

Blasphemy Laws

An abomination that continues to plague humanity

This issue of *Humanist Perspectives* has a section devoted to blasphemy, no doubt a subject that we will revisit in future issues. The articles in that section are provided by the Centre for Inquiry Canada (CFIC) who, along with Humanist Canada, are spearheading a campaign to End Blasphemy Laws in this country. CFIC is also a co-founder of the International Coalition to Abolish Blasphemy Laws (ICABL). This Coalition is teaming up with the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU) to launch a web resource – end-blasphemy-laws.org – to provide education regarding blasphemy laws around the world.

Blasphemy laws may be asleep but not dead in Canada, as Cassandra Martino points out in her article, but they are alive and virulent in other parts of the world, as Rafida Bonya Ahmed and Eric Adriaans, writing about Bangladesh, and Seanna Watson, writing about Saudi Arabia, point out in theirs. To the atrocities described in the latter two articles, one could add many more. Consider the case of Asia Bibi, a Christian woman in Pakistan, a country with draconian blasphemy laws, who has languished in jail since 2010 and is facing execution based on accusations by fellow village women that she insulted the prophet of Islam. But those are Islamic countries, you might say, and we know the direction they are going in.

Yet Ireland implemented a blasphemy law in 2009, about which Atheist Ireland, supported by ICABL, is pressuring its government to hold a referendum. And CFIC reports on its website that Poland once again has a blasphemy law “after 50 years of absence.” And apparently this sort of de-

velopment is affecting all ex-communist countries.

The vicious murders in Paris of the Charlie Hebdo cartoonists, whose one-year anniversary we are approaching, carried out against those deemed to have offended the Islamic prophet Mohammad, proved that no one is safe from vigilante enforcers of blasphemy laws, even if they live in countries with decidedly secular constitutions. The outlay of about \$30,000 USD for massive security paid off for the organizers of the Mohammad Art Exhibit and Cartoon Contest in Garland, Texas, in May of this year, when two jihadi would-be assassins were killed before they could carry out the slaughter they had come to perpetrate (even though the person who killed them was a traffic cop). It is worth pointing out that the venue, the Curtis Culwell Center, was very deliberately chosen by the organizers – because that is where U.S. Muslim leaders held a conference “in defense of the prophet” one week after the slaughter of the Charlie Hebdo cartoonists. The winner of the cartoon contest, Bosch Fawstin, who won \$12,500 USD, thought the cost, in terms of treasure and risk to lives, was worth it, because “this is a stand for freedom” and “is us telling them we will not submit.” The fact that Western media blurred out images of Mohammad when they reported about the event was described by co-organizer Pamela Geller (the other being Robert Spencer) as a prime example of Western governments and media bowing to the dictates of Islamic law.

As it happens, at about the same time as CFIC approached the editors of *Humanist Perspectives* to include a blasphemy section in this issue of *HP*, I acquired a copy of Doborah Weiss’

monograph “The Organization of Islamic Cooperation’s Jihad on Free Speech,” produced this year by the Center for Security Policy Press (Vol. 3 of their Civilization Jihad Reader Series). In her short 65-page booklet, Weiss describes the machinations of the Islamo-supremacist Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), comprised of head-of-state level representatives from 56 Islamic countries and the Palestinian Authority, to pass United Nations resolutions that are in effect resolutions against blasphemy. The OIC is a voting bloc at the UN and the largest multinational organization in the world after the UN itself. Some experts liken it to a future Islamic Caliphate.

Saudi Arabia plays an important role in, and is the largest financial backer of, the OIC, which is headquartered in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. Other powerful states within the OIC are Pakistan, Iran, and Turkey. The OIC’s charter says its mission is to promote Islamic values and, among many other things, to combat defamation of Islam. All of the stated objectives of the OIC, including positive ones such as promoting peace and fighting terrorism, must be seen through the lens of Islamic sharia law. Bear in mind that not long after the Iranian Revolution of 1979, the OIC nations withdrew their commitment from the UN’s 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights to come up with their own declaration, which eventually became the 1990 Cairo Declaration of Human Rights in Islam. Under the CDHRI, some people are more equal than others, all in accordance with sharia law.

The long-term goal of the OIC is for all humans, Muslim and non-Muslim, to submit to sharia law. In furtherance of this long-term goal, the OIC seeks to internationally outlaw and eventually criminalize all criticism of Islam, sharia law, Islamic theocracies, Muslims and even Islamic terrorism. While claiming to support freedom of speech, the OIC insists that freedom of speech does not include the freedom

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to make blasphemous comments or “insults to Islam.” Its promotion of the concept of combating “defamation of religion” serves to justify blasphemy laws that exist in Muslim countries and to promote their adoption in other countries. In her book, Weiss describes how the OIC uses multi-lateral conferences, “consensus building,” and legal instruments such

as UN resolutions to incrementally achieve its goals. And it is disturbing to read how they have managed to dupe other countries, including the United States.

The OIC held its first major Summit on “Islamophobia” in 2006, in Mecca (a city, it might be mentioned, that non-Muslims are not allowed to enter). Declaring that there would be zero tolerance for Islamophobia, the OIC unveiled a 10-year “Programme of Action” to counter it. At the second Summit, in 2008, the “1st Annual OIC Observatory Report on Islamophobia” was unveiled. Alleged instances of Islamophobia included reporting on bad things that Muslims had done, even if the reports were accurate, as well as the European Union’s request that Iran drop the death penalty for apostasy. It is clear that what the OIC is seeking is not the protection of Muslims but of Islam itself.

In 2011, then Secretary of State Hilary Clinton co-chaired, along with then OIC Secretary-General Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, a high-level diplomatic meeting in Istanbul on “Islamophobia,” in order to launch the implementation of the OIC-sponsored UN Resolution 16/18 to Combat Intolerance Based on Religion or Belief, in what became known as the Istanbul Process. The OIC was clear on wanting to restrict critical speech about Islam and eliminate Islamophobia. The conference focussed on alleged Islamophobia in the West, but ignored the very real persecution of religious minorities in Muslim countries. Secretary Clinton asserted that the US would not push for the enactment of speech-restrictive laws but that it would

advocate for other measures to achieve those results, including interfaith dialogue and the use of “good old-fashioned techniques of peer pressure and shaming.” So, suppression of free speech is fine as long as it is achieved through political correctness and not legal means?

Which brings us (eventually) to the absurdity that is Quebec’s Bill 59, “to prevent and combat hate speech and speech inciting violence...” The bill, proposed by the Quebec Human Rights Commission’s President Jacques Frémont and introduced by Quebec Premier Philippe Couillard, would allow an anonymous procedure for reporting hate speech to the Quebec Human Rights Commission (QHRC) and would grant it new powers, including the power to investigate. In addition to targeting hate speech against protected groups of individuals, including those based on race, sexual orientation, and gender, Bill 59 also protects language, social condition, and political convictions. Unlike criminal code prohibitions against hate speech, the Human Rights Commission provides no procedural guarantees, such as the presumption of innocence, against the accused. Furthermore, the legislation does not define what hate speech is. In addition to first offenders possibly being

fined between \$1,000 and \$10,000, their names would be published on the HRC’s website. Frémont let it be known that he planned to use the requested powers to sue “people who would write against ...the Islamic religion...on a website or on a Facebook page.” It is not surprising to learn that Frémont had worked for American billionaire and left-wing social activist George Soros, who believes that terrorism is the result of economic inequality but is silent on the matter of jihad, which predates the existence of the US as a nation state by over 1100 years.

It does not take much imagination to draw a line between the OIC’s “Programme of Action” on Islamophobia and Quebec’s Bill 59. There could be no better illustration in Canada of why the work of the Centre for Inquiry Canada and of the International Coalition to Abolish Blasphemy Laws is so important. •

– Madeline Weld

Postscript: This editorial and all articles in this issue of HP were written before the November 13 attacks in Paris. The slaughter in Paris and other recent attacks are manifestations of the escalating global jihad to establish Islamic sharia law around the world.

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