

The Worst Religious Extremists on the Planet

By Norm R. Allen Jr.

Muslims and progressives routinely complain that any strong critique of Islam is rooted in Islamophobia. This is not surprising. After all, many secular and religious Jews charge those critiquing Judaism - or Israel- with anti-Semitism. Those critiquing pedophilia in the Catholic Church often meet charges of Catholic bashing. Though most Americans are Christians, as are most American politicians and all Supreme Court justices, many Christians in the U.S. claim that they are an oppressed minority.

There are good and bad theists from all religions, just as there are good and bad atheists. There are religionists of all political persuasions - liberals, conservatives, radicals, moderates, etc. Of course, the same can be said of atheists.

Extremism of all kinds is bad. However, it is a mistake to contend that all forms of religious extremism are equally bad. On the contrary, I argue that of all the forms of religious extremism in the world today, Muslim fanaticism is the worst. Indeed, it is difficult to know where to start in demonstrating this case. So why not begin with sexism?

Religious extremists from all of the patriarchal religions such as Judaism, Christianity and Islam are thoroughly sexist in theory and/or practice. However, Muslim extremists are far worse than their counterparts. For example, though religious extremists in general insist upon “modest” clothing for women, Muslim extremists force women to cover up to the point where the woman cannot be seen at all except for (possibly) her eyes (the niqab). Women must be covered from head-to-toe, and the balky, unwieldy, hot, stuffy, self-effacing and dangerous burka popularized by the Taliban is the best example of such a get-up.

Among Muslim extremists, a woman’s testimony in court is worth half that of a man. A woman pursuing justice against her rapist must have more than one male witness to the crime, even though it seems unlikely that, except in cases of gang rape, there are ever any witnesses to such a crime with the exception of the victim and her victimizer. This sets an impossibly high standard of evidence.

Some Muslim extremists do not even want girls to learn how to read, let alone get a decent education. When the Taliban ran Afghanistan, they did not permit girls to learn how to read or to get a proper education. In Pakistan, on July 12, 2013, a young girl, Malala Yousufzai, now 15, was shot in the head point blank by God-addicted thugs from the Taliban simply for defending girls’ right to an education. She received medical treatment in the UK and is finishing her education there. She is now writing a book titled *I am Malala* which is scheduled to be released in the fall of 2013. She will reportedly get paid \$3 million for her literary work.

Men that embrace extremist Islam have a fear and hatred of women that borders on the pathological. Not only are they afraid of having to compete intellectually against women, they believe it is wrong for men and women to simply shake hands.

Extremist Muslims push for the death penalty for those convicted of adultery - especially women. For example, on March 22, 2002, a Sharia court in northern Nigeria sentenced 32-year-old Amina Lawal to death by stoning for allegedly committing adultery and for having a child out of wedlock. (Not surprisingly, the father was let go due to a lack of evidence against him.) On February 23, 2004, due to international pressure, Lawal was freed, and she has since remarried.

In Maldives, a 15-year-old rape survivor has been sentenced to receive 100 lashes in public for having premarital sex. Her stepfather allegedly raped her for years and murdered her baby. In Maldives, only women and children are flogged for alleged sexual misconduct. Of those convicted of fornication and punished, 90% are women. Though rape is widespread throughout the nation, there have been no rape convictions in three years.

Boko Haram (which means Western education is forbidden) are the nuttiest of Nigeria's religious nuts. They force their children to learn nothing but the Qur'an. They strike terror throughout the nation by bombing churches, murdering Christians, attacking police stations, killing cops, etc.

Other victims of Muslim religious insanity include LGBT people, especially gay men. They can be put to death by fanatical Muslim governments. They are forced to live in fear. Not long ago, Iran's president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, said that there are no gays in his nation. Though Christian religious fanatics in such African nations as Uganda want to pass legislation that condones death for homosexuals, they have been largely kept in check by progressives. (Similarly, reactionary Christians in Uganda are trying to pass a law against women wearing mini-skirts and other revealing clothing. Again, progressives are holding them in check.)

Apostates, atheists and alleged blasphemers are also victims of fanatical Muslims. In many states and nations run by Muslim extremists, they can be put to death. Alleged blasphemers are especially susceptible to the blind rage of ultra-reactionary, intolerant Muslims. The Ayatollah Khomeini issued a fatwa against Salman Rushdie in 1989 for writing his provocative book *The Satanic Verses*.

In mid-March, 2013, Amina Tyler, a Tunisian student, posted topless photos of herself on Facebook with the words "Fuck Your Morals" and "My Body Belongs to Me And Is Not The Source of Anyone's Honor" painted on her body. Extremist Muslims protested, and one Muslim leader said that Tyler could be stoned for disrespecting Islam. She is reportedly in hiding and many fear for her safety.

On March 30, 2013, authorities in Egypt arrested popular satirist Bassem Youssef, considered to be Egypt's Jon Stewart for his program modeled after "The Daily Show. Youssef was charged with insulting Islam and Egyptian President Mohammed Morsi. He was released the following day on \$2,200 bail. (A court in Cairo threw out a lawsuit by an extremist Muslim lawyer attempting to ban the show for insulting Morsi "and containing excessive sexual innuendo.")

Religious nuts have gone on rampages over the publication of cartoons mocking the Prophet Muhammad, for the naming of a teddy bear in Afghanistan, the planned Miss World contest in Nigeria, and other real and perceived slights to Islam too numerous to mention.

The International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU) has published the first of a proposed series of annual “Freedom of Thought” reports, detailing cases of discrimination and persecution against non-believers. The 2012 report found that:

- * In Indonesia, Alexander Aan was jailed for two-and-a-half years for Facebook posts on atheism.
- * In Tunisia, two young atheists, Jabeur Mejri and Ghazi Beji, were sentenced to seven-and-a-half years in prison for Facebook postings that were judged blasphemous.
- * In Turkey, pianist and atheist Fazil Say faces jail for “blasphemous” tweets.
- * In Egypt, 17-year-old Gamal Abdou Massoud was sentenced to three years in jail, and Bishoy Kamel was imprisoned for six years, both for posting “blasphemous” cartoons on Facebook.
- * The founder of Egypt’s Facebook Atheists, Alber Saber, faces jail time....

To be sure, there are laws against blasphemy or defamation of religion in predominantly Christian European nations, but they are not enforced to this extent. Moreover, charges of blasphemy by non-Muslims are not followed by deadly riots. (For more information on the report see *International Humanist News*, March 2013, p. 6. The full report may be downloaded at <http://goo.gl/LuzzS>)

The IHEU has also reported that Muslim extremists in Bangladesh have given a list of 84 alleged blasphemers to the Bangladeshi government calling for them to be executed unless they apologize for their alleged crimes. At least four atheist bloggers have been arrested and at least eight persons have been killed in religious riots. One hundred thousand angry Muslims marched in Dhaka demanding a new Blasphemy law and the execution of the bloggers. Authorities ordered the deletion of numerous Internet writings deemed blasphemous. They have also stopped about 12 blogs and Websites and provided spies to search for blasphemous writings on the Internet. (For more information, visit <http://iheu.org/bangladesh-bloggers>. To support the bloggers, visit <http://iheu.org/story/call-action-defend-bloggers-bangladesh>)

It is estimated that about two-thirds of Iraq’s Christians have left the nation during the past decade to evade harassment, burnings of their churches and mass murder. Pakistani Christians are routinely chased from their homes and neighborhoods by intolerant Muslims. In Iran, a Christian minister, Saeed Abedini, received an eight-year prison sentence for the horrible crime of spreading Christianity. (In Iran, Christian converts are not allowed to build churches.) According to Human Rights Watch, Christians in the Middle East are at very high risk; and in Iraq and Syria, they are in fact experiencing “ethnic cleansing” at the hands of Muslim extremists. Islamophobia is real. However, where are the non-Muslim religious extremists driving Muslims out of their nations in these ways?

It is not as though heterosexual Muslim men have it easy under the power and influence of Muslim theocrats. In Saudi Arabia, they, too, have to contend with the virtue police. When the Taliban ruled Afghanistan, the virtue police routinely whipped men for getting out of line. In many Muslim theocracies, it is illegal to drink alcoholic beverages or to listen to music, and in some cases, men are forced to wear long beards. Men, women and children are subjected to amputations and other primitive forms of cruel and unusual punishment.

Some might argue that dangerous religious cults such as the Branch Davidians of Waco, Texas, the Jim Jones cult in Guyana, the Heaven's Gate cult, etc. are more dangerous than Muslim extremists. However, as one commentator has pointed out, deadly cults are suicidal, but deadly religions are *homicidal* (and genocidal). If religious fanatics turn on themselves, that is one problem. However, when religious fanatics start killing people who are simply minding their business, that is anti-democratic behavior at its worst.

Just as some nations, governments and cultures are more authoritarian and reactionary than others, such is also the case with religions. The late commentator Andy Rooney used to say "There's no nut like a religious nut." He could have added, "there's no religious nut like a *Muslim* religious nut." Indeed, Muslim extremists are the worst religious extremists on the planet.