

Making Progress by “Correcting the Bible”

By Norm R. Allen Jr.

...the world has corrected the Bible. The church never corrects it; and also never fails to drop in at the tail of the procession—and take the credit for the correction.... –Mark Twain, *From Europe and Elsewhere* and *A Pen Warmed Up In Hell*, reprinted in *the Portable Atheist: Essential Readings for the Nonbeliever*, edited by Christopher Hitchens (pp. 120-122)

Genuine human progress consists largely in undoing the damage done to the world by inhumane biblical ideas and actions. Some of this progress is, ironically, initiated by progressive religionists. The very best example of this is the eradication of chattel slavery.

The Bible condones life-long slavery for the captives of the Hebrew people. In Luke 12:47-48, Ephesians, chapter 6 and numerous other passages, slavery is condoned. Yet abolitionists “corrected the Bible” and managed to kick slavery to the curb with human thought and human action. Yet, the Bible *still* condones slavery. As Twain pointed out, “The slavery text remained; the practice changed, that was all....”

Christianity’s main slogan could be “if you can’t beat ‘em, join ‘em, lead ‘em, and hog the glory.” Indeed, this had been the case with the persecution of alleged witches. The Bible had taught that believers should not suffer a witch to live. However, rational and empathetic human beings finally discovered that persecuting and killing alleged witches is downright inhumane. However, as Twain noted again, “The witch text remains; only the practice has changed.”

Sadly, the text *and* the practice remain in some parts of the world. In nations such as Malawi, Ghana, Nigeria and other African nations,

alleged witches are still being persecuted and killed in the name of God. As long as the text and the practice continue to influence the thoughts and actions of highly irrational and superstitious believers, the problem will persist.

Cruel and unusual punishment, i.e. death by stoning, is condoned in the Bible. However, civilized people have long outgrown this utterly barbaric practice. The only place it is still carried out is among extremist Muslims that still have a seventh-century mentality. Bible believers might try to absurdly rationalize why it was used in biblical times, but it will never make a comeback among civilized people.

The hyper-masculine patriarchs who wrote the Bible considered women to be the property of men. In Genesis 3:15-16, Ephesians and numerous other chapters, women are commanded to obey men. In Numbers 31:17-18 the chosen men of God are commanded to slaughter their enemies except for the virgin females, whom they are allowed to keep (rape) for themselves.

However, thanks to courageous women's rights advocates such as Thomas Paine, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, Frederick Douglass and countless others, women have made tremendous strides. Today, much to the consternation of reactionary Bible believers, they can lead nations, Fortune 500 corporations, sports teams and so on. There are laws against rape, sexual abuse and domestic abuse. Girls and women have it best in secular nations with strong democratic institutions. However, girls and women clearly have it the worst in places run by extremist Muslims, such as northern Nigeria under the Boko Haram, Pakistan under the Taliban, Saudi Arabia, and areas under the control of ISIS.

The Bible condemns homosexuality and calls for the death penalty for men that have sex with men. According to many homophobic ministers,

it is the only time in the Bible when the word “abomination” is used, which shows just how disgraceful homosexuality is supposed to be. (In reality, though, the word “abominable” is used elsewhere in the Bible.)

Today, however, in many nations, same-sex couples are allowed to marry and adopt children. LGBT people can be elected to high political offices, as in the case of Ireland’s Prime Minister Leo Varadkar, the 38-year-old non-White son of an Indian immigrant. They are leaders in entertainment and other areas of influence. They are coming out in sports and have increased visibility throughout the world.

However, in many parts of the world, the text and the practice are the same. In extremist Muslim parts of the world LGBT people can be legally put to death for same-sex relations. In African nations such as Uganda and Nigeria many are calling for the death penalty for LGBT people, and it is illegal for LGBT people to even organize.

Today, in opposition to biblical teachings, civilized people reject theocracy and no longer believe that demons cause disease. People have made progress against reactionary religious ideas in many other areas. Still, we all need to do more to “correct the Bible” (and the Qur’an.) What better way to improve the world?