

BOOK REVIEW

A Ridiculously Biased View of Islam

Heretic: Why Islam Needs a Reformation Now, by Ayaan Hirsi Ali, 2015, ISBN: 978-0-06-233393-3, 272 pp. cloth \$17.93

One would have to be brain dead to argue against the sensible idea that Islam needs a Reformation (preferably without the kind of bloodshed that accompanied the Christian Reformation.) By now the human rights abuses of extremist Muslims throughout the world are well-known. What is lesser-known is the fact that the Qur'an and the Hadith, or sayings of Muhammad, condone these abuses.

But the Bible, Torah and other "sacred" texts also condone such abuses. Indeed, according to some scholars, the First and Second (or Old and New) Testaments condone violence far more so than does the Qur'an. Nearly every foul act condoned in the Qur'an has its equal in the Bible.

However, this does not cause Ali and other biased critics of Islam to pause. The author of *Heretic* merely shrugs and concludes that Islam is much worse than other religions, and that most conservative and reactionary Christians and Jews do not pose serious threats to true democracy. On the contrary, she essentially worships capitalism and the West.

Ali was warmly embraced by the administration of George W. Bush, and she was a fellow with the American Enterprise Institute (AEI.) This is the same organization that has supported such reactionary thinkers as the disgraced Dinesh D'Souza, author of *The End of Racism*. In this tome, the author contended, among other provocative ideas, that slavery greatly benefited Black people!

Rather than a courageous feminist battling against Muslim-sanctioned patriarchy, Ali comes off as an anti-Islamic critic with an axe to grind. This book is, indeed, a hatchet job if ever there was one.

Ali is much like New Atheist Richard Dawkins, who has implied that because women in predominantly Muslim nations have far greater struggles than do women in the West, women in the West should simply be thankful that they have it so well. However, such thinking is wrong on many levels.

First, however, it must be acknowledged that, despite what many of her critics say, Ali does have Muslim “street cred.” She is highly qualified to speak and write about Islam. She was a student and a teacher of Islam. She literally talked the talk and walked the walk. She lived in Saudi Arabia. She is widely read in Muslim literature.

Yet all of this does not change the fact that other religions also pose serious threats to liberty and human happiness. On the contrary, an obsessive focus on the shortcomings of Islam blinds people to the serious failures of other religions and worldviews.

Perhaps the best example would be Ali’s outrage against hypocritical Afghan religious extremists that have sex with young boys. On the other hand, she showers much praise among Pope Francis and Catholicism. Yet it is difficult to imagine that she could be oblivious to the fact that the Catholic Church has many pedophile priests all over the world. The Church has paid out massive sums of money to the victims and their families (that is, whenever Catholic leaders were unable to sweep the crimes under the rug.) Sadly, though, they also have given large payouts to pedophile priests! How could their crimes possibly be less harmful than those committed by extremist Muslim pedophiles?

The Catholic Church also promotes patriarchy and will not permit the ordination of women. Furthermore, Catholic leaders interfere with women’s reproductive rights, thereby ruining the lives of millions of women all over the world.

Conservative Christians also oppose the use of condoms. In Africa in particular HIV/AIDS transmission continues to wreak havoc among those that refuse to practice safer sex. The Pope and other Western Christian leaders are wildly popular in many African nations, and their reactionary messages continue to contribute to the harm that is befalling the continent.

Ali rails against the deadly homophobia of extremist Muslims. However, she pretty much dismisses the homophobia of Christians in Africa with a mere sentence!

In typical Ali fashion, she reluctantly admits that Christian homophobia exists, but believes that Muslim homophobia is worse. She rightly contends that

governments in Africa that are predominantly non-Muslim do not enforce the death penalty for homosexuality. However, it is not for lack of trying. In Uganda, Nigeria and other African nations with large Christian populations, governments have been held in check (so far) from enforcing or calling for the death penalty for LGBTQI people by pressures from influential Westerners.

The fact of the matter is that homophobia in Africa today is largely a Western import. Westerners first insisted upon laws against homosexuality in Africa. Today White evangelical ministers from the West are spreading hateful homophobic messages all over the continent. LGBTQI people are being unfairly outed and threatened in African media. They are being ostracized by their friends, families and communities, and they are being killed by homophobic mobs. African heads of state are demonizing LGBTQI people and their lives are a living nightmare. Christian-sanctioned homophobia deserves at least as much outrage as does that of Muslim extremists.

The best way to reform Islam is not through hypocrisy and double standards. The best way for Westerners to help reform Islam is by cleaning up their own act and leading by example. As Ali points out in her final chapter, there are many good Muslims trying to reform their faith. Westerners should support them while seeing to it that their own religions and worldviews are in proper working order.