



The Enlightenment



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Great Comparison

Wow! What a great pair of interesting maps. There is almost a perfect match between the least religious and the most peaceful countries. Surely this tells us a great deal and justifies the conclusion that there is an inverse correlation, namely: the most religious countries are the ones most likely to be engaged in warfare. This not only applies to Islamic countries, but also to the Christian United States.

And other religions are involved too. Hindus and Muslims have an uneasy truce in India/Pakistan as do Hindus and Buddhists in Sri Lanka.

Would we have a more peaceful world if religions disappeared? Most likely, but unfortunately it will be a long time before humanity finds out.

LEAST RELIGIOUS COUNTRIES



MOST PEACEFUL COUNTRIES



President's Remarks

There is currently a great deal of concern about the growth of extreme right-wing nationalist movements in many countries of the West. This worrisome trend is seen in the supporters of Donald Trump in the US, the clamour of voices in Great Britain pushing for that country to leave the European Union, and the ultra-nationalist parties that are gaining support in many countries of Europe. These movements are all characterized by narrow nationalism, xenophobic fear of immigration, and rejection of others with different cultures and beliefs. Anti-Muslim feelings are also a big part of the mix. These sorts of movements are particularly troublesome because they resemble the growth of intolerance, mistrust, and isolationism that led up to the two world wars of the last century. Fortunately, at least so far, Canada seems to be one country where this type of extremist thinking has not gained much traction. Most Canadians seem to recognize the importance of immigration for economic prosperity, are proud of our country's diversity and pluralism, and place strong emphasis on our values of equality and tolerance. However, as increasing numbers of Muslim immigrants and refugees are coming to live among us, more people, including a number of atheists and humanists, are beginning to express concerns about the Muslim influx, portraying Islam as an inherently intolerant, misogynistic, and oppressive religion, and viewing it as a particular threat to our freedom and democracy. It is certainly important that we speak out when we see that religious views and practices are causing harm to ourselves or others, but we also need to be very careful not to be drawn into the narrative of intolerance of the right-wing nationalist movements. As Adriaan Mak notes in this issue of the *Enlightenment*, humanists have always stood up for tolerance and diversity in society. Over the past century, as different waves of immigrants have come to our shores, there have been repeated dire warnings about how these different cultures were going to destroy us. Instead, they have each contributed to, and strengthened the rich fabric of our diverse society. As humanists, we need to find a proper balance between criticizing religious beliefs and showing respect and tolerance for those who think differently from us. ~ Rod Martin

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What Makes a Heretic Tick?

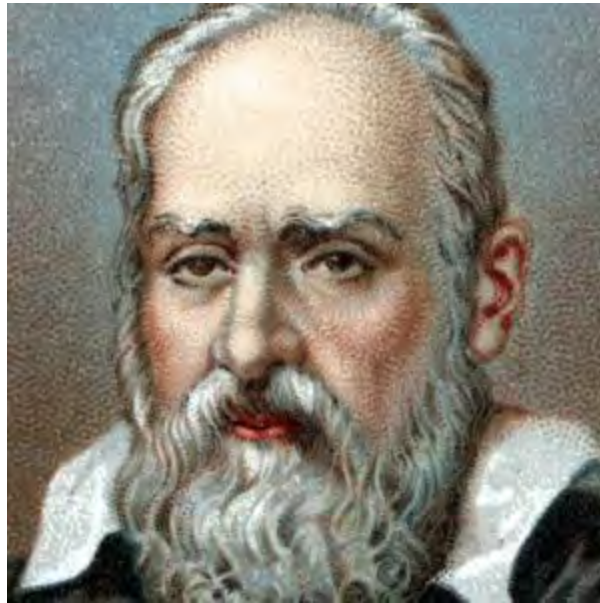
By Adriaan Mak

Heresy: questioning of popular and accepted beliefs or doctrines; dissent.

Orthodoxy: (from *orthos* correct + *doxa* belief) adherence to convention.



Sappho



Galileo



Ann Druyan

Hearing the word heretic, many will think of 16th and 17th century European religious conflicts. Most would not immediately think of Buddha who indeed was a Hindu heretic. Today Ayaan Hirsi Ali, a Muslim heretic stands out as the author of *Infidel*. The latter's name should remind us that religions do not only have their heretics as apostles, but also as apostates. In the world of Islam the closest synonym for heresy is *Bid'ah*, which in Arabic also means "innovation", usually something new that is bad for all believers. Such an "innovator" or *zindiq* was the tenth century Sufi mystic, Al-Hallaj, who was nailed to a cross, reminding us of the Hebrew heretic Joshua (Jesus) of Nazareth. Al-Hallaj's crime was similar to that of Jesus by proclaiming "I am the Truth", the latter being one of the names for God. More recently Salman Rushdie was declared a *zindiq*, when his novel *The Satanic Verses* led to a call for his death; a *Fatwa* issued against him by Ayatollah Khomeini.

One Renaissance humanist was a man who trusted his innovation, a telescope, more than Holy Scripture, and saw proof that the earth rotated; making this information public made Galileo a heretic to be put on trial. After him there have been other scientists who discovered a truth but were not believed by their more esteemed colleagues.

One such was Ignaz Semmelweiss who had a hunch that doctors dissecting cadavers somehow caused the death of mothers giving birth. Following research he found proof of this. Yet, for many years he had

to keep warning his colleagues to wash their hands. This led to an obsession, followed by mental illness and death. Not long after, Louis Pasteur and Joseph Lister confirmed his antiseptic principles.

In the last century geologist Alfred Wegener solved the jig-saw puzzle of the globe and found that West Africa would fit neatly against South-America. After comparing rock formations on both sides he proposed the theory of continental drift. For years geologists deemed his theory a heresy, until depth soundings found the Mid-Atlantic rift.

One proud heretic, also a humanist, is Freeman Dyson, retired professor of physics at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton. Perhaps it seems ironic that in a 2007 article called *Heretical thoughts about science and society* he admits: *My first heresy says that all the fuss about global warming is grossly exaggerated. Here I am opposing the holy brotherhood of climate model experts and the crowd of deluded citizens who believe the numbers predicted by the computer models.*

The list of heretics could include: Ananta Bijoy Das, one of several recent Bangladeshi bloggers murdered for advocating freedom of expression; humanists Carl Sagan and Ann Druyan for their book *The Demon Haunted World*; John Lennon for his song *Imagine*; Karl Marx, who declared that "Religion is the sigh of the oppressed . . . the opium of the people . . . the impotence of the human mind to deal with occurrences it cannot understand"; Arius who in 325 CE denied that Jesus was truly God; Sappho of Lesbos (610 BCE – 570 BCE), of whose homo-erotic poetry only fragments exist; and Tariq Ali author of *Mullahs and Heretics*.

Some heretics were wise and others fools, but all had strong convictions. The best of them had questioning minds, examined and critiqued beliefs or dogmas. Many, among them pro-democracy activists in China and elsewhere, were willing to face opposition and wanted to change their society by making their unorthodox views public.

Books:

Loewenstein et. al. (2009). *Heresy, Literature and Politics in Early Modern English Culture*.
Carl Sagan and Ann Druyan. (1996). *The Demon-Haunted World: Science as a Candle in the Dark*.

Sun, Sand, and Satan - On the Beach in the Bible Belt

By Duncan Watterworth

A beach vacation on the Florida Panhandle should be really simple. Shall we run on the beach today, or just walk? Shall we dine on seafood, or at the BBQ place? But the Bible Belt is always a bit spooky for me. Here, we enter a supernatural world, an alternate universe that runs on a different set of rules.

When we drive across the county line, a billboard blares, "Wakulla loves you Jesus", as if that county's entire population expects the Second Coming to parade into sight at any moment. A church sign warns that the Devil is out and about. And there are so many churches that if you close your eyes, spin around, and pull the trigger, you'll hit one for sure.

Life here is a morality play where "everything happens for a reason", and God and Satan are pulling the strings. So I tread lightly. But this year I found out Satan has a sense of humour. One day the wacky guy

plunked us down, to our total surprise, in a collection of atheists. On a Sunday morning, no less. Good one, Satan!

Barb and I were having lunch on the deck of an out-of-the-way café in Tallahassee. The only other diners, a jovial group at a large table, consisted of an elderly white couple, a black college-aged couple, two men with bushy white beards, two thirty-somethings, and a lean young woman with bright lipstick and lots of bare midriff.

We couldn't help but overhear their conversation. One of them was describing a discussion he'd had with a Christian who maintained that without God there could be no morality, no right or wrong. About then the grandfatherly man looked over to Barb and me and said, "I hope we aren't bothering you. We're the Tallahassee Atheist Club. You are welcome to join us."

I stood up and said, "I don't see how Christianity can be the basis of an ethical system. It's based on punishment and reward, the carrot and the stick, Heaven and Hell." I knew that was a tad unfair to Christian morality, but it worked as an icebreaker. We joined their table.

A rambling, amiable conversation followed. "We don't always talk about religion," said the grandfather. "Last week it was gravity waves." He was a retired philosophy prof from Buffalo. His wife was a biology prof. The teacher said his job was to get his students to examine their beliefs, and logically support them. The college kid gave us a brief – but still too long – lecture on Deism versus Theism. Midriff's comments were smart and very political. She had a feminist's perspective on religion. Over all, they seemed to be a collection of sincere and like-minded souls, seeking the warmth of tribe, as in any church.

It is understandable that Christians down here worry about the morality of the rest of us. In their minds, we are all born in sin, and inclined to evil thoughts, fornications, murders, deceit, and more. Mark 7:21,22. Psalm 51:5. But those living in other philosophical worlds manage to conjure up ethical systems, although lacking supernatural foundations. The Tallahassee Atheists do sponsor a section of local highway, and keep the litter picked up.

So a beach vacation isn't always simple. Not for me, anyway. But Satan has since left us alone. And, as always down here, that is happening for a reason: he had to get back to the Donald Trump campaign.

On Toleration

By Adriaan Mak

The events in Paris on Friday 13 November 2015 are a reminder to all who call themselves Humanists that toleration of the beliefs of others is sometimes hard to bring into practice. We are aware that many prejudices bring hardships to minorities. Some of these may eventually resort to violence. Of course the inhumane practices of believers and non-believers alike deserve to be met with appropriate scorn and punishment.

Although the Greek philosopher Xenophon (431 - 352 BCE) mentions the idea and praises the tolerant actions of Cyrus the Great of Persia, it would be wrong to see toleration as a classic Western notion.

Similar ideas of peacefulness and acceptance of others' beliefs existed in ancient China and India where certain Confucian, Taoist and Buddhist tolerant practices existed well before the 3rd century BCE.

Many historians will recognize as one European forerunner of the notion of toleration the Renaissance humanist Sebastian Castellio, who in his *De Haereticis* (On Heresy), in 1554, gave us this famous line: "To burn a man does nothing to rescue a doctrine, but to kill a man." Castellio wrote this after John Calvin had caused Michael Servetus to be burned at the stake for questioning the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. When other influential Protestants, among whom John Knox, a Presbyterian, and Philip Melancthon, a Lutheran, supported Calvin's decision, the persecution by Protestants of other Protestants, whose views deviated from the accepted doctrines, took off. Castellio, although his students at Geneva had supported him, was cast out of the fold and lived a life avoiding contact with orthodox Protestants and Roman Catholics.

Presently the world is experiencing on a large scale the mixing of peoples whose differing ethnic, religious and cultural practices may lead to conflicts. Internationally, Humanists are united in their support for practicing toleration.

Recently the British Humanist Association stated the following: We are committed to the building of a more humane society through an ethical approach based on Humanism. We believe that refugees and migrants are first and foremost human beings who hold human rights and should be treated as such. Refugees and migrants not only contribute economically and demographically to our societies, [but also] bring with them new cultures and traditions that contribute to a rich and diverse society.

Recommended reading:

Harris, Sam and Nawaz, Maajid (2015). *Islam and The Future of Tolerance: A Dialogue*.

Kaplan, Benjamin J. (2007). *Divided by Faith: Religious conflict and the practice of toleration in early modern Europe*.

Laursen, John (2005). "Toleration", in *The New Dictionary of the History of Ideas*.

Upcoming HALA Events – Mark Your Calendar

July 17th Annual HALA picnic for HALA members at the home of Peter and Pauline Evans. Poster has been sent out to members.

July 24th London Pride Parade. Details to follow.

Sept. 19th Wolf Hall Event. Hemant Mehta – The Friendly Atheist. Watch for advertisements.

Oct. 12th Regular HALA meeting at London Library - Discussion on Hemant Mehta's talk. - 7:00 p.m.

Nov. 9th Regular HALA meeting at London Library. - Rod Martin – How a humanist finds meaning in life.

Dec. 3rd HALA Winter Solstice Celebration. Details will be sent out closer to the event.