on the increases in divisiveness and intolerance spreading over the globe.

This has a number of co-occurring factors and influences. One of the big ones is the increased proliferation of communications technologies and the development of science implemented in technology.

These combined can increase the efficiency of physical and informational travel. That creates a world more global, smaller to transmit information or travel from point-to-point.

“In a world of increasing intolerance and division, a world undergoing dramatic change due to technological advance and globalization, it is sometimes easier to become entrenched in narrow beliefs,” *WalesOnline* stated, “and to ignore the expanse of thought and imagination that there is in the world and the commonality of libertarian belief that there is in the world whether that be related to a belief in God or a rational belief in none.”

The article continues to argue in favor of humanism, noting its foundation as a long-term tradition for the free thought community. That has been a source of inspiration for some of the great minds and thinkers in the history of the world.

That is, it also created the foundation for the affirmation of the scientific revolution or empirical revolution more precisely.

The reportage explained, “Humanism is ethical; it affirms the worth and dignity and autonomy of the individual and the right of every human being to the greatest possible freedom compatible with the rights of others.”

As noted in [an earlier article](#), but this also extends into the entertainment world where the technological advancements, communications technologies infusions, and globalization of culture show themselves in full force, the cultural milieu has moved from the local to the global.

Majalla Magazine provided some insight into this. It talked about the creative performances of the night. The renditions of various music hits and the ways in which this was “broadcast into millions of American homes.”

It is interesting to note that statement. Something not possible centuries ago. Technology permits the closeness of and pervasiveness of shared experience. That forms a basis for humanism, non-explicit — quiet, in the veins of the society.

There were speeches and talks about diversity and representation of peoples not typically seen on the scene decades before, where the venues were blocked from them. Not these people as individuals alone, but also people who look like them, diversity and representation does not by necessity reduce the need for talent.

Talented people from a broad range of backgrounds.

The importance of diversity and representation was underlined repeatedly throughout the night. Even so-called trivial social media technology showed other items of interest, the article reported.

“Along with the politics and pathos, threads of whimsy, humor and hope wove through the proceedings on the heels of the hashtag #TonyDreaming,” It stated, “At the invitation of Groban and Bareilles, fans tweeted images of themselves engaged in theater, often at very young ages, and mostly looking earnest and hopeful. The results were projected here and there throughout the night, reminding viewers at home, and the famous faces in the room, of the power of theater to unite, even as it celebrates difference.”

Difference and unity, technology and culture sent to millions for a shared experience, this gives an impression of a silent humanism on the air, riding technology’s waves, and over the world’s shared airwaves.

Space Warfare Remains Possible

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

June 24, 2018

The Atlantic reported on the International Space Station (ISS) orbiting the Earth.

Six busy bees work inside of the ISS. As these are some of the smartest and most talented people from each country, they are important. They take part in this space odyssey.

The group of six travel at thousands of miles per hours. These amount to peaceful ends. Other people want space for different purposes. One of which is for war.

If a single country owns the orbits of the Earth, then they own the surveillance of it. They have the strategic advantage of space-based weaponry too.

The Trump Administration has talked about the so-called Space Force or a Space Corps.

“The debate in Congress over whether to create a Space Corps comes at a time when governments around the world are engaged in a bigger international struggle over how militaries should operate in space,” as described in *The Atlantic*, “Fundamental changes are already underway. No longer confined to the fiction shelf, space warfare is likely on the horizon.”

These produce concerns for the potential for Sino-Russian relations to increase in intensity. A multinational military response to a space warfare initiative by the United States.

There are international agreements about the operations of war in land, water, and air. But this leaves open questions about space. Few countries can access low Earth orbit.

Few have a space program. Even those that do, like South Africa, it cannot compete. The US, Russia, and China dominate space. So, Sino-Russian relations will see reactions to US innervations into space.

Astronauts get reactions from cosmonauts and sinonauts.

The article stated, “It’s presumed that International Humanitarian Law would apply in outer space — protecting the civilian astronauts aboard the International Space Station — but it’s unclear whether damaging civilian satellites or the space environment itself is covered under the agreement.”

The guidelines for war in space are limited. They are outdated too. How could they not be? With fewer contenders and rules, what would stop a nation from domination of low Earth orbit?

No military conflict took place in space; not in a major way.

The article stated, “In 1962, the United States detonated a 1.4 megaton nuclear weapon 250 miles above the Earth’s surface.”

1/3 of the satellites orbiting around the Earth got obliterated. One region of space became poisoned with radiation for several years. It came from *one bomb*.

US, Russia, and others signed a treaty to not test nuclear weapons in space. North Korea and China did not sign it.

“In 2007, China tested an anti-satellite weapon, a conventionally-armed missile designed to target and destroy a satellite in orbit. In the process, it annihilated an old Chinese weather satellite and created high-velocity shrapnel that still threatens other satellites,”

The Atlantic explained.

What of the consequences for tests, debris created, and damage to satellites from tests?

Do we have any treaties for this signed onto by everyone?

With space warfare, the US may lose out the most. It can gain by establishment of norms. But it can also lose a lot more. Because half of the satellites in space are owned by the US.

Or they remain owned by US-based companies. Two times as many as Russia or China together. All modern conveniences rely to some extent on them.

The article said, “When the U.S. military deploys troops overseas, satellite communications connect forces on the ground to control centers. When North Korea launches an intercontinental ballistic missile, the U.S. and its allies depend on early-warning satellites to detect it.”

With agreements signed onto for limits, everyone can be safer. But the US spent lots of money developing space warfare-intended technologies.

This can cost them money. Lots and lots of money, it creates problems. The first human satellite flew into orbit in 1957. Then the US and Russia owned 9/10ths of the world’s satellites.

That’s a lot. It is a helluva of a lot. But the race began for the perfection of ownership of space. This race was based on fear of the other.

Science, discovery, and diplomacy seem less reasonable than deterrence and control. Starting in 1990, the second stage of the space era began. Now, the landscape of low-Earth orbit is conquered by many actors.

Still the US dominates it, the private companies and other nations take part in it. It is a diversified landscape. Private companies have more satellites in orbit than militaries.

“More players in space — particularly more unpredictable players — means more opportunities for aggressive behavior,” the article said, “like developing anti-satellite technologies or hacking satellite communications.”

Iran or North Korea could function and operate in ways not seen before. This escalation in space age technology. This spread of it. It can lead to potential standoffs. This was known from the start.

The article explained, “The Outer Space Treaty of 1967 was written to govern a space era far different from the one seen today. Since 2014, a majority of space launches — civil, commercial, and military — have come from outside of the United States and Russia.”

There are work to create a functional guidebook for operation in space have not worked. Russia and China made a proposal for the proper conduct in space. However, the US did not sign onto the proposal. When the US gave explicit support for the EU 2014 proposal for the governed use of conventional weapons in orbit, Russia and China did not agree either.

The article concluded, “Since the congressional debate about a Space Corps, people have been taking the prospect of a war in space seriously, in a way we haven’t seen before. Now we should start talking about how to avoid that war. To prevent conflict in the upper atmosphere, all

potential adversaries — the United States, China, North Korea, Iran, Russia, the EU — need to align, and agree on norms of behavior. They need rules.”

India Listed as the Most Dangerous Nation for Women

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

June 26, 2018

According to *CNN*, India has become, or maybe remains, the single most dangerous nation on the face of the Earth for women.

This is based on a survey reported on by relevant experts. The Thomson Reuters Foundation produced a survey of 550 experts on women's issues, which found India as the most dangerous for women in a number of particular areas.

For one, the sexual violence domains, where women are the vast majority of the victims around the world. Another area is in human trafficking for sexual slavery. That is mostly women and girls too.

The other areas are for domestic work, forced labor, and then forced marriage. Each disproportionately women and girls who tend not to have any or if they do few rights in the international scene.

There were other areas in the research domains. One was the look into the dangers for women regarding the cultural traditions that impact women in a negative way and, of course, disproportionately.

There were a number of unique, almost, to women areas including acid attacks against them, female genital mutilation, infibulation, clitoridectomy, child marriage and then physical abuse.

These are the contexts for women and girls, which are, for the most part completely different than the concerns for the men and boys in the world and in particular in India, which is one of the most populace nations in the entire world.

Thus, the concern is amplified based on the number of women in the country being subjected to these brutal, harsh, and unjust conditions. It moved up from fourth to first place in terms of danger for women regarding the comparison between the survey from seven years ago.

Nine of the ten countries with the worst conditions for women were in Asia and the Middle East and Africa. Interestingly, number ten in the world was the United States of America coming in at 10th place.

It is the only country from the West where this is the case. The Thomson Reuters Foundation claimed this was the reason for being a catalyst country for the #MeToo movement.

The top ten countries are as follows:

1. India
2. Afghanistan
3. Syria
4. Somalia
5. Saudi Arabia
6. Pakistan

7. Democratic Republic of Congo
8. Yemen
9. Nigeria
10. United States

The Use of Religion to Berate, Bludgeon, and Bombard Everyone Else

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

June 28, 2018

The *Des Moines Register* talked about a woman who was raised as a Lutheran from a first-person perspective.

The woman, Kimberly Glassman, pointed to a slippery slope argument of some of the Conservatives. She characterized the argument in the following terms, “If people can love and marry people of their same sex, then there’s nothing to stop them from demanding the right to love and marry their parakeets or their microwave ovens.”

She does not agree with this argument. Glassman argued the slipperiest slopes come with religion. The example being the Supreme Court in the United States with the interpretation of religion and the phrase of “sincere and meaningful belief.”

The belief does not have to incorporate a Deity, some ultimate existent thing. Since the idea is a sincere and meaningful belief without the need for a Supreme Being, Glassman notes that this is not even needing to be in the scope of the First Amendment in terms of the gathering together of a bunch of like-minded individuals.

Then these people can get a bunch of superb tax breaks and protections against the social and cultural milieu’s criticism.

Glass queries, “Don’t want to get your children vaccinated? Declare a sincerely held belief. Don’t want to bake a wedding cake for two women? Trot out your abiding faith in a just and loving — of some people — God. Don’t want to uphold your Hippocratic oath if the patient doesn’t conform to your view of right and normal? Get Congress to pass a law protecting your appalling lack of ethics or simple humanity as a ‘religious freedom.’”

She further notes that this does not have to include the Bible or the Quran, or a Theity, but, rather, simply needs to include religion.

She relates the idea of White supremacists who remain a “clear and present danger” to American society. Glassman imagines seeing people flying a Nazi flag while walking down the flag.

“If I were to see one walking down the street flying the Nazi flag, would I be within my First Amendment rights to hit him with my car? Probably not. What if I were an EMT and my ambulance came upon him bleeding in the street? Could I refuse to administer medical assistance or carry him to the hospital?”

She asks these great questions. Glassman does this to illustrate the absurd privilege of religion above other systems and categories in the United States to exemplify the undue deference to religion.

Glass man continued, “Your sincerely held belief might be that left-handedness is the mark of Satan. After all, only about 10 percent of the population is left-handed. It is clearly not ‘normal,’” she said.

What about the banning of the scissors for the left-handed and the blacklisting of the switching sides baseball players when at the plate to bat? There could be the denial of jobs and housing to those who are left-handed and why not. I would be a faith-based initiative and religious freedom issue.

Why is religious freedom a valid excuse for bigotry and denial of the fundamental rights of others?

Case Filed Against Babu Gogineni

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

June 30, 2018

According to *The News Minute*, A case has been filed against Babu Gogineni for hurting religious sentiments.

Many rationalists and humanists have expressed solidarity with Gogineni. He is known as a human rights activist. The activists showing solidarity condemn the actions using the police by religious fundamentalists to silence critics.

The article stated, “Members of the South Asian Humanist Association, Science for Society, Jana Vignana Vedika and Indian Humanists held a joint press meet at the press club in Somajiguda, where lawyers representing Babu were present. Film critic and actor Mahesh Kathi was also present.”

Gogineni got taken by police, recently, because of accusations against him of both sedition and the hurting of religious sentiments, and some other charges.

“The petitioner, Veera Narayana Chowdary, claimed that his religious sentiments were hurt after watching Babu’s earlier speeches, which prompted him to file the case,” the article continued.

Gogineni and others believe that he has the rights of freedom of expression. The lawyers for him believe that this case will not stand in court. However, this may set a precedent or example, along with others, to silence any critics of the fundamentalist religious authorities.

One lawyer said, “The police which is investigating the case will come to a conclusion on how many charges will stand after scrutiny and how many will not, following which they will approach the court.”

This is a crucial time for Gogineni because the attack came when he could not defend himself. Some view this as an attack on Gogineni as well as a larger attack on humanism and rationalism in the early 21st century.

The president of the Lakshman Reddy, Jana Chaitanya Vedika, reported that he has known Gogineni for a long time and has worked with him around the world. The work has been focused on human rights and humanism.

They spoke together at many villages against superstitions and, indeed, their negative consequences on communities. With this form of attack by police, this becomes an attack on the larger freethinking community.

Gogineni’s allies came to the Cyderabad Police Commissioner VC Sajjanar and with a representation submitted to him. Sajjanar stated that he would look closely at the case.

“The lawyers present also explained that the petitioner, Veera Narayana Chowdary, had filed a private complaint in court, following which the police were ordered to look into the allegations,” the article stated, “As it was a court order, the police first registered a case and then began investigation. The police also informed that the petitioner was yet to submit his evidence to them.”

The full listing of the charges are as follows:

The case was registered under Sections 121 (waging, or attempting to wage war, or abetting waging of war, against the Government of India), 124a (sedition), 153a (promoting enmity between different groups on grounds of religion), 153b (imputations, assertions prejudicial to national integration), 292 (obscenity), 293 (sale, etc, of obscene objects to young person), 295-A (deliberate and malicious acts, intended to outrage religious feelings of any class by insulting its religion or religious beliefs), 406 (criminal breach of trust), 420 (cheating), 504 (intentional insult with intent to provoke breach of the peace) and 505 (statements conducing public mischief) of the Indian Penal Code.

Edgardo Reguyal Cayetano -Member, Humanist Alliance Philippines, International

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

July 4, 2018

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: How did you become involved in the humanist community in the Philippines?

Edgardo Reguyal Cayetano: To kill my curiosity, I searched for atheist groups in the Philippines and I come across a few including PATAS, ARMMC, I can't remember exactly how I become a member of HAPI. But one thing I'm sure is when i saw Jamie's post about her charity projects, i become interested and feel the urge to chip in a little bit to help out.

Jacobsen: How much does religion, such as the Roman Catholic faith, influence political life in the Philippines?

Cayetano: Religion and Politics are 2 legs chasing each other in the Philippines. It is either the politicians using religion or religion using politicians

I mean, religious institutions

Jacobsen: What do you consider the strongest are you meant for reason and against things like superstition or magical thinking? Why do so many Filipinos find magical thinking convincing? In fact, in a more humorous note, why does most of the world?

Cayetano: In the world of make believe, nothing is impossible. If you have nothing, you can only dream. That is magic! Poverty is one reason why people tend to believe in magic, wishing there's a quick and easy way out. Ignorance is another, the lack of education and understanding makes people vulnerable.

Jacobsen: What kind of work do you do with the humanist community within the Philippines?

Cayetano: Physically I'm not involved in any work with HAPI i can only send support due to my busy work loads.

Jacobsen: What kind of charity events have you done in the Philippines before being formally a part of the humanist community in the Philippines?

Cayetano: I have been involved in person with charity events like feeding programs and relief good distribution in some areas of the Philippines.

Jacobsen: What is the organization The Good Fortune?

Cayetano: The Good Fortune was formed and organized here in Australia by myself and a friend. Its main purpose is to help out poor street kids in Manila doing feeding programs. It all started when my friend was touched with sadness looking at the kids begging for food. He then contacted me and a few more friends to help out. We come up with the feeding idea and we did it several times until we decided we need to continue and keep helping as much as possible when we can.

Jacobsen: What are your hopes for you the humanist movement in the Philippines? What can be an effective means for the young and the old to get together and rapidly change the Filipino culture for more secularism and set example for other countries throughout the world?

Cayetano: My wish is to see the rest of the world living a free life without fear being persecuted for something they haven't done. Eradicate religion as much as possible and replace it with a much more effective human government concentrating on equality and safety of everyone.

Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Edgardo.

Mark Richardson — Member, Humanist Alliance Philippines, International

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

July 10, 2018

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: What is your own affiliation or relationship with the non-religious community in the Philippines?

Mark Richardson: My connection with the Philippines started when I was introduced to a Filipina, at IDIC a community group, mainly for seniors, here in Seattle. I actually can't remember how my association with Marissa and the HAPI group started except to say it was through Facebook somehow.

Jacobsen: What is your own perspective on Filipino lack of religion? That small number of people who do not adhere to a formal religion?

Richardson: I consider the atheists, humanists and freethinkers in the Philippines to be amongst the most respected of groups in my mind, not quite up there with ex-Muslims, but close. They, especially the youth, are at the front line in the battle with the church establishment. The saturation of religion throughout Filipino society and the immense societal pressure to conform from family, friends and community elders must make any expression of secular thought very difficult. It must take much courage for anyone to break out. I know Filipinos are one, if not the, greatest user of social media in the world and I hope they use this to counteract the influences of religion.

Jacobsen: What do you consider the best argument for reason and against superstition?

Richardson: I think Epicurus' concise logic on the existence of evil adequately deals with the notion of God, the "loving", omnipresent, omnipotent entity featured in the monotheistic religions. Other less perfect and less powerful entities that might be called gods I dismiss like they are in science fiction shows like Star Trek TOS (the episode "Who Mourns for Adonis" springs to mind) where false gods only appear god-like by having more advanced technology. I must make it clear, at this point, that I do not want to take away a person's need to have faith and believe in whatever they want. Without some form of sinister mind-control this would be impossible anyway. What is absolutely essential, though, is that this religious freedom does not impinge on the other aspects of our lives. Both historically and currently, it is clear that religious dogma, or interpretations of it, has led to persecutions towards minority groups, racism, generally bigoted behavior, hostility and, unfortunately, much bloodshed. The wall of separation between church and state is a concept of paramount importance that must be maintained and defended. Laws and public policy in general must be determined through secular thought only.

Jacobsen: Do you have any recommendations for the young in terms of building a coalition of activists for secularism?

Richardson: Continuing the great work of the HAPI group (and others) with the focus on educational programs for the young, and building up the grass roots activism, is the best way forward I think. One concern I have is that the secular groups do not become too fragmented and thus lose the ability to effect change. This is an issue for the secular movement in the USA, in my opinion, and there is a definite benefit of having strength in numbers. With a strong grass roots

membership and a minimum of organizations to represent them, I think it will be easier to influence the politicians, law makers and educators.

Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Mark.

On Freedom of Expression with Faisal Saeed Al Mutar — Founder, Global Secular Humanist Movement

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

July 17, 2018

Scott Douglas Jacobson: With respect to social media and humor, social media has positive aspects and negative aspects. The positives are the way in which people can mobilize and communicate with one another.

The negatives are some of the trivial aspects of it. With regards to the humor for building community and mobilizing people, as well as bridging divides, what are some examples of this that can be used as lights — to focus on in terms of building those communities rather than keeping oneself closed into one's own community such as banning and shutting down people online as well as speakers in person at events?

Faisal Al Mutar: So, humor is one of the best ways to talk about serious subjects, especially the subjects that I touch upon from the Middle East to extremism to terrorism. These subjects tend to be dry.

If I have some spice, then people get excited about them, which makes using humor a necessity. I was making a joke about Buddhist monks. I started, "If you do not like ISIS, you should join them, because change comes from within."

As a result, many people were offended by this post. Some had assumed because of my name that I am a Jihadist who is trying to recruit people to ISIS. The comments section, some people thought that the joke itself was offensive.

Because I am trivializing the experiences of some individuals. Unfortunately, because some of these jokes, some of them require some understanding of some things. The joke is, it is about how many Buddhists talk about subjects of change from within and so on.

With text, many jokes fly over many people's heads. As a result, the reaction of reporting seemed immediate for many people, especially when you have a larger following. If you get reported by 1,000 people, even though it is trivial, it is 1% percent of my following.

However, it is enough for some pages to get shut down. I have not been banned permanently, but I have been banned for three months, the maximum. With the way social media and people are responding to this, it was not positive in my opinion.

Humor is dark, sometimes. It depends on what dark humor. Naturally, it is trying to expose their subjects. Not necessarily trivialize it, many people are not aware of it. For example, there is this meme that I like.

It has like a depiction of Joseph Stalin. It says, "Some say communism is like food. Not everyone gets it."

Jacobsen: [Laughing].

Al Mutar: When you look deeper to many of these jokes, you will see that what is being exposed is the totalitarian version of communism. The fact that many people under communism do not get food. It is not about making fun of people who are hungry.

It is a result of some of these complications. Unfortunately, some of the people immediately look at what is said alone. They interpret everything as literal statements. I am not trying apologize for the holy book, but it is about the context. It is about the interpretation.

As a result, people who have little to no sense of humor, and no understanding of how dark humor works, react with reportage. Sometimes, there is the case of Ellen DeGeneres. I do not know if you know her. There can be misunderstandings.

There was a Kenyan athlete who was considered one of the fastest people in the world. He is athletic. He runs fast. DeGeneres made this like graphic. He was holding her, running.

So, she was saying, “Wow, this guy is running so fast.”

People interpreted from the social media environment: “Oh, look at the white woman using the black man to run.” They made a connection with slavery and racism. That is the opposite. It has nothing to do with slavery.

Nothing to do with the subject altogether. Yesterday, Heineken pulled its ad, which is for the light beer. They said, “Lighter is better.” Many of us like light beer. It is a good targeted advertising. However, some people interpreted that, “lighter is better,” means people with lighter skin are better than people with dark skin.

This is the worst possible interpretation of what is being said. The way some of these social media companies responded to the court of public opinion. If enough people are offended, that is enough for some of the posts to be taken down.

Scott: It reminds me of some statements of some people. I mean, every movement, every population has extremists. The point is not to let the extremist 1) drive the conversation or b) be the leadership.

Faisal: Unfortunately, this is an issue for many of us. We get into these situations. Sometimes, social media amplifies the scope of the problem. Let’s say a thousand people. Say I make a post about doing Trump or US politics, any subject in the world. Then 1,000 people offended.

On a major scale, if your following is 100,000 or above, then only 1,000 people are offended. You only offended 1 percent. But if the 1 percent were mobilized enough, all of them like each other’s posts. Then it looks like it is a big problem. It looks like everybody hates you.

But what’s happening in social media, everybody has the same equal amount of space when they come in as the other person. You could be Barack Obama and the other guy is a crackhead. They both have the same amount of section in the conversation.

It creates the illusion that there is an equal quality post. Sometimes, people get deluded, including social media companies. They get deluded when they see like “Oh, there is a controversy being created.”

But generally, it is small population. People probably do not care if Heineken made a “lighter is better” ad. However, there are 1,000 people. However, that is a small population. There are 2 billion users on Facebook. Only 1,000, it is not a big number.

Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Faisal.

Interview with Justin Trottier — Executive Director, Canadian Centre for Men and Families

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

July 18, 2018

Justin Trottier is Executive Director of the Canadian Centre for Men and Families, a men's health and social service facility. The Centre is an open, inclusive and space serving as a hub for counselling, legal aid, fathering programs and trauma support groups. He is Founder of the Canadian Association for Equality, a registered educational charity that seeks to integrate boys and men into our efforts to advance gender equality. Justin has played a leadership role in a variety of humanist, secularist and skeptic organizations, appearing frequently in the media advocating for church-state separation, fundamental freedoms and humanist ethics.

There is the crowdsourced funding campaign for their men's shelter campaign [here](#).

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: When it comes to the Canadian Centre for Men and Families, what was the inspiration for founding it? What is its current status?

Justin Trottier: This goes back to 2013 or even earlier than that. There had been a sense of the social justice organizations, which I cut my teeth in. I had been discussing the missing element of equality and justice was men's issues.

It was the elephant in the room. We talked about women's rights. We talked about LGBTQ rights. There was another piece to those issues to do with boys, men, and fathers. I came to feel that piece was being ignored and marginalized.

By marginalizing it, if we did not, we would be more effective in our women's and LGBTQ programs. Those issues affecting all peoples. I would raise issues and perspectives having to do with this population.

I was surprised those comments were not welcome. That is what led me to think, "Maybe, I need to do this in a separate organization." At some future point, I would like to bring the issues together.

However, if there is this knee-jerk hostility to raising issues affecting boys, men, fathers, and families, and if that is where we are now, then, maybe, we need a separate approach to raising public awareness and consciousness about issues affecting boys, men, fathers, and families.

This planted the seed for establishing the Canadian Centre for Men and Families. It has been running for three years. We run important mental health programs, social service programs. They address some gaps in health and social services for boys, men, and fathers.

For example, we run the only program in Toronto focused on divorced or separated fathers. We know the rates of family breakup are high. We know this creates challenges and stress for all members of a family: mothers, fathers, and children.

There are really very few programs for fathers, to support dads. So, they can provide the best possible parenting for their children in a family breakup situation. We run a father involvement program focusing on that. Another example, we run the only program in Toronto for male victims of domestic violence.

There are ones for females. However, there is only one — the one we provide — for male victims. We wanted to fill the critical gaps, where we can make the most positive difference in the lives of men and their families.

Then we create interventions. I provided some examples of the services provided here.

Jacobsen: When men come for help with respect to domestic violence, do their needs in terms of the violence they face differ from the ones women may face?

Trottier: They are more common than a lot of people would imagine. We have men who have been victimized in all kinds of imaginable ways. It does include emotional and psychological abuse or manipulation.

It includes severe physical violence. This is surprising to a lot of people. There is a different profile, an average. They differ. Women are more likely to use weapons to make up for the fact the women are physically on average not as strong as men are.

Men will batter women. That is true. They do that more often. Women will take objects and hit men and throw them at men more often. The profile is different. The severity of the violence is not necessarily different. We have had men who have been very, very badly abused by women.

Then there is sexual abuse. It is less likely for the men. But it does happen. That women sexually abuse men. It does happen. We do have cases of that as well. It is quite a range of what men experience when they come to us.

Their commonality. Men are obviously physically and also emotionally and psychologically based on what they experienced. The other piece that gets talked about less. What happens when a man asks for help?

I told you men's treatment as victims at the hands of an abusive partner. It is not different. What is it like for men who reach out to the police or a treatment center? It is wildly different. When it comes to men with law enforcement, it is probably the most radical difference in response.

Men are not believed when they go to the police. The police have a profile of domestic violence in mind. Literally, a profile in their training manuals. They go into situations of domestic abuse already assuming the man is the perpetrator and the woman is the victim.

We have dozens of cases where the man has called the police. Maybe, there is a witness. There are documents to support the case. None of that matters. He is removed from the home. He is himself arrested. Even though, all signs point to him as a perpetrator.

This is a case of revictimization. It would be scandalous if this happened to women systematically, but it happens to men systematically. We are trying to acknowledge the reality and do something about it through our organization here and through the advocacy with the police and other agencies, and by opening the first shelter for male victims of abuse.

It is going quite well. In fact, we raised a quarter of a million dollars to open Toronto's first shelter for men and children. That will open in the next year or so.

Jacobsen: Does this amount to, based on the systematic nature of it, a rejection of consideration for some of the difficulties some men go through in terms of similar difficulties women would go through as well?

Trottier: It comes down to is our simplistic view of looking at gender and gender relations. Despite the talk of how gender is more complicated than a gender binary of men and women, in many ways, we reinforce the binary gender approach.

We look at men as essentially perpetrators, assailants, guilty of lots of things; we look at women as essentially good victims, innocent. There is this essentialist, dualistic way of dividing men and women, which is very much reinforcing a gender binary.

In fact, the reality is much more complicated. People are complex individuals. We have men who are perpetrators. There is no doubt of that. We also have men who are perpetrators too. Then everybody in between.

We have to step back and acknowledge the complex nature of human beings. My philosophy is simple: anyone can be a victim; everyone deserves support. Shockingly, not everyone agrees with that because of the gender binary or gender profile, often used. It is domestic abuse, but in other spheres of life as well.

Jacobsen: What about fathers and access to children?

Trottier: I am glad you raised it. Here is another essentialist and binary way of looking at parenting, it does not acknowledge the reality of fatherhood changing over the last 30 or 40 years. Today's father is more involved in parenting and childrearing.

New polling reveals dads seeing fatherhood as their primary identity. They put fatherhood as more important. The majority of dads would like to spend more time with kids. However, the family law system has not caught on to that reality. The fact is, you have a lot of dads kept from the kids, not allowed to have as much access to their kids as they like — and not able to bring their skills as very competent parents to help their children become the best, most contributing members of society that they could be.

Jacobsen: How does this impact sons and daughters?

Trottier: The research is pretty clear in this area. That children flourish when they have strong, positive, and healthy relationships with both parents. That isn't always possible. When it is not, we should support single parents as much as we can. They are really doing heroic work.

But when you have two competent, willing, loving parents, we should be doing as much as we can to maximize the time between the child and each of his or her parents. We do not always do that. It is part of what we do here.

It is emphasizing co-parenting. How do a mother and a father successfully co-parent when they are no longer living together with that child? We help fathers with developing co-parenting plans. We help them deal with conflict resolution and healthy-peaceful ways of resolving situations.

We emphasize the ways they can successfully co-parent for the wellbeing of their child.

Jacobsen: To some of the points raised, what are some objections to them? What are some proper responses to them?

Trottier: I am not going to speak for those who have objections or criticisms of what they do. I firmly believe and see the evidence that what we are doing is transforming people's lives: fathers, mothers, and children.

So, I am proud of what we have done. I think what we have done is part of the progressive direction we want society to go in. I think everybody can be a victim or need support. It should be provided. We talked about fathering.

We talked about domestic violence. A lot of what we do is basic mental health services, support groups, and counseling. Men dealing with anxieties and challenges in their lives and not having a lot of support. We are trying to provide that for them.

I can't imagine why people would have an objection with what we are doing. I am not going to put words in their mouths. I am not going to put words in their mouth. They can speak for themselves. I happy to respond to their critiques.

But those critiques would have to be brought to me. Yet, I am happy to respond to them. We do have people who do not like what we do very much. They have their reasons. We are always reaching out to them, to have dialogue and listen to their concerns.

Maybe, we can reflect on what they have to say and have a conversation with them. Almost without exception, those people almost never are interested in having a dialogue. If you find people who want to have a conversation with us, I am eager to do it.

Otherwise, I am going to focus on the support and services that we provide because that is where I think my time is best placed.

Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Justin.

Trottier: No problem.

In Conversation with Leonardo “Nards” Go — Member, Humanist Alliance International Philippines

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

July 18, 2018

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: What was family background in religion? What are your own story and educational background? How did you find humanism and HAPI?

Leonardo “Nards” Go: I grew up in a deeply religious (Catholic) and conservative, family. We were praying for the angels every night at 6pm, prayed with the rosary every night with my parents and grandparents in my elementary years, going to Church every Sunday, participating in religious events.

My father was a Liturgical Assistant, my aunts and uncles, active in church groups, I was once an altar boy and *ave maria*, Boy Scout awardee (knights of the altar — the highest award for a Catholic Scout), went to catholic schools from prep all the way to college and of course, got my education from nuns in an exclusive school in my elementary then to proceeded to another exclusive school run by Jesuits in high school and all the way to college up to my Masters.

I once taught World Literature and Philosophy to a non-sectarian community college for a while in our hometown. At present, I work for the City Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Office (CDRRMO, that would be Emergency Management Agency in the US) in our city as assistant to the head.

My item is Environmental Management Specialist. Actually, I hold 2 offices, as I am also officially with the City Environment and Natural Resources Office (EPA in the US), but since my area and training is climate change adaptation and mitigation; hence, I also sit at the CDRRMO.

I found humanism, when I started to become politicized, during my college days, as I was starting to notice the hypocrisy, inequality, and beliefs and customs of society that I grew up in, specifically the kind fostered by the Catholic Church.

The most glaring is that of attributing everything as God’s will, even in gambling, Filipinos pray for signs before making a bet; ours is a combination of mysticism and Catholicism, after reading inspirational books (I started reading in High School) and exposure to Western culture through movies, TV, and other mass media sources, I slowly started to realize that we actually hold our destiny in our own hands.

While it is good to be inspired by God, to do good things in his glory, in our country, there were more disturbing cases to the contrary, our beliefs (and religious attitudes) in God have actually become a hindrance to our full potential as human beings.

Nowhere is it more evident than when it comes to disasters, it is a big part of my job to go around the city and the countryside giving lectures on how to make their communities more resilient.

It is always not easy, especially when people, believe that disasters are an act of god, and everything is his will and has a purpose and leave everything to his mercy and pray. Humanism for me is the ultimate empowerment, which seems to be the byword in government endeavors these days.

I came upon HAPI when I was invited by a Facebook friend, environmentalist and fellow caver, Jennifer Gutierrez, then the executive director of HAPI Phils International, it was only natural that I accepted the invitation.

Jacobsen: How does the world see the Philippines from the outside under Duterte? How are humanists generally treated in the Philippines? How do Filipinos, in general, view humanists and the humanist community?

Go: It's mixed there are those who say, "It's a dangerous place to live, what is with his War on Drugs and all the extra-judicial killings happening around," while there also those who see that it is much safer since most of the criminals are either killed, arrested, or on the run: also because of his War on Drugs.

Jacobsen: How can the non-religious overcome religious privilege, e.g., building a coalition and a solidarity movement? What are the areas of religious privilege within the Philippines?

Go: By being non-political, and less confrontational, a lot of the non-religious groups are affiliated with the radical left, although they have worked with religious groups especially when speaking for human rights and against poverty.

That is because they find common ground, but that is still limited, when it comes to women's rights, birth control. They are on opposite ends, using less confrontational methods, as opposed to leftist non-religious groups in promoting their agenda, which has actually turned off and alienated the middle class, who are actually the most influential sector in our society.

I am at a loss by what you mean by "religious privilege." But if by that you mean, areas not influenced by religion, I can only say. Those that are affiliated with the left, of the political spectrum

Jacobsen: When in the Philippines, and looking at the political situation, how does religion influence politics?

Go: Very much, it has influenced our way of life, but consider this, almost every politician will always claim that he was sent a sign by God. Before he decided to run, he goes to church to pray prior to filing his candidacy.

If he wins, his victory is celebrated by a mass; no session, meeting, brain storm is done without prayers first. Elections take a form of evil vs. good, with everyone claiming to be the good guys. It was religion that helped the late Pres Cory Aquino topple the dictatorship of Pres Marcos.

It is religion that has influenced why family planning has never taken off here.

Jacobsen: Why is religion such a large influence on the country? What are some of the main prejudices that the irreligious experience in the Philippines?

Go: It is said that our history can be summed up with the joke: 300 years in the convent (Spanish Rule) and 50 years of Hollywood (The American Rule), blame it on the Spaniards, who justified their conquest as a mission to spread Christianity (by the cross and sword) and to keep the natives submissive, and the Americans who perpetrated the same albeit to a lesser degree, still to keep the natives in their place.

When it comes to religious prejudice, let me just site a few personal experience as an example, when my sister got married to an American in Thailand, only our parents, and their friends, came. None from relatives because the wedding was done in a Buddhist church and ceremony.

When my daughter decided to become a born again Christian missionary, I was chided by my friends, and relatives, for not controlling my daughter and letting her leave the catholic faith. During previous typhoons, our governor and mayor ordered that we would not receive relief goods from the UN Commission on Population and Development, and not to accept joint projects with them because they supported The Women's Reproductive Health Care Bill because the Catholic Church was against it.

Jacobsen: Any final thoughts or feelings in conclusion?

Go: Humanism is and will always be, the ultimate empowerment.

Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Nards.

Professor Mir Faizal on Quantum Logic Applied to the Israeli-Palestinian Issue— Adjunct Professor, Physics & Astronomy, University of Lethbridge

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

July 20, 2018

Professor Mir Faizal is an Adjunct Professor in Physics and Astronomy at the University of Lethbridge. I wrote an article for Science, Technology & Philosophy, which gained the attention of one of the people related to the work in the article. It happened to be professor Faizal. He reached out in appreciation for the publication and the accuracy of the reportage on the research. I then returned with a request for an interview because... physics and astronomy. I love the field. Previous interview in Canadian Atheist. Here we talk about some of the work continuing an educational and exploratory series.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: What is the difference between classical and quantum logic?

Professor Mir Faizal: There is a fundamental difference between quantum and classical logic, or classical and quantum ways of thinking. In classical logic, two contradictory possibilities cannot be simultaneously actualized, but in quantum logic, this is exactly what happens. A cat can be both dead and alive, and a single particle can be present at two different places at the same time. Similarly, light is both a particle and wave in quantum mechanics. This is not a mere philosophy, but this way of thinking is essential to the correct understanding of nature. I would argue that this fuzzy way of thinking can also help resolve real-life problems, and the Israeli–Palestinian being one of them. In doing so, it would be not only possible to reconcile Zionism with democracy, but it would also be possible to reconcile Zionism with Palestinian Nationalism.

Jacobsen: How can quantum logic be applied to such a political problem?

Faizal: Just like we have to accept that the cat is dead and the cat is alive, at the same time, in the quantum world, we have to accept that all the land belongs to Jews and all the land belongs to the Palestinians, at the same time in the political world. So, this is where we need to think quantum mechanically. Just as wave nature of light and particle nature of light are both needed to get a complete picture, and relying on only one of these will create problems in understanding natural phenomena, we need to accept both the claims of Jews and Palestinians to all the land as being simultaneously true, to understand this social phenomenon. Accepting this quantum logic will help both the Jewish and Palestinians population to see the others point of view, without having to compromise their own point of view. They can even empathize with the other point of view, as both these communities have been historically displaced from their homeland, and have similar aspirations and the similar basis for their National moments.

Jacobsen: What is the basis on which you have stated that claims of both the Jews and the Palestinian simultaneously true?

Faizal: To do so, let us first understand what gives a certain part of human population preferentially more rights to live in a certain region of the earth (country), than the rest of humanity. When a group of humans lives in a certain region, they develop an emotional attachment to that region, and this gives them a preferential right to live in that region. This is the basis on which the concept of nationality is formed, and holds true for almost all nation on earth.

Furthermore, when a new group lives in that region and develops a similar emotional attachment to that region, then that group also acquires a similar preferential right to live in that region of the earth. This is the reason why in most countries, citizenship can be acquired by staying in that country for a sufficiently long time.

Jacobsen: Does a group of people not lose this preferential right to live in a land, after living away from it for long? After all, humans evolved from Africa, but not all humans can claim citizenship of African countries.

Faizal: Now, there is also a question of people losing this preferential right. All the humanity has evolved from Africa, but most of the humanity does not have this emotional attachment with Africa. So if a group loses this emotional attachment to a region, it also loses this preferential right to live in that region. This usually occurs in a century for most groups, but the important question is what happens if a group does not lose this emotional attachment to a region. It is only logical to suppose that if a group of humans does not lose this emotional attachment to a region, they should also not lose the preferential rights to live in that region.

Jacobsen: Who according to this logic has the claim to the land?

Faizal: I would say that all the land belongs to Jews, and all the land belongs to Palestinians, and both these claims are simultaneously true. The only and strongest basis on which Zionism is justified is that the Jews have historically lived in Israel, and even though they have been removed from that region, they have not lost the emotional attachment with the land of Israel. A Jew has as much right to be in Israel as a German has to be in Germany, or a British has to be in Britain. But for the same reason, a Palestinian has as much right to be in Palestinian as a Jew has to be in Israel. Just like the Jews, Palestinians have also historically lived in that land, and have an emotional attachment to that land. What makes this situation interesting is that both these claims are equally true, and for the same reasons. Both these groups of people (Jews and Palestinians) have lived in that region, and have an emotional attachment to that land.

Jacobsen: What would be the practical implications of this for Israeli–Palestinian conflict?

Faizal: Now having established that all the land belongs to Jews, and all the land belongs to Palestinians as simultaneously true claims, we can think of real practical solutions for the issue. First of all, it would really help Zionism, if it accepts the claim of Palestinian Nationalism, and then used the same argument to argue for Zionism, as it would then win the support of moderate Palestinians, and greatly reduce the violence against Jewish people in Israel. Similarly, it would help Palestinians, if they accepted Zionism's, and then argued for their cases using the same argument. As this would win them the support of moderate Jews, and that would, in turn, improve the rights of Palestinians. So, such an acceptance of Zionism and Palestinian Nationalism as simultaneously true would directly reduce the violence against Jews, and improve the lives of Palestinians.

Jacobsen: Is it practically possible for Jews to accept Palestinian Nationalism, given the high levels of anti-Semitism in Palestinians?

Faizal: It is important to point out that certain ideas have now mixed with both Zionism and Palestinian Nationalism, with is neither beneficial for these moments nor essential to them. The problem with Palestinian Nationalism is that is has been mixed with anti-Semitism, and a desire to remove the Jewish population from Israel. It does the most harm to the Palestinian cause, as it promotes right-wing political parties in Israel. Realistically, if the Palestinians leadership took a

bold step and encouraged Jewish immigration and integration into Palestine, then Israel would be forced to be more restrained militarily, and more generous economically towards Palestinians territories. Also, the settlers would lose all motivations to live in settlements, if they could legally live in Palestinian territories along with Palestinians as Palestinian citizens. This would also cause a decline in right winged political parties in Israel, and this would be beneficial for the Palestinian cause. This new form of Palestinian Nationalism would be acceptable to most moderate Jews.

Jacobsen: Is it possible for Palestinians to accept Zionism as Zionism made them lose their homeland?

Faizal: The problem with Zionism is that a justified desire for the Jewish population to live in Israel has been mixed with an unjustified desire for the Palestinian population not to live in that region. In fact, if Zionism accepts the rights of Palestinians to live there, and uses this argument for the Jews to live there too, it will be viewed as great liberation moment and this way Israel can emerge as a real democracy. This will also cause a decline in support for groups which support violence, and increase the support for Israel in moderate Palestinians. This will cause a real decline in the violence against Jews in Israel. Furthermore, this would be the only way in which Israel can emerge as a real Jewish democracy. This new form of Zionism would be acceptable to most moderate Palestinians.

Jacobsen: A real concern for Jews to accept all Palestinians would be that they can easily vote Zionism out of existence, so how can Jews accept all the Palestinians to live in Israel/Palestine?

Faizal: It is logical for most Jews to be afraid of doing this because by allowing all Palestinians to return and give them equal rights, then they can vote the Zionism out of existence.

So, sadly at present, there seems to be only one solution. To allow Palestinians to return and give them equal rights, but freeze their vote to its present vote share. They can have a weighted vote. Apart from this all the Jews of the world should be given a vote in Israel, even if they are not legal citizens or residents of Israel. This political discrimination will end all social discriminations against Palestinians. Hopefully in future, when anti-Semitism ends in Palestinians and most Jews are living nicely in Israel, then this discrimination can end too. But at present, the only way to end social and economic discrimination against Palestinians is for Israel to allow all the Palestinians the right to live in Israel, and equality in all aspects of life, but discriminate against them politically.

This is also important for the survival of Israel as a place for Jews to return, as both the Palestinian population with Israeli citizenship, and anti-Semitism in this population, can grow and vote Zionism out of existence in the future. However, such a discrimination need only be a temporary measure, it can end when a greater sense of nationhood develops in both these populations, and all the Jews have Israeli citizenship.

Jacobsen: As there is a religious dimension to this problem, what can be done about that?

Faizal: There is definitely a religious dimension to this problem. The central problem is that the Temple Mount/Majid Al Aqsa is holy to both the religions. However, in the Jewish tradition, it is allowed for non-Jewish monotheists (Beni Nao) to pray in Temple Mount, and they used to do that in early times. Furthermore, most Jews consider Muslims to be from Bnei Noa, and hence according to Jewish religious tradition they can pray at the Temple Mount.

According to Muslim traditions, a group of Christians was allowed by Muhammad to pray in his Mosque. Based on this, it is religiously possible for both these religions to share the Temple Mount/Majid Al Aqsa. There are also problematic traditions of Hadith, and verses in the Old Testament, which are used by certain religious groups to promote violence. However, the many interpretations have nicely justified the violence of such traditions away, and such interpretations should be promoted, and this would be beneficial for both Zionism and Palestinian Nationalism.

Jacobsen: What is your reaction to those who claim the land should only belong to the Jews or Palestinians?

Faizal: It should be realized that even if Israeli Jews wanted they cannot leave Israel, and even if Palestinians wanted they cannot leave Palestinian. No country will accept so many new immigrants. So there seems to be no other way than living together. In summary, the only practical solution to the Israeli-Palestinian issue can come if both the contradictory claims are accepted as simultaneously true, and then real rational solutions are worked out to resolve this issue.

Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity and your time.

The Late Stoltenberg and Mandela

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

July 21, 2018

According to *The Nation*, Thorvald Stoltenberg, born 1931 and died 2018, was a Norwegian political who died after an illness. He was active in the helping of refugees and others.

He helped those coming from Hungary post-1956 invasion by the Soviet Union. Stoltenberg was a member of the United Nations peace negotiating team. He was a diplomat and politician in the 1990s.

As reported, “He was for a short year high commissioner for refugees in 1990, but Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland called him back to serve as Norway’s foreign minister again; and he had earlier served both as deputy and full minister of foreign affairs and defence.”

He then retired from the political world. Later, his son, Jens, would be the prime minister and then the secretary general of NATO. Stoltenberg, the deceased, was also the chairman of the Norwegian Red Cross.

“His two other children were Camilla, a medical researcher and administrator, and Nini, a lawyer by training, like her father, but a victim of the liberal ‘hashish and heroin era’ of the 1970s,” the reportage continued, “She passed away in 2014 at an age of 51, just two years after her mother Karin Stoltenberg (née Heiberg) passed away, leaving Thorvald Stoltenberg without his lifelong partner.”

He viewed Nini as the most kind and sweet person imaginable. The late Mr. Stoltenberg even work a book about her, in order to discover why she was a drug addict and also to see if there was a way for others to become clean.

“By the time she died, she was ‘clean’, but the heroin and other poisons had taken their toll on her organs and she just wasted away and died after a short illness,” the article explained.

The article then pivoted into the legacy of Nelson Mandela. It was the 100th anniversary of the birth of Nelson Mandela this year. He was seen as a humanistic ideal of someone working for hope as a politician and as a statesperson.

“He based much of his thinking on his training and experience as a lawyer, with justice and fairness as cornerstones, My Pakistani lawyer friend Idrees Ashraf underlines the importance of his legal training and practice,” the article stated, “also continuing studies while in prison. Certainly, Mandela was a very unique and extraordinary man, yet also a very ordinary man, somebody who had met him told me.”

The report makes a comparison between both Stoltenberg and Mandela. With the unique abilities of each to connect with the people around them, an argued-for important capacity for encouraging individuals to do the right and good thing in the world.

Each person, the parallelism argues, were working on local and everyday things in addition to the universal concerns of everyone for a better world locally and internationally.

The reportage stated, “Mandela never denounced the use of violence in the struggle for justice in apartheid South Africa, or as a general principle, although he drew lessons from Mahatma

Ghandi's philosophy; yet, he rather said that those in power should refrain from use of violence. Stoltenberg, who served as minister of defence in Norway, was also not a pacifist."

In Conversation with Rupert Aparri— Member, Humanist Alliance International Philippines

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

July 25, 2018

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: What was family background in religion? What are your own story and educational background? How did you find humanism and HAPI?

Rupert Aparri: Like most Filipinos, I was raised in a Catholic home. While the male members of the family weren't religious, the females were (and still are) devout. My mother is 70 years old. When she went to a small town in Georgia, USA, right smack in the midst of the evangelical US South, the first question she asked was: "Is there a Catholic Church here?" My grandmas and grandaunts and great grandma all lived to be nonagenarians so just imagine being with these tough religious women who practically IMPOSED their beliefs on us, grandchildren. No, not in a violently threatening way, but through something more fearsome — the threat of eternal damnation. I recall my grandma (father's side) and her sister together with my grandfather praying the rosary every night. And when they could no longer go to church because of old age, they'd wait for the priest to come on Sundays so they could receive communion. That's how "Catolico Cerrado" they were.

However, while my paternal grandma was religious, she was, in fact, a liberal. In 1935, she got pregnant out of wedlock. That must have been quite a scandal in those times. Interestingly, she studied under the American Thomasites. They were intrepid volunteer teachers from the US who taught Filipinos in a non-religious set-up. It must be noted that under Spain, the friars had control in educating the masses, so we can suppose that they prioritized religious brainwashing to perpetuate the subjugation of the people.

My father, a lawyer-accountant wasn't religious. He seldom went to church, and when he did, it was observably just by force of tradition, not because he was afraid to go to hell. He was, after all, a man of integrity whose reputation was absolutely beyond reproach and from his example I learned that one can be "good without God." My siblings and I were sent to a Catholic school administered by Chinese priests forced to escape China during the Cultural Revolution. So aside from superb math and Chinese language lessons, I also grew up learning Catechism. I attended religion subjects which, in retrospect, were a waste of time. In college, I went to the University of the Philippines (UP), a secular public school established by the Americans in 1908 when they were still our colonial masters. Our public school system is among the best and lasting legacies of the United States, by the way but I digress.

UP taught me secularism. Prayers and going to Mass were no longer compulsory.

Ideas could be freely exchanged, and because I entered college right after the Marcos dictatorship was toppled, we breathed in the air of freedom with gusto — enthusiastically challenging conventions to which we were otherwise accustomed. My humanism germinated in UP but my absolute disavowal of the god-idea came in phases, culminating one day, ironically, when I attended a Catholic Life in the Spirit Seminar shortly after I got married.

By then I was already a doubter. So when I confessed to a priest by lamenting "Father, I have doubts about the Sacrament of Penance, and if it is a sin to doubt, forgive me." The priest's reply:

“I’m not going to give you absolution.” And right there, it struck me. I really couldn’t force myself to believe in the bullshit anymore. I honestly don’t recall how I “found” humanism. I was barely even aware of the term until I became FB friends with Ms. Marissa Langseth. She referred me to a FB Group and we’d occasionally chat. I think this was after she read my FB Note on atheism. Or perhaps somebody referred me to her. One time I got into a weeklong online argument with an Evangelical friend on the existence of God. Of course, debating with believers is like banging your head against the wall, but I had lots of time and ammunition, so to speak. I had facts. My friend had verses of the bible. No match.

As a humanist, I haven’t been able actively engage in HAPI events because of my restrictive work schedule. But I’m happy to say that I’m raising my children to be good not because they are scared of an imaginary being or the promise of eternal reward, but rather because this simply is the right thing to do. My wife respects my views although she’s still keen on Pascal’s Wager.

Jacobsen: How does the world see the Philippines from the outside under Duterte? How are humanists generally treated in the Philippines? How do Filipinos, in general, view humanists and the humanist community?

Aparri: Duterte is, to put it lightly, a controversial figure in Philippine politics. By appearances he is uncouth, disrespectful of women, scoffs at human rights, considers mainstream media as adversaries, and has cursed the Pope, Obama, and officials of the EU and the UN. Also, he probably isn’t aware of this, but he is a cringe-inducing racist. (He referred to Obama as “ang itim itim” — very black, and dark skin is derided in the Philippines, a country where skin-whitening soap and lotion sell like hotcakes.) Kinda reminds us of someone else, huh? Anyhow, Duterte doesn’t have a nuclear arsenal so we’re fortunate. Duterte is an admitted murderer though and has even bragged on national TV about killing people. Yet he still has a very favorable approval rating among Filipinos!

So how is he regarded internationally? I’ll say it’s a mixed reception. Democratic, progressive nations regard him with disdain. Consider the G20 meetings, for example. Traditionally, the Chair of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is invited to the G20 meetings, which was hosted by Germany in 2017. The Philippines was ASEAN Chair in the same year but Duterte was not invited. He and his government has been criticized by the EU, Australia, the UN, and even the US under Obama. But Duterte just retorted to such criticisms with profanities. He has been very friendly with China and Russia though. Ohhh, those parallels again.

As for the Filipino people and the Philippines, I can only offer snippets of impressions about us by foreign friends, now that Duterte is in power. I work in the field of international relations so I’ve had the fortune of visiting 17 countries in the past 3 years. Also, I have been hosting foreign exchange students and INGO volunteers since 2009. Aside from travelling in Europe, Asia, and the US, I have brought the world to my home. Germans, Swiss, Ecuadoran, Spanish, Turkish, Japanese, French, Belgian, Norwegian, and a Dutch have stayed with us as family members. No American because the US deemed our place “unsafe.” Right now, there’s an Italian boy with us.

Anyway, their impression of the Philippines naturally changed when they started living among the Filipino people. So once a foreigner actually experiences being among us, Duterte becomes an insignificant blur. Internationally, we’re probably known as seafarers (more than 50% of the world’s seamen are Filipinos); nurses (40 thousand in UK and Ireland, hundreds of thousands in the US) so we’re actually in the healing business; Filipinos are literally everywhere. In the US, Fil-Ams are the 2nd highest earning minority (after Indians) and among the best educated. We do

have our sad stories as a poor nation (shithole?) but we are among the happiest and most resilient people on earth. We should be, otherwise we won't endure living in a country located in the ring of fire, typhoon belt, earthquake zone, and tsunami prone area.

We're also very welcoming. During the Holocaust, we were the only country that readily accepted Jews who were escaping from the Nazis. In the aftermath of the Bolshevik Revolution, we also welcomed the so-called White Russians. The Vietnamese boat-people also made our shores their home before they eventually proceeded to their final destinations. That's how we are as a people, and I think it's in our cultural DNA to be so accepting. There are also pejorative references about us. Like we're regarded as "Oreos" — brown outside, white inside; a nation of domestics and caregivers, etc. Such impressions have stuck, no matter how unfair and we've learned to regard them nonchalantly or better still, dismiss them with humor.

Humanism has been a steadily growing movement in the Philippines. But compared to the religious, we are still vastly outnumbered. So humanists — and again the term and idea haven't caught on yet among the majority of the people — have not yet reached a critical mass where they can disrupt commonly held beliefs and values. In other words, because we aren't a "threat" at present, nobody really takes much notice of us. So HAPI members can go to communities and do philanthropic deeds and they will be welcome. But there are also levels of tolerance for humanism. You shouldn't venture into Muslim areas if you're an identified humanist. You'll most probably be killed there. Yes, the degree of evil among modern day religions vary, with Islam sadly being the most toxic and violent now.

Jacobsen: How can the non-religious overcome religious privilege, e.g., building a coalition and a solidarity movement? What are the areas of religious privilege within the Philippines?

Aparri: Like the United States, we have a non-establishment clause in our Constitution. But this hasn't really been observed. Cases in point: We have an Office of Muslim Affairs. This has been one of my pet peeves but I can only whine because I don't want to get bombed! Shariah and Islamic lessons are being taught using public school facilities. Professors lead prayers before starting their lessons in public universities. Government resources are being used during Catholic Church events. There are churches, temples, and mosques built through public funds inside our military camps! Religious idols are displayed in government buildings. In my wife's workplace, a Philippine government bank, Catholic masses are held within office premises every first Friday of the month! I could go on and on about religious privilege. We still have a lot of evolving to undergo in terms of being an actual secular democracy.

As humanists, we can't just barge into the religionists' zone and tell them they're wrong. That's the first thing I learned during my arguments with religious friends and family members, including my own mom. Logic will not persuade godly people. They will just yell back and bombard you with more nonsense. When you argue with them and point out the falsities of their religious beliefs, they tend to be defensive because you're attacking their core; their being. Therefore, since we are obviously more reasonable, it is up to us to adjust to their tantrums. There are religionists, however, whose spoiled brat antics involve murder and mayhem, and with THEM, we have to be less congenial.

In terms of solidarity and building coalitions, we should primarily focus on environmental protection, because climate change poses an existential threat to our people, whether religious or humanist. To answer the question on how we can overcome religious privilege: I say through patience and education. It'll take years to undo what was imprinted for centuries.

Jacobsen: When in the Philippines, and looking at the political situation, how does religion influence politics?

Aparri: Religion influences Philippine politics in many forms, from the completely insidious to the relatively benign. For example, the Iglesia ni Cristo (Church of Christ) led by a certain Eraño Manalo is often courted by politicians because the sect votes as a bloc as dictated by the leadership. At about 5 million members, they can make or break political careers. Allegedly, in exchange for votes, favors are given to the sect, like plum positions in government, particularly the law enforcement offices. There's also a sect led by Apollo Quiboloy, who refers to himself as the APPOINTED SON OF GOD. He's extremely wealthy, the money raised from tithes, but which he attributes to the blessings of his father, God. For a time, he was visibly too friendly with Duterte, even offering to lend his private plane and helicopter to the president.

A thinking individual would be frightened to see his president palling with The Appointed Son of God, but that's where we are now. The Catholic Church, as one would expect still meddles in our political discourse, vehemently opposing a Divorce Law, and a Reproductive Health Law. The RC still insists that contraception is a sin and one who uses condoms goes to hell. We're the only country aside from the Vatican where there is no divorce. In this instance, Duterte's irreverence has been helpful. He has ignored the Church's importunings and threats of fire and brimstone.

The most damning influence of religion on politics, in my opinion, is the Muslim rebellion in Mindanao. While the Christian sects only try to influence political outcomes by threats to the soul and moral suasion, the Muslims actually kill in the name of Allah. And the government acceded to their demands by giving them autonomy — the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao. Now they want more; their own state within a federal government. The Mindanao problem is complex, but suffice it to say that without the inherited hatreds passed on by religions, this would have been easier to address.

Jacobsen: Why is religion such a large influence on the country? What are some of the main prejudices that the irreligious experience in the Philippines?

Aparri: Spanish friars spread Catholicism in the islands for 4 centuries. They did this not just by friendly persuasion but also by threat of physical harm and death. Colonizers used religion as a means of social control. Such a method was extremely effective. Fear of torture and execution, coupled with the thought of wallowing in a lake of fire for eternity are quite persuasive. The influence of the church in the country is thus a vestige of our colonial past that is difficult to forget. This isn't to say that we have to expunge ourselves of our history. As a Filipino, I am proud to be a child of the East and West, and under the present circumstances thankful that I was born Christian, rather than Wahhabist or Salafist. But we do have to be honest and accept that our religious heritage stemmed from unholy intentions of mostly wicked men.

Atheists, or apatheists, and now humanists are considered "sinners" in the Philippines. I have been accosted, ridiculed, even asked why I say Merry Christmas when I don't believe in Jesus Christ. But these are just the ridiculous chidings of pesky friends. More troubling, for instance, is equating communism with unbelief because it gives misguided and ignorant religionists in government to persecute you. Also, woe unto you who claims unbelief and you're branded a Satanist. You could get physically assaulted.

Jacobsen: Any final thoughts or feelings in conclusion?

Aparri: For centuries, religion has been an anchor in the lives of people and communities. It is no wonder therefore that absent such anchor, people and communities would feel hopeless; bobbing up and down, to and fro in an ocean of problems and uncertainty. At least with the god-concept, there is this notion of security and stability. It is a challenge for us, humanists, to articulate to our fellowmen, that we have EACH OTHER, and this in fact is more reassuring than beseeching an invisible, non-existent entity.

Having said that, in places where I am a stranger, I find sanctuary in Catholic church services, just to be with something familiar. And this, I think is the last purpose of churches and their rituals and incantations — to provide a sense of familiarity and camaraderie. It is only after recognizing this that we can begin an honest and fruitful conversation with the believers.

Thanks.

Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Rupert.

Opening the Way for Legal Marriages for Humanists in Ireland

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

July 25, 2018

There has been an Appeal Court ruling in Ireland, according to Raidió Teilifís Éireann.

The humanists have been hailing this as a significant transition in the movement for the rights of the non-religious in the area of partnerships. There was a failure to have the current ban declared a breach of human rights. Although, a reasonable argument could be claimed there.

As reported, “A model and international footballer, who won the right to have a lawful humanist wedding in Northern Ireland last year, failed to uphold a judicial declaration that the existing prohibition is incompatible with human rights legislation.”

Laura Lacole went with her husband, who is Eunan O’Kane. O’Kane is a Leeds United and Republic of Ireland star. Lacole considers the judgment still a win for the humanist community.

It is positive in the sense of moving the dial more and more with precedence to push for humanist marriages. The Appeal Court judges — three of them — found the prohibition on humanist celebrants in Northern Ireland, which are legally-binding ceremonies, discriminatory.

“However, they stopped short of declaring the law incompatible with human rights, explaining that an existing provision enabling couples to apply for temporary authorization for celebrants to conduct humanist marriages ‘provides a basis for avoiding such discrimination,’” the article continued.

The court in Belfast stated that the definition of a legal marriage had no need of being expanded in order to incorporate “beliefs” including humanist. Humanist does not count to this court in Belfast.

The article said, “But they indicated the General Register Office (GRO) for Northern Ireland should now look favorably on future applications for temporary authorizations.”

Therefore, even with the loss of the case, Ms. Lacole considered this, on the whole, a move in the progressive direction for Northern Ireland the right for humanist marriages as recognized weddings in the area.

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