

# excommunicated

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## CHARLIE HEBDO AND THE WRATH OF FAITH

### James Morrow

Novelist

As the murders of four French cartoonists—plus eight of their colleagues—soaked into the consciousness of Western journalists last January, an apparent consensus emerged to frame the tragedy vis-à-vis the Enlightenment ideal of free speech. This default setting for the debate was understandable but also, I would argue, misguided. Let me suggest that our reflections on the *Charlie Hebdo* massacre should lead us into a less comfortable, more heretical zone: the domain of discourse about how the world works according to supernaturalist and other systems of thought.

When a gunman screams “*Allahu Akbar!*” while proposing to blow your head off for mocking his preferred prophet, you and he are not having a conversation about the merits and disadvantages of unfettered expression. You and the gunman are not having a conversation at all. Rather, the gunman has sent you plummeting into an abyss—a void dredged out by what Adam Gopnik (in writing

about the Paris killings) called “the wrath of faith”—and it’s a foregone conclusion that the abyss will win.

From where I sit, the insistence on making the *Charlie Hebdo* horror an occasion for revisiting the free speech controversy—as opposed to revisiting questions about the larger workings of the world—has led to a surfeit of muddled thinking. Two examples come immediately to mind.

On the Friday morning following the murders, Hussein Rashid, a Hofstra University professor of religion, spoke about the event on the WNYC radio program, *The Takeaway*. Professor Rashid took pains to clarify that he regards the right to sacrilegious expression as virtually unqualified, and he came across as erudite and knowledgeable concerning France’s struggles to assimilate immigrant populations into its body politic. But near the end of the interview Professor Rashid made me sad when he remarked, “I think what we see often, though, is that under the rhetoric of free speech and satire we see bullying of oppressed and marginalized communities. I think *Hebdo* mixed those lines.”

To characterize the creation of pen-and-ink drawings as “bullying,” I feel, violates the plain meaning of the word. Bullying occurs when one or more individuals gang up on a live victim who has no choice but to endure their abuse. When we use the term to indicate a person’s entirely optional consumption of impertinent artifacts skewering a dead historical figure (whether allegedly holy or not), we have sidled into incoherence. The *Charlie Hebdo* artists might have behaved recklessly, insensitively, and loutishly, but they weren’t bullies, and no amount of moralizing about marginalized communities can ever make cartoonists or their editors legitimate targets for the wrath of faith.

Continuing the theme, Professor Rashid also remarked, “If we talk about the difference between satire and bullying, it’s about understanding who your audience is and who you’re going after. We look at the [Little Black] Sambo comic tradition in America. We would never run those things now—right?—because we’re aware of a population that is not subservient to us anymore. We treat blacks as people in this country now.”

Leaving aside the question of whether a consensus now exists among white Americans to treat “blacks as people,” I believe that Professor Rashid’s example is utterly irrelevant to the *Charlie Hebdo* debate. First of all, Helen Bannerman’s 1899 children’s book, *The Story of Little Black Sambo*, was never intended as satire. And, of course, nobody brought weapons to conversations about the Sambo character. Nobody cried “God is Great!” while simultaneously gunning down Helen Bannerman. (Nota bene: Professor Rashid is not alone in his mistaken assumption that Little Black Sambo is an African-American figure; the author was British, and the story is set in South India.)

I am perhaps being unfair to Hussein Rashid. Even the most brilliant people often fail to say exactly what they mean in extemporaneous interviews. On the other hand, I have no sympathy for cartoonist Garry Trudeau’s response to the *Charlie Hebdo* tragedy, which he articulated in his carefully scripted acceptance of the Polk Award last month at Long Island University.

Consider this assertion of Mr. Trudeau’s: “By punching downward, by attacking a powerless, disenfranchised minority with crude, vulgar drawings closer to graffiti than cartoons, Charlie wandered into the realm of hate speech.” A Martian reading those words might conclude that the cartoonists in question had imagined, and then

rendered, loathsomely pornographic scenes of ordinary, oppressed, pious Muslims going about their daily lives. But the cartoonists’ overarching theme was the theocratic legacy of the Quran and its exalted author, Muhammad, a man who presumed to set the entire human race straight about the workings of God and His Creation. Contrary to Mr. Trudeau’s indictment, the *Charlie Hebdo* artists weren’t picking on the afflicted. They were inviting

their audience—through a series of deliberately coarse and tasteless solicitations—to think about a troublesome set of absolutist ideas.

Or consider this nugget from the same speech: “At some point free expression becomes childish and unserious. It becomes its own kind of fanaticism.” Not only does this observation verge on the meaningless—what human endeavor isn’t vulnerable to silliness, insincerity, and obsessiveness?—it distracts us from the core of the problem, the reflexive deference to faith that characterizes political discourse in both the East and the West. To return to our Martian: an extraterrestrial reading Mr. Trudeau’s thoughts on “fanaticism” might infer that for Earthlings there’s no important difference between a zealous devotion to free expression and a zealous devotion to homicide committed in fulfillment of a supernaturalist worldview.

Either our species has made intellectual progress since the Middle Ages or it hasn’t. Either the cosmos contains a supernatural stratum or it doesn’t. Either the universe is being supervised by a person-like divinity—knowable, accessible, appeasable, opinionated, and dependent on human beings to protect Him from ridicule—or there are more plausible alternative models. And that is the conversation we should be having, I believe, in the post-*Charlie Hebdo* world.



Cover of January 14, 2015 edition of *Charlie Hebdo*; the first published after the shooting. A cartoon of Muhammad bears a Je suis Charlie sign and is captioned *Tout est pardonné* (“All is forgiven”).

RESPONSE TO JAMES MORROW

John Daniel Holloway, III

Union Theological Seminary

James Morrow makes a compelling point about the *Charlie Hebdo* situation: religious extremists committed a violent act because they believed in a God who justified their suspension of the ethical—and so he refers to “the wrath of faith.” Thus, honest reflection on the event might inspire us to view theology/religion/faith as inherently negative, and so if we are to cultivate a rational and free society we should move on from such things. Philosopher and sociologist Slavoj Žižek made a comparable point about theism, saying that it gives certain groups something beyond themselves to appeal to in order to justify their inhumane actions. As “the instruments of God’s will,” they need not adhere to governing moral precepts. He explains,

The vast majority of people are spontaneously moral: torturing or killing another human being is deeply traumatic for them. So, in order to make them do it, a larger “sacred” Cause is needed, one which makes petty individual concerns about killing seem trivial. . . . Without it, we would have to feel all the burden of what we did, with no Absolute upon whom to off-load our ultimate responsibility (“Christianity against the Sacred,” in *God in Pain: Inversions of Apocalypse*, New York: Seven Stories Press, 2012, 44–46).

It is important to recognize, however, that *theism* is not what is being critiqued here; *problematic theology* is what is being critiqued. Not all theologians would say God is even capable of sanctioning the suspension of the ethical. Roberto Sirvent, for example, says we should posit a “shared moral standard” between God and humans, so that theologians attribute what we consider moral in our immediate experience to the divine moral standard (*Embracing Vulnerability: Human and Divine*, Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2014, 45–63). Thomas Jay Oord argues that “God did not arbitrarily choose the laws of nature and standards of morality,” and nor can God “supersede them.” However, he adds, “the standards of morality or laws of nature neither exist independent of

nor transcend God;” rather, they emerge from God’s “eternal and unchanging nature of love” (*The Uncontrolling Love of God: An Open and Relational Account of Providence*, Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, forthcoming, 40–43). God cannot go against God’s own nature, and because morality is part of God’s essential nature, God cannot act immorally or sanction others to act immorally. Thus, to appeal to the deplorable suspension of the ethical that springs from one’s belief in God is not actually to argue against theism, but only against bad theology.

Morrow’s analysis is overly-dismissive and neglects the potential value of theology. His thinking is typical of Enlightenment rationalism, and so he is not venturing into a “more heretical zone,” as he says, but is actually embracing the modernist orthodoxy of the all-determining quality of reason. He concludes,

Either our species has made intellectual progress since the Middle Ages or it hasn’t. Either the cosmos contains a supernatural stratum or it doesn’t. Either the universe is being supervised by a person-like divinity—knowable, accessible, appeasable, opinionated, and dependent on human beings to protect Him from ridicule—or there are more plausible alternative models. And that is the conversation we should be having, I believe, in the post-*Charlie Hebdo* world.

We moderns have moved on from religion and theology. We’re above all that. We no longer adopt silly notions like the existence of a supernatural realm. We only accept plausible worldviews. As we can see from the *Charlie Hebdo* incident, faith is regressive and violent, and so a rational and free society should move on from faith as well.

It is presumptuous to assert that the regressive violence of the *Charlie Hebdo* incident is a symptom of the larger problem of religious faith. In fact, religion-less thinking can churn out the same kind of violence. After discussing the suspension of the ethical that theism inspires, Žižek goes on to point out a similar thought process in Stalinist Communists, who, though atheists, built a kind of theology around Communism and justified the suspension of the ethical

in pursuit of it (46). Humans can be violent, and our potential violence transcends our culture, religion, philosophy, etc. In any of these facets of society, there will be groups who use certain things to justify committing violent acts. Religion is no exception, but nor is it the cause.

Jesus was an example of a religious man who often took the side of the outcast and the oppressed over against the self-righteous “instruments of God’s will.” Many first century Jews were right to think of Jesus as a heretic, because when he was confronted with a choice between following religious laws or exercising compassion, he always chose to privilege the concerns of the person. Like Huck Finn when confronted with the choice between supporting slavery and following the “morals” he grew up with, or helping out a runaway slave, he chose compassion (*The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, reprint, New York: Penguin Books, 1985, 36–37). Denouncing his morals would mean going to hell, and to that he said, “All right, then, I’ll go to hell.” That is the spirit of Jesus, and it is a religious spirit. It of course does *not* have to be a religious spirit, but the point is, religion is not inherently regressive and violent, even if it can be used to justify regressive violence. In fact, religion can and has often been a source of compassion and good will. Dismissing religion the way Morrow does is a recipe for intolerance, and the “post-Charlie Hebdo world” should be one of pluralism, not of Enlightenment dogmatism, for dogmatism and intolerance are what characterize religious fundamentalism. It is not religion that kills, it is how religion is constructed, and almost anything can be constructed in such a way as to inspire violence—including Enlightenment rationalism.



Albrecht Dürer’s woodcut, Christ’s Descent into Limbo, c. 1510

CHARLIE’S ORTHODOXY

Jordan E. Miller

Salve Regina University

I am not Charlie. And I won’t be coerced into feeling as though I should say that I am.

The problem here is authorities that have enough force and meaning to convince us to kill and die for them. This is the problem with what happened at *Charlie Hebdo*’s offices in Paris in January. But this is also precisely the problem with the “Draw Muhammad” event in Texas on May 3. The goal of these events has been to turn the cartoonist into an icon. As Aaron Bady wrote in [a blog for The New Inquiry](#), “...I want to observe how very strange it is to see a magazine that takes a pride in pissing people off, that is meant to be blasphemous and offensive and provocative and unsettling—a magazine whose entire reason for existing is supposed to be that it is irreverently outside the mainstream—be transformed into something which one feels compelled to regard with reverence, a thing in whose name assembled heads of state will pretend to march.”

I am not Charlie because I refuse to answer tyrannical violence with the insistence upon a better, more enlightened value system. I will not answer tyranny with a more perfect orthodoxy.

The cartoonists at *Charlie Hebdo* were killed because they offended a sense of orthodoxy. Heresy, at its best, is iconoclastic. In knee-jerk valorizing free speech, we run the risk of making *Charlie Hebdo* into

an icon in its own right. “Je suis Charlie” has become the clarion call of loyalty. It is an expression of faith. In fact, the appeal to rights which is so often trotted out during horrific events such as these is fundamentally an appeal to an authority beyond critique. Who would dare criticize the right to free speech other than a champion of tyranny? Except the very language of “rights” itself is the language of appeal to authority. Rights are bestowed by those with power and legitimacy whether it’s “our creator,” “natural law,” the values of liberalism, or some other stop gap. In the end, rights are idols. And *Charlie Hebdo* has become the icon of the religion of free speech and free press. But if nothing is sacred, then neither is free speech or the right to it.

As a heretic—or at least as someone who values the heretical impulse, procedure, and imperative to tear down those authorities which stand beyond critique—I cannot simply join the chorus of those who unequivocally condemn the shootings and support the cartoonists. This is, of course, not to say that I advocate the violence that unfolded in Paris in January. There is no justification of the murder of those who would dare express political opinion in public. But it is to say that I refuse to be bullied into the uncritical position of a secular, liberal orthodoxy. No matter what the tolerant secular liberal might say to the contrary, neither secularity nor liberalism are neutral. They are political, economic, theological, and -- indeed -- imperialist categories with long and storied histories that should by now be familiar to any educated reader. You know there’s a problem when FOX News is running defenses of free speech every two minutes for days on end. Free speech is thus not free speech an und für sich; free speech is the expression of an agenda. The appeal to free speech is a tactical deployment of a concept. I will not trot out my support for the cartoonists at the offices of *Charlie Hebdo* on such problematic grounds. To do so would not only be short-sighted, but it would contribute to the very problem that it would ostensibly seek to solve.

To propose free speech as the value worth fighting for is to enter into a pissing contest of competing orthodoxies. Her values are better than your values. Fine. That may well be. I do, in fact, hold to the idea that free speech is preferable to executing those who disagree with me. But holding this position doesn’t move us any further away from the problem that got us into this mess in the first place.

Orthodoxy is the problem, not the way out. Authority is the problem. Iconoclasm, heresy, blasphemy, unbelief, anarchy -- these are allies on the side of attempting to solve that problem. I’m not sure of the solution or the goal. In fact, I’m suspicious that there could be any goal proposed that wouldn’t be subject to the same issues. But I am sure that we’re not going to solve the problem by appealing to new and better authorities, more rigorous and thoughtful orthodoxies, or more generous and rational idols.

No lords. No masters. Not even *Charlie Hebdo*.

## Edward Simon

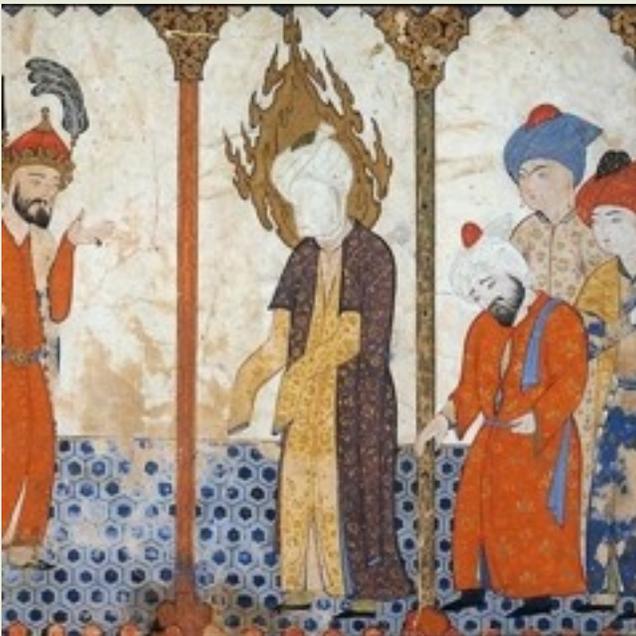
Lehigh University

I am also not Charlie, but I'd probably be fine grabbing a beer with "him," and maybe enjoying some irreverent (if not blasphemous) conversation. It's true that a lot of people muttered "Je Suis Charlie" as a type of meaningless digital advocacy, and it's also true that the usual suspects unfortunately emerged and appropriated it as another neo-conservative slogan in the "War on Terror." But despite all the frustration, the anemic Facebook posts meekly supporting freedom of speech and the FOX News cooption (when did *they* start to love France so much?) we shouldn't forget the actual event that transpired. Twelve people were violently murdered for *drawing cartoons*.

It's generated the standard hand-wringing on the fractured left – do we embrace that old Voltairian chestnut about absolute free speech, or do we say that the cartoonists "went too far and their murder isn't justifiable, but didn't they know what they were getting into" (and thus falling perilously close into the rhetorical logic of "What did she expect would happen, dressing like that?".....).

The vultures of the right swoop in after anything that can be labeled terrorism occurs, and the declaration of "Je Suis Charlie" was quickly appropriated into a tacit slogan for continuing the disastrous policies of an ill-defined global "War on Terror." It was only three days after Hollande, Merkel, and Netanyahu marched through the streets of the Republic in the name of liberty, equality, and fraternity that (the odious) comedian Dieudonne M'bala M'bala was arrested because of his anti-semitic statements.

It serves to remind us of the complex genealogy of the Enlightenment which we believe ourselves to be the inheritors of, and which we see fundamentalist Islam as being in reaction to. There were of course many "enlightenments," radical ones and reactionary ones. The multiple intellectual movements of the eighteenth century in Britain, France, Germany, America and so on that gave us a conception of "rights" are more complicated, contradictory, and difficult to conceptualize than Sam Harris, Bill Maher, or Christopher Hitchens would have us believe. If it's true that modern skepticism and scientific modernity were born of the ideologies of the Enlightenment then it's also true that colonialism and totalitarianism were dark twins of that period as well. And it's also true that the word "rights" can be easily used as an illusory mask of moral certainty to dodge the issue of justice and to replicate inequalities.



*The Prophet Mohammed in a Mosque. Turkey, 16th century, painting on paper. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. The artist depicted Mohammed in very long sleeves so as to avoid showing his hands, though his neck and hints of his features are visible.*

Despite secularism and the Enlightenment's mixed legacy, Cabu, Charb, and George Wolinski are martyrs. And I chose the word "martyrs" very intentionally, because if there is one thing I agree with in Jordan Miller's excommunicated piece *Charlie's Orthodoxy* it's that Enlightenment values are undeniably theological in origin. It's telling how American secularism – born in a country and an era of dozens of disestablished churches – should find itself defined by the "separation of church and state" (a particularly low-church Protestant type of secularism). France on the other hand, with its anticlerical tradition of *laïcité* seems to have taken a more absolutist claim on issues of religion – it's a very Catholic brand of secularism. But much as Protestantism and Catholicism are but branches of the same tree, so are American and French forms of the Enlightenment. And in their response to, rejection of, accommodation to, and adaptation of religion and religious thought they are inescapably theological in their origins. It is true that secularism and liberalism (and humanism) are not neutral; they are not the teleological results of a preordained system of moral evolution from primitive religion to some sort of advanced scientificity. Those ideas, like all of us, were born to parents, and those parents are the culture and religion of Western Europe where the Enlightenment originated.

But here is the real issue: when discussing why we deserve to stand with the martyred cartoonists of *Charlie Hebdo* none of the aforementioned issues matter. Miller writes, "To propose free speech as the value worth fighting for is to enter into a pissing contest of competing orthodoxies. Her values are better than your values. Fine. That may well be." But it's not just that it may be, it's that *when it comes to free speech* our values actually are better. I'm fine with saying my idol is prettier than radical Islam's idol. If we are not to make idols of anything then paradoxically we are to make idols of relativism. With some on the left's embrace of a multiculturalism that borders on relativism there is something just as irreverent and heretical in saying, "Some values are actually better." Secularism may well be a myth, but I'm fine with believing it to be the myth that is true (with apologies to C. S. Lewis). Perhaps history operates in a process of competition between iconoclasm and iconophilia, but secularism is a "faith" expansive enough to contain both. Perhaps this is a Holy War, not between Christianity and Islam but between secularism and fundamentalism. And perhaps we eliminate our hypocrisy if we just admit that. But it doesn't mean that it isn't worth picking up the gauntlet on secularism's behalf just because it is a "religion" (of sorts).

I believe that Miller has identified a hypocritical aspect of much of the language surrounding *Charlie Hebdo*, one that coopts the deaths of these cartoonists and uses them in an absolutist political cause. And yet if he sees "Iconoclasm, heresy, blasphemy, unbelief [and] anarchy" as the tools to build a better world then the best of Enlightenment secularism is what allows for that, for these are its very values. It is precisely through a consistent, absolute and unbending commitment to free speech – to genuinely and literally all speech – that we find a system which accommodates all systems precisely because it finds no system sacred. I could wipe my ass with a copy of *Charlie Hebdo* and none of those cartoonists would have murdered me (they may have even found it funny). This is not a small difference.

We may inevitably live in a system of values and cultural biases and prejudices, but at least the ideal of the radical Enlightenment is one of a flattening where there are no lords or masters. The spoken Enlightenment is not the true Enlightenment, but the former knows we only get to the latter by allowing the speaking in the first place. Does secularism contradict itself? Very well then, it contradicts itself, it is large, it contains multitudes, room enough for irreverent cartoonists and pious Muslims alike. It is the system that precludes difference that we must fear. Why I stand with *Charlie Hebdo* is that they would be the first to agree with the sentiment "No lords. No masters. Not even *Charlie Hebdo*." I do not need to write, "Je Suis Charlie" on Twitter or Facebook (though I probably have), but I need not run away from what they represented either. As another iconoclast once said, "Liberty, let others despair of you – I never despair of you."

## Richard Santana

Rochester Institute of Technology

We live in an age of false analogy and overstretched metaphors, in which a center-rightish US president is called by some (and considered by more than a few) a socialist, dictator, a Muslim, and variously either “literally Hitler,” or “the Antichrist.” The Affordable Care Act (a law enacted to help people get health insurance) has been referred to by Ben Carson, a conservative presidential candidate as “the worst thing since slavery ... in fact, it is slavery.” From “inflate-gate” to “bridge-gate,” this is an age in which there is no scandal, no matter how small or large, that cannot be called a -gate. Words, phrases, and even symbolically significant linguistic gestures take on a hackney and clichéd form. There is in this a diminution of meaning; once something is a -gate we think we know all about it.

The response the terrorist acts in Paris has had the feeling of a Don Draper created ad campaign, that seems filled with high symbolism until examined more deeply. The response has fit into a pattern that has emerged since 9/11, and become the orthodox reaction to terrorist attacks in the West. Step one is to stand with those who have been attacked; step two call those responsible

cowards, and step three vow to bring the cowards to justice. The formula is simple and has the advantage of being malleable and marketable.

We can see these steps coming together as ritual in President George W. Bush’s “bullhorn” address at “ground zero” (itself already one of these linguistic maneuvers) on 9/14/2001. The “Je suis Charlie” response to the attacks in Paris represents the first step in the ritual. To contextualize the horrible actions of some, it is necessary to stand with the victim in an appositive formulation in which  $a = b$ . What is interesting is that this phrase has come to encapsulate discussions of the event: questions about the propriety of publishing Muhammad cartoons, the limits of free speech (or the potential or consequences of those limits). Not to be with the victims is to be for the terrorists, says the orthodox response. But, the publishers of *Charlie Hebdo* are far from the bastions of liberal idealism with whom defenders of global free speech might make common cause. They have published racist, homophobic, sexist and Islamophobic material that goes well beyond “depictions of the prophet.”

The problem with “je suis Charlie” is that it is too binary and too simplistic. Put a different way, we don’t have *be* Charlie to know that it is wrong to kill someone for making bad jokes, even about the prophet.

## ANTI-ISLAM: THE NEW ANTI-CATHOLICISM?

### Jeremy Carnes

Lindenwood University

When I reflect upon the many reactionary responses I’ve seen to the *Charlie Hebdo* shooting, or to the more recent shooting at an anti-Muslim cartoon contest in Texas, I continually find myself drawn to what may seem a rather distantly related story: John Dryden’s 1689 tragic drama, *Don Sebastian*. Set in Morocco, Dryden’s play portrays violent and scheming Muslims tyrannizing captive Christians (whose crusade conveniently ends just prior to the events of the play, preventing any of the Christian characters from being shown committing an act of violence). Near the climax of the story’s heroic action, the leader of a mob of Moroccan commoners works his followers into a frenzy by recalling their past depredations against Christians: “Do you remember the glorious Rapines and Robberies you have committed? Your breaking open and gutting of Houses, your rummaging of Cellars, your demolishing of Christian Temples, and bearing off in triumph the superstitious Plate and Pictures, the Ornaments of their wicked Altars, when all rich Moveables were sentenc’d for idolatrous, and all that was idolatrous was seiz’d?”

A typical Islamophobic image of hypocritical zealotry, we might say. And it is. However, Dryden isn’t actually targeting Muslims. The Muslim violence against Christians in *Don Sebastian* is a thinly veiled reference to the Protestant violence against Catholics that had occurred throughout England in the previous year. In the final months of 1688, Protestant forces had chased England’s last Catholic king, James II, out of the country. The following year, as England installed the Protestant William III on the throne, riots and mobs attacked Catholics and Catholic property with impunity. At the same time, new legislation strengthened penal laws against Catholics. Dryden, himself a recent Catholic convert, wrote the play to seek pity from the Protestants who were oppressing his co-religionists—and to shame them by suggesting that they were no different from Christendom’s Muslim enemies.

I find the religious violence of the Glorious Revolution important to recall when thinking about responses to the *Charlie Hebdo* shooting—both the surge of think-pieces on whether Muslims can ever integrate into European society, and the even more depressing surge in anti-Muslim attacks in France (up 500% since the *Charlie Hebdo* shooting, according to the French National Observatory Against Islamophobia). The West does a very poor job of remembering its own history of religious violence. Oh, pundits and columnists will make a passing remark

about medieval Europe and the crusades in discussions of Islamic violence, wreathing their subsequent comments in the aura of objectivity even as they imply an association between the contemporary Islamic world and an era of European history that is synonymous in the popular imagination with cultural and religious backwardness. But the crusades are conveniently ancient history; moreover, as *Don Sebastian* demonstrates, Westerners are good at avoiding serious appraisals of the violence of the crusades. (Reading Amin Maalouf’s *The Crusades Through Arab Eyes* was perhaps my first great eye-opening experience as a naïve college freshman.)

If we consider violence *between* Christian groups, the West’s history of large-scale religious violence comes distressingly close to the present day. To take just England as an example (the country whose history of religious violence I am most familiar with), it was not so long ago that its people feared Catholics even more than they fear Muslims today, and for similar reasons: some Catholics (a very, very few) committed acts of terrorism (the Gunpowder Plot, various assassination attempts), and some Catholics (a minority by the eighteenth century) believed the laws of their religion trumped the laws of the state in which they resided. As Ed Simon has recently discussed in a thoughtful essay that appeared on the Religion Dispatches website (“ISIS Is the Islamic Reformation”), the iconoclasm and violence we see in Syria and Iraq today is strongly reminiscent of the iconoclasm and violence of Europe’s Reformation and Counter-Reformation. And that violence persisted well into the period we call the Enlightenment, or the Age of Reason (which is an even more unreasonable name for it).

The Glorious Revolution and its bigotry and violence so strongly criticized by Dryden occurred in the early years of the Enlightenment; it led directly to the English Bill of Rights and Act of Toleration, documents that signal transformations in the relationship between church and state, and government and governed, which would be the Enlightenment’s greatest gifts to the modern world. Yet the Act of Toleration only granted toleration to Protestant minority sects (and not even to all of them), while the Bill of Rights provisioned that no Catholic would ever sit on the English throne, a prohibition that remains in effect to this day. As England advanced further into the enlightened eighteenth century, violence against Catholics erupted again in 1715, 1745, and most infamously in the Gordon Riots of 1780, when London was rocked with the worst urban violence in its history because Parliament had repealed a few of the most draconian laws against Catholics.

The Enlightenment did not cure Britain of religious violence—or if it did, it did so only by planting seeds that did not blossom until well into the nineteenth century (or even much later, if we view the violence against Ireland as based in anti-Catholic bigotry). Indeed, many of the supposedly secular institutions and ideologies that developed in England during the Enlightenment can be traced back to very unsecular, bigoted efforts to disenfranchise and alienate Catholics and protect Protestants against Catholic heresy. Perhaps that is why today’s defenders of those institutions and ideologies so often treat Islam as a heresy which the secular world must stamp out or expel.

If it sounds as if I am trying to excuse or dismiss the violence against *Charlie Hebdo*, I wish to be clear that I am not. The fact that Christians and Muslims

have both proven themselves capable of senseless violence in the name of religion does not excuse anyone of anything, and such violence only becomes more inexcusable as the world becomes more global and cosmopolitan. No, all I wish to say is that before those of us in the enlightened, secular West act holier-than-thou (pun definitely intended) when discussing a violent Muslim world, we should make sure that we are not setting ourselves up to be called to account by some modern Dryden for exhibiting the very intolerance that we fear. If Europe and the rest of the Western world respond to the violence of Muslim extremists with efforts to disenfranchise or alienate Muslim communities, we can expect future generations to find us as embarrassing as we find our Enlightenment-era forebears who combatted intolerance with intolerance.

HERESY IN THE NEWS

**Thomas Jay Oord**

**John Daniel Holloway, III**

Union Theological Seminary

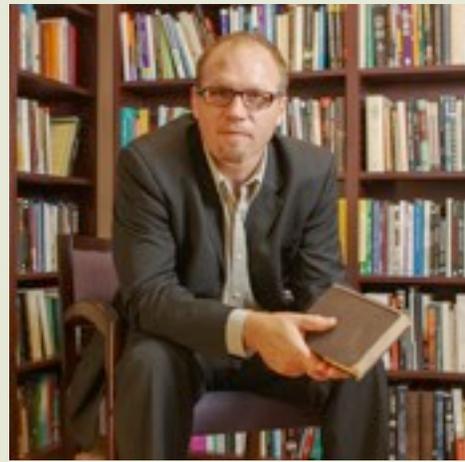
Thomas Jay Oord is a Christian theologian and philosopher with growing popularity in various academic and non-academic circles. He is known for his advocacy of open theism—the belief that God does not possess extensive foreknowledge—and theistic evolution—the simultaneous affirmation of theism and evolutionary theory. In his book *The Nature of Love: A Theology*, Oord lays out his “Essential Kenosis” theology of God. Drawing from the Wesleyan tradition, Oord emphasizes love as the center of his theology, which leads him to advocate an open theist view of foreknowledge, a qualified doctrine of omnipotence, and an ethic of absolute non-coercion. In other works, he engages scientific topics theologically, stressing the importance of accepting evolutionary theory and offering ways for Christians to affirm both evolution and faith in God.

Such a brief overview of Oord’s theology does not capture the essence of his thought, nor the radical nature of his ideas. It is no surprise that he does not have many fans among conservatively orthodox Christians. This reputation recently took a serious toll on his career, as in March Oord received an email from Northwest Nazarene University’s administration notifying him that his tenured position at the university would be terminated at the end of the semester.

In response, a Facebook group called “Support Tom Oord” was created for sharing information and support. While his reputation among many Evangelical circles might be negative, Oord has many friends throughout the world. In one week, over a thousand people joined the group, and some even donated money to Oord. NNU students organized protests, and an on-campus Q&A session for the students was set up by the university in response. The key question: Was Oord’s termination due to his theological views? The university offered a resounding no, but there is plenty of evidence to the contrary.

In 2013, Oord was asked by NNU President David Alexander and Stephen Borger, Intermountain District Superintendent of the Church of the Nazarene, to defend his theology by answering 70 questions. This would determine whether or not his theology fell within the bounds of the Nazarene denomination’s standards. Oord wrote an 80-page response and undertook an interview with Nazarene theologians H. Ray Dunning and former General Superintendent Jesse Middendorf, who then attested to his orthodoxy.

The following year, Oord was threatened with a heresy trial by Borger. He was told if he resigned from his position at the university there would be no trial. (If his theology was deemed heretical, his ordination would have been terminated.) He refused to resign, believing he could sufficiently defend himself against heresy charges. President Alexander subsequently urged a resignation, offering him a severance package, which Oord refused. No heresy trial was conducted; instead, less than a year later, during Spring break of 2015, he was fired.



Thomas Jay Oord

The university at one point called it a financial decision, and at another called it a response to the decline in enrollment in Oord’s department; however, there are reasons to doubt both claims (which are too technical and detailed to get into here). While President Alexander and other representatives of the university have stressed that the decision was not personal and was in no way related to Oord’s theological convictions, the evidence against them is too glaring to ignore (the questionnaire, the threat of a heresy trial, and President Alexander’s appeals for resignation being only a few).

The NNU president’s actions are part of a recent trend in Christian universities toward ruthless business tactics. At Regent University, where I earned my Bachelor of Arts, eight professors, including many beloved by the students (among them, a mentor and dear friend of mine), were informed over Spring break 2012 that their contracts would not be renewed. Like the situation with NNU, this led to an outcry from the Regent student body and the development of a “We Support the 8” group. The university’s own president responded with an open forum where students could ask questions. The stance of Regent was eerily similar to NNU’s various public statements to their student body: We recognize we handled this the wrong way, we’re sorry, we’ll learn from this and will know not to do it this way again. Please forgive us. But we have to move on together as a university. As with NNU, there were reasons to doubt the sincerity of Regent’s apologies. In fact, a year later, Regent repeated their conduct and fired more professors in the same manner.

Pastor and theologian Gregory Boyd, a good friend of Thomas Oord’s, once mused, “One wonders why no one in church history has ever been considered a heretic for being unloving.” Given the centrality of the love ethic in Christian teaching and love’s central role in Christian theology, one would think some theologians would regard this as a reasonable litmus test for determining orthodoxy and heresy. In the case of Thomas Oord and Northwest Nazarene University, the irony is that Oord was more than likely fired for his theological views, and yet it could be said that the truer heresy lies in the unloving conduct toward Oord.

**Tom Paine**  
**Edward Simon**  
 Lehigh University

“For there’s no gods/And there’s precious few heroes.”  
 -Dick Gaughin

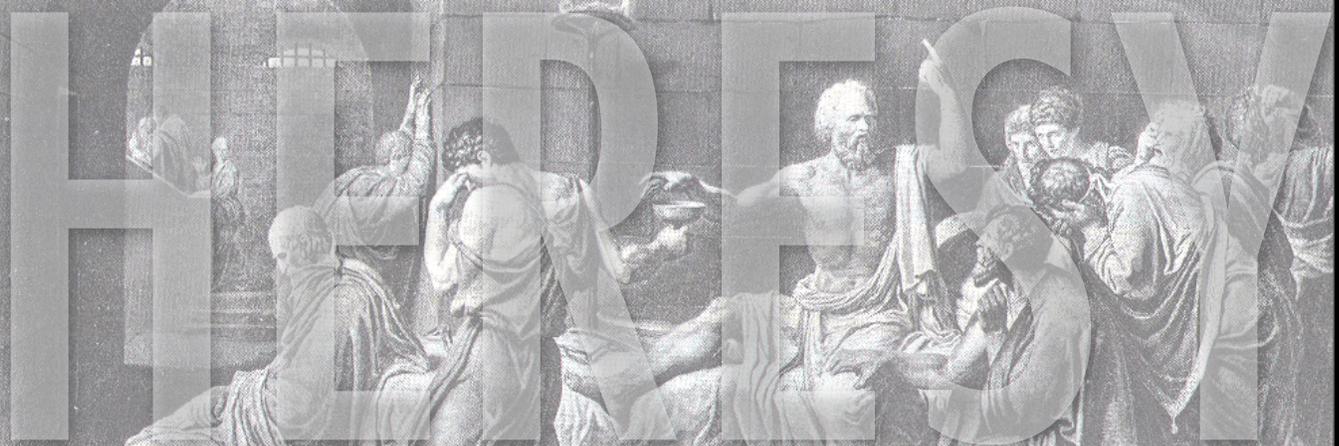
“The King of England looking westward trembles at the vision.”  
 - William Blake

Since it became America’s Bohemia, its “Republic of Dreams” as it’s been called, many junkies and drunks have died anonymously in the tenement houses of Greenwich Village, but only one of them was a Founding Father of the United States of America. Before Andy Warhol and Bob Dylan, or Walt Whitman and Mark Twain walked Canal and Houston, there was Thomas Paine. Here the forgotten founder of America died alone of cirrhosis in a lower Manhattan hovel with only six mourners at his funeral. His very body was absconded with and lost in transit to his native England. Regal George Washington lay in a massive mausoleum and a mural of his apotheosis looks out over the Capital (making him not just monarchical but divine); the silver-tongued hypocrite and patron of equality Thomas Jefferson’s tomb is surrounded by the graves of anonymous slaves. But Tom Paine, most pious partisan and prophet of liberty had his body mutilated, spread about, and lost. In myth-haunted America, land of the jeremiad, newest world based on some of the oldest legends, polemicists on both left and right treat our “Founding Fathers” as gods. Tom Paine however didn’t believe in gods, and so he was just a man, sometimes a flawed one, and because of that he deserves our love.

Tom Paine did not have the aristocratic forbearance of Washington or Jefferson; he was an uncouth man, one of the roughs, an American. Born in Norfolk, England, he had a life-long working class English accent. Rebellion was what he was raised on. It was not ideology; it was something deeper, an inheritance. Unlike Jefferson, he needed no Locke and Bacon to convince him of man’s natural state of liberty, and unlike Washington he had no need of a Jefferson to convince him of the same. His home village of Thetford was the site of Boudicca’s royal residence, the raped Celtic queen who avenged her husband’s death by descending on Roman Londinium and burning it to the ground, and it’s that legacy he imbibed in youth. It’s a historical slander against the English to say that they are a people of royal servitude, for Tom Paine demonstrated the deep sense of justice and equality which runs in the veins and sinews of those who belong to the radical English tradition. There is no understanding 1776 without understanding 1649, or 1381. His was not the England of Plantagenet, Tudor, Stuart, Hanover or Saxe-Coburg-Gotha. Tom Paine is of the England that gave us John Ball and Jack Straw, Gerard Winstanley and Abiezer Cope, William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft. “When Adam delved and Eve span,/Who was then the gentleman?” is almost as if it could have been a nursery rhyme to the young Tom Paine, inheritor of radical religious non-conformism and theological dissension.

If Paine was an Englishman by birth he was an American by choice. For Paine “The cause of America is in great measure the cause of all mankind.” Washington and Jefferson were wealthy plantation owners, but Paine’s father was a corset-maker. Paine was that most potent of American archetypes, the self-made man. He was the son of a woman’s underwear maker and yet he was also the one who christened the thirteen colonies with an original name for them: “The United States of America.”

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His parents were Quakers, followers of the radical tradition of George Fox and John Naylor and William Penn. It was the Quakers who took the Reformation tenet of a priesthood of all believers to its logical conclusion, rejecting even Luther's biblical "Pope of Paper" in favor of an "inner light." Because of his *Age of Reason* he is often thought of as Theodor Roosevelt's "dirty little atheist" (the 26th president's estimation of Mr. Paine) but his convictions were forged in the kiln that is the hot and fiery inner light of the Society of Friends.

In England he failed at every task he tried, as a tobacco shop owner and a rope maker, as a town alderman and as a petitioner to Parliament. In 1774 he left his wife and escaped to London (Can one see George walking out on Martha?) where he met the frontier physicist, the sage of Pennsylvania, the raccoon-fur clad guest of Europe's salons and courts: Benjamin Franklin. The printer wrote Paine a letter of recommendation. Five months later he was an immigrant in that apocalyptic-named Revelation city Philadelphia, sitting on the edge of the western horizon where the sun goes down on the last day of existence, but where Paine saw the sun rising in the west. It was the light marking the arrival of a "New Man," a *Homo Novus*, a millennial figure that would take at least a thousand years to truly develop, the American. And while Paine may have failed at his schemes in England, and he would die destitute and alone, forgotten and drunk in New York, it was for an act in that auspicious year of 1776 that he would be forever remembered, the publication of a little pamphlet with the humble title of *Common Sense*.

Paine was a pamphleteer, a journalist, a propagandist. And he was the product of a radical republican tradition that has existed in the shadow of Britain's royal absurdity for centuries. One could see him as in the tradition of that other revolutionary writer, John Milton. Milton had much like Paine taken advantage of cheap print more than a century before (during the years of the English civil wars) to advocate for the ancient liberties of the Anglo-Saxon people. But where Milton was an educated man, a polyglot and a polymath, "the Lady of Cambridge," the author of the greatest epic poem in the English language, and the last of the Renaissance men, Tom Paine was, again, the son of a corset-maker. Milton's intellectual home was Trinity College; Paine's was a tavern in London or a bar in Philadelphia. That makes all the difference.

Milton – "Thus did Dion Prusaeus, a stranger and a privat Orator counsell the Rhodians against a former Edict: and I abound with other like examples, which to set heer would be superfluous. But if from the industry of a life wholly dedicated to studious labours, and those naturall endowments haply not the worst for two and fifty degrees of northern latitude, so much must be derogated, as to count me not equall to any of those who had this priviledge, I would obtain to be thought not so inferior, as your selves are superior to the most of them who receiv'd their counsell: and how farre you excell them, be assur'd, Lords and Commons, there can no greater testimony appear, then when your prudent spirit acknowledges and obeyes the voice of reason from what quarter soever it be heard speaking; and renders ye as willing to repeal any Act of your own setting forth, as any set forth by your Predecessors."

Paine – "These are the times that try men's souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of their country; but he that stands it now, deserves the love and thanks of men and women," and "If there must be trouble, let it be in my day, that my child may have peace," or "Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered," and maybe most amazingly "We have it within our power to begin the world anew."

This is not to defame or slander Milton. *Areopagetica* is one of the most potent defenses of free speech written; in *Eikonoklastes* and *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* he conceives of an inspiring radicalism, and of course the author of *Paradise Lost* could turn a phrase. And yet his political pamphlets today read to us as stiff, scholarly, as arguments built on an edifice of the knowledge of the great classics; they ooze Latin and Greek. Milton can be stirring, he can be inspiring, he can light a love of liberty, but he can also be ponderous. Milton's Republic collapsed under Cromwell's Stalinist personality; Paine's Republic remains, shaken and often on the verge of collapse, yet somehow still standing.

It would be hard to argue that it was the pure power of direct, simple, and angry rhetoric that sustains the life-blood of a nation, but perhaps (or hopefully) some of that working class rage of the dispossessed and ignored which threads its way through *Common Sense* is somehow to attribute for our survival. Milton was read widely, but he spoke in an educated tongue, a Cambridge man. Paine was a pub man; he spoke not to university dons but to the barkeep, the factory worker, the farmer. He has a rough language but it's the peoples' language. He wrote like an American. Paine's sleight pamphlet sold half a million copies the year it was printed. Less than a year later all thirteen colonies would declare their independence from Great Britain.

Americans were already fighting the British in a revolution, but Paine made it the Revolution. Like all true Revolutionaries he knew that America needed its Year Zero, and he reoriented and redefined what was at stake. No longer was this a small rebellion simply tied to anger over a few taxes here and there, petty grievances about expensive tea and playing cards to raise revenue to pay for a frontier war which in many ways the colonists started themselves. No, now this was about apocalypse, it was about Millennium, it was about making the world anew and redefining what it meant to be a person. In *Letters from an American Farmer* written only a few years before by the Frenchman J. Hector St. John DeCrevecoeur he had asked, "What then is the American, this new man?" Paine had an answer; the American was of no particular nationality, and of no particular faith. Rather his was a new creed, a new religion, for now the cause of America is the cause of all mankind.

It's important to remember that Paine was no provincial, but that his nationalism was cosmopolitanism. For Paine, "America" was but a synonym for the cause of liberty, wherever she may need to be liberated. Though it was Paine who coined the phrase that would be the official name of these fifty states, he intuited that in many ways there is a distinction between "The United States" and "America." The former is a nation-state bordered to the north by Canada and to the south by Mexico with the Atlantic on one side and the Pacific on the other and a capital in Washington, DC. Like all nations it has its good and bad, its idealists and its corrupt. It is a country bounded like all nations by a border of time and space. But "America" is something different; "The United States" is written in prose but "America" is written in poetry. Its language is not that of legislation and treaties, rules and laws, but rather of myth and legend. "America" is the commonwealth, Arcadia, Eden. John Locke wrote "In the beginning all the world was America." It's synonymous with ancient and hopefully future freedoms. America is not a place, nor has it every really existed; it is merely always in the process of coming into existence. That other destitute and drunk poet-prophet, Oscar Wilde, would write almost a century after Paine's death that "A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth even glancing at, for it leaves out the one country at which Humanity is always landing. And when Humanity lands there, it looks out, and, seeing a better country, sets sail." The United States is on the geographer's map, but America is on the one drawn by the utopian. America is not found in the United States (alone) but she is found in Europe's revolutionary camps of 1848, in the Paris Commune of 1871, in the abolitionist's sermon, in the Union soldier's heart at Gettysburg, at Seneca Falls and while marching in Selma, at the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, in Ho Chi Minh's *Declaration of Independence* and in Nelson Mandela's prison cell and inside Vaclav Havel's type-writer, at Stonewall and Tiananmen Square. Thomas Paine understood the crucial point that America must never be a mere country, for it is much more; it is an idea, and a potent one. The American is not a citizen of the United States or an inhabitant of the western hemisphere; the American is "the Adam of a New World."

In 1792 Paine found "America" in the streets of Paris, among the debates of Jacobins and Girondists. As he always maintained, his cause was the cause of all mankind and his empire was Liberty's; so, in France he took the banner of revolution up once again. It was the second time in his life he left his native England for radical causes across the sea. Left behind in Britain was the *Rights of Man*, which answered the objections to the revolution made by Edmund Burke, the comfortable father of contemporary conservatism. Burke may have maintained that the dead deserve a say in the present, but Paine was wise

enough to know that the world is for the living, and he answered Burke's objections point by point. And he not only advocated the cause of revolution, he put his body "upon the gears and upon the wheels, upon the levers, upon all the apparatus to try and stop tyranny" (as Mario Savio put it in 1964). He was elected to the French Assembly, but his opposition to totalitarianism and his embrace of freedom was too consistent. He opposed the execution of the pustule rat-king Louis XVI, and Robespierre used the opportunity to have Paine imprisoned within DeSade's home, the supposedly liberated prison of Bastille.

But as they say, stone walls do not a prison make, nor iron bars a cage, and Paine found an America even within the Bastille. It was here that he wrote *The Age of Reason*, the book scandalous and heretical enough that the newly holy of Second Great Awakening America would turn their back on the man who baptized their nation, and whose political ethos made their faith even possible. It was Paine's catechism that states "I do not believe in the creed professed by the Jewish church, by the Roman church, by the Greek church, by the Turkish church, by the Protestant church, nor by any church that I know of." Milton's rebellious and similarly exiled hero Lucifer taught us that the human mind can make a heaven of hell and a hell of heaven, and for Thomas Paine the motto goes similarly: "My own mind is my own church." It only saw publication because his fellow American and member of the French Assembly Joel Barlow (who also gave this nation its first epic poem in *The Columbiad*) smuggled it out of prison. Paine's stay from execution seems ironically providential; all that saved him from the guillotine's blade was an improperly placed sign on his cell door. Thermidor and Robespierre's downfall awaited and James Monroe was

able to secure his release. And this is how Thomas Paine found himself returned to the crooked streets of lower Manhattan, so different from the rational, rectilinear Enlightenment street grid of a few blocks north. But if America was an Arcadia then *Et in America Ego*.

Washington had his Mount Vernon, and Jefferson his Monticello, but Tom Paine just had 59 Grove Street. He died seemingly abandoned by all, with only Jefferson still supporting him but distancing himself at all costs, as the Federalists loved nothing more than to tout Paine's associations with the third president, like some eighteenth-century Weatherman. In 1799 when Washington died, Napoleon ordered ten days of mourning, thousands of Americans felt intense grief at the death of their god, and they built an Egyptian pyramid to entomb him, after he lived through the construction of the capital which bore his name. Ten years later when Tom Paine died like a common drunk, most American newspapers merely reprinted the local obituary. There was no ceremony for Tom Paine; the Quakers wouldn't even allow him to be buried in their ground. Only six people came to mark the passing of the man who named the United States of America, including two nameless black freedmen. On the Mall of that right-angled city of Roman marble there stands an occult obelisk in memory of Washington, and an American Pantheon holds a statue of Jefferson that is nineteen feet tall, but in the District of Columbia there is no memorial to Tom Paine. Washington and Jefferson are gods, but Paine is but a man, and the better for it. If you seek his memorial you must go to those places where people yearn for freedom, and are willing to fight for it. There if you seek his monument you must merely look and listen.

TEACHING CORNER

**Belief, Heterodoxy, and Liberal Education:  
a Test Case**

**Bernard Schweizer**

Long Island University, Brooklyn

Last fall, I taught a class about heresy at Long Island University. To be precise, it was a course about God and laughter (or religion and comedy). During the semester we read texts that poked fun at gods and religion, ranging from Abraham bargaining with God over the suitable punishment for Sodom (Gen. 18:16-33) to Boccaccio's bawdy anti-clerical tales, from Mark Twain's bitter misotheism, to James Morrow's high-concept religious satire and Ron Currie's blasphemous short stories. This class challenged my students in ways that even the elaborate "trigger warning" on the syllabus could not adequately prepare them for. With one exception, all of my 18 students were practicing religionists, and all of them, it appears, had been sheltered from outright irreverence and blasphemy until the moment they enrolled in my class. Indeed, the reactions to some of the writers mentioned above ranged from mild amusement, to discomfort and guilt, to bewilderment and outright rejection. As far as my students were concerned, they were undoubtedly exposed to all kinds of advanced adult-material regarding sexuality, drug consumption, and especially violence, but they were completely underprepared for plain irreverence.

I have written a general reflection about this class for the Chronicle of Higher Education, but here I want to discuss one specific incident. My students were conducting final projects to assess perceptions about religious humor among members of different religious orientations, using a public survey format. One of my students wanted to test the difference in humor appreciation between Christians and non-Christians. I cautioned her that this was too broad a distinction and suggested that she introduce narrower categories and specify a control group. She came up with a scheme of religious categories that included the following: Atheists, Hindus, practicing Christians, non-practicing Christians, and Catholics. What caught my eye—other than the absence of "Other"—was her distinction between Catholics and Christians. I suggested that she omit the Catholic category since if she left it in, Catholics would have to be counted twice—as "Catholics" and then again as either "practicing

Christians" or "non-practicing Christians—thus, hopelessly muddling her study populations with deleterious effects for her data treatment. Strangely, the student refused to do this and continued to count returns from Catholics separately, distorting her statistics. We went back and forth over this a couple of times, and at one point, she emailed me the following statement:

"I don't believe Catholicism and Christianity are the same. The Catholic doctrine may have some similarities to that of Christians but they deny some essential doctrines of the bible. Though I do believe there are some Catholics who could be considered Christians, I don't see the doctrine of the modern day Catholic Church as being biblical."

Now, on the face of it, this is of course quite preposterous. To say that Catholicism merely has "some similarities" with Christianity is a bit like saying that the Swiss may have heard of cheese making. Similarly, to imply that the Pope is not a Christian is akin to suggesting that Hilary Clinton is not American. Such claims purport to make real distinctions, when in actual fact, the distinctions they make violate basic precepts of logic and contradict established fact. They are, in other words, expressions of muddled thinking or worse, manifestations of bigotry. Indeed, saying that Catholics are not Christians is a strategic statement of targeted exclusion, an act of denying membership to the very group that can justifiably claim to be a mainstay of the very category in question. I don't have to argue that Catholicism is closely associated with both the origins and the current practice of Christianity, just as I don't have to argue that the Swiss practically invented cheese making. These are as close to "self-evident truths" as we are likely to get.

So, what was I to do with my anti-Catholic student? I initially responded to this situation by treating it as a teachable moment. I thought that this was an opportunity, to work through an impasse of logic, a misunderstanding of history, and a prejudiced take on doctrine. My first step was to find out where the student was religiously coming from. It turns out that she is a Seventh-Day Adventist. Seventh-Day Adventists have often been criticized for religious exclusivism and for trying to "convert" Christians of different stripes to their own Church, while equating Catholicism with the moral level of "Babylon." In fact, my student exactly reproduced the official view of SDA doctrine, which states that:

"We fully recognize the heartening fact that a host of true followers of Christ are scattered all through the various churches of Christendom, including the Roman Catholic communion. These God clearly recognizes as His own. Such do not form a part of the 'Babylon' portrayed in the Apocalypse" (*Questions on Doctrine*, 197). Note the carefully qualified tolerance toward a number of genuine followers of Christ as "scattered" through other denominations, including (and that sounds like a particularly generous admission) the Catholic Church. Obviously, my student was orthodox within SDA doctrine. To her, Catholics were mostly apostates, unworthy to be considered as belonging to the Christian fold.

I tried to discuss the matter with the student, inviting her to come to my office so that we could talk. Twice she avoided me. Then, I button-holed her during break time in the middle of our 2 ½ hour class session, took her into the hallway to speak confidentially, and inquired into the rationale behind her claim that Catholics were not Christians. I did not get an intelligible answer. I then asked whether perhaps she meant to say Catholics were not quite the "right kind" of Christians in her view. This approach fulfilled two purposes: I was looking for an admission of contingency. "Not the right kind of Christianity" is decidedly milder than "not Christian," because it leaves room for perspective; also, it would contain an admission of opinion rather than affirmative absolutism. But I could not make headway with her along those lines, as she simply insisted on her initial distinction. At this point, I handed her a genealogical chart representing the denominational history of Christianity, with Catholicism as its trunk. She was shifty and evasive, saying something about the Virgin Mary, but essentially incapable of formulating a reasoned argument, while obviously feeling uncomfortable and wanting nothing more than to get away from me. I tried one final tack, using an analogy: "Imagine an Italian-American saying that White Anglo Saxon Protestants are not Americans. Could one credit such a position as reasonable and true?" She had nothing to say to this.

I then realized the dilemma I was facing: here was an essentially smart student, whose mind had been conditioned in certain ways to think thoughts that were not only in contradiction with generally acknowledged reality but that also prevented her from rational discussion of those thoughts. This is called indoctrination, and it interfered, at the very least, with her ability to conduct a proper statistical project.

But apart from the faith-based interference with the fundamentals of statistics (i.e. that you cannot count some study subjects in two or more categories), there is something else and much more fundamental that bothered me. I normally encourage students to disagree with me, to find new ways of thinking, and to take intellectual risks. In other words, I foster a culture of "heresy" in the

classroom, rewarding productive conflict. Whenever this happens, the result is an intensification of debate, a springing forth of interesting interpretations, and a disciplined and sometimes exhilarating dialogue or contest of ideas. No such debate or intellectual sparring occurred with the Seventh-Day Adventist student who held on to an opinion that was at odds with both my own worldview and the common evidence on the matter. I was disappointed because she did not thrive on the argumentative premise of her claim, and her unorthodox stance did not prompt her to greater rhetorical eloquence and advanced conceptual diligence.

Genuine heretics are word-smiths, orators, argumentalists, and contrarian logicians. Think of Jan Hus or John Wycliffe or Tom Paine. Milton wrote no less than four effusive pamphlets in favor of his heretical views on divorce. These people were not stolid, sullen, dour, defensive folks but eloquent, combative, nimble thinkers with a tongue as sharp as their intellect. My student, by contrast, appeared to have been conditioned in holding an anti-rational belief that she had neither the will, nor it appears, the ability to defend discursively.

And this is where belief can become an obstacle to intellectual growth (not to mention statistics). When belief takes the place of fact in the real world (rather than in the world of religious ideas), then the door to bigotry is opened: "Jews are not German," "Blacks are not people," "Barack Obama does not love America," "Women are second-class citizens," and—yes—"Catholics are not Christians." I am not conjuring up the proverbial slippery slope here; after all, what I see in these statements is not a slope but an abyss. None of the positions mentioned above can withstand reasoned, evidence-based disconfirmation. But in order to be disconfirmed, I need to have a basis of rational argument and an interlocutor with open ears to listen to facts and evidence. Unfortunately, my teachable moment suffered a setback because the preconditions for such a moment—reasoned argument and rhetorical fluency—could not take hold in this situation.

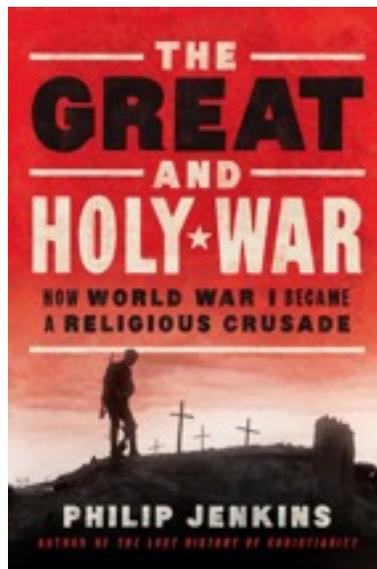
Of course, I will not be caught expressing the categorical view that you cannot teach fundamentalists—that would be just another exclusivist statement. My anti-Catholic student was a good learner in many other areas of literature and theory, but she did have a blind spot that I could not illuminate. I don't resent this *per se*, since we all have our collective and individual blind spots. But some spots are more dangerous than others, and I would hope that a liberal education is designed to limit and decrease the more dangerous blind spots. Even just having one's blind spot challenged, as my student certainly did hers, is a good thing in and of itself. Perhaps, the teachable moment was just delayed, and the after-effects of that confrontation will bear fruit in years to come. Here's hoping...

## BOOK REVIEW

***The Great and Holy War: How World War I Became a Religious Crusade***  
by Philip Jenkins  
(HarperCollins 2014)

Gregory Erickson  
New York University

Many recent exhibits, books, and events have commemorated the fact that August 2014 marked the one hundred years since the beginning of World War I. Philip Jenkins's book, *The Great And Holy War: How World War I Became a Religious Crusade* (Harper 2014), is a direct and ambitious historical and intellectual response to the anniversary. It can also be read as an indirect, but thought provoking path to think through even more recent events that have again foregrounded issues of religion, politics, power, and violence.



Jenkins, a professor at Baylor University, is a historian with broad interests and seemingly inexhaustible energy for research (as well as—presumably—an outstanding research staff). Jenkins has taken on topics as diverse as the history of Wales, a book on pedophiles and priests, and multiple histories of events in both modern and ancient Christianity; his books are clearly written and well documented accounts of intersecting and complex religious and political narratives. Jenkins is no heretic by most definitions—although his book *Jesus Wars* is an excellent introduction to debates over heresy and orthodoxy in the early days of Christianity—he is a contributing editor for the *American Conservative* and writes a column for the *Christian Century*. (Though not a heretic *per se*, he did however cause a bit of a stir when, on NPR, he stated that the Qur'an was less bloody and violent than the Bible.) And yet *The Great And Holy War* provides multiple entry points through which to think about heresy—both in its historical/theological sense and in a more vernacular sense of resistance or nonconformity to established institutions and ideologies.

For Jenkins, religions (defined according to beliefs, practices, and institutions) are central to “understanding the war, to understanding why people went to war, what they hoped to achieve through war, and why they stayed at war” (60).

If, as he writes, the war “marked the end of a world,” then it was religious language and imagery that “provided a structure to comprehend the global change” (60). He presents clear descriptions of events, images, anecdotes, and texts as a way to understand and distinguish the war’s short- and long-term impacts upon religion. One of his main points, as reflected in the book’s American subtitle (the British subtitle is *How World War I Changed Religion for Ever*) is that although the details are different across nations, each of the major warring powers wound up embracing the language and images of holy war: “while we might expect clergy to support their nations, in practice they went far beyond any simple endorsement and became vocal, even fanatical, advocates” (67). The book drives home the extent to which, on all sides, “governments, media, and cultural figures presented these arguments in highly religious form” (63), as Christians in all combatant nations—including the United States—“entered wholeheartedly into the spirit of cosmic war” (87). For example, it is important to remember today that important American religious figures like the Congregationalist Minister Dwight Hillis advocated the complete extermination of the German race.

Jenkins describes various ways in which this kind of rhetoric among church leaders was part of larger movements in the early twentieth century to reshape and redefine what Christianity was. Church leaders “described the faith of their rivals as so fundamentally flawed or sinister as no longer worthy of the name of Christianity” (97). Any approach, Jenkins writes, was better than confronting the realities of inter-Christian strife. In the words of William Temple, who would go on to be the Archbishop of Canterbury during the next great European war: “Members of the body of Christ are tearing one another . . . It is as though Peter were driving home the nails, and John were piercing the side” (63).

The other large narratives that Jenkins presents are the long-term religious consequences. The war resulted in “a global religious revolution,” Jenkins writes, and in the process “drew the world’s religious map as we know it today.” While this is not the most immediately striking point, it is in some ways the most important story to take away from this book. Jenkins is especially instructive on the War’s consequences for the world’s—not simply Christianity or not simply European—religions. He includes the consequences across the globe, reminding us, for example that in 1914, the Russian Church actually looked like a Christian world success story (117). But while “Christendom,” in its centuries-old traditional sense ended after the War, Christianity, especially in many previously marginal or non-existent forms (particularly the pentecostal and charismatic), emerged re-invigorated. Throughout his book, Jenkins convincingly gives evidence that the Great War set the stage for our contemporary religious world: the formation of fundamentalism and pentecostal sects, the first steps toward Vatican Two, the American acceptance of Mormonism, and the creation of a Muslim Middle East and a Christian Africa are just some of the religious shifts Jenkins traces back to the events of World War I.

For mainstream churches, as Jenkins points out, the problem was not that people were abandoning faith, but that they were pursuing what seemed like strange and radical spiritual ideas. For example, new ideas of the end times and Armageddon—although they pre-date the war—found fertile soil in which to thrive. Other shifts in the religious landscape of Europe and the US moved outside of recognized forms of Christianity, and he traces many different kinds of turns toward the occult, the spiritualist, the supernatural, and the magical, often found in direct first hand accounts of the battlefield. (In World War II, on the other hand, Jenkins points out that the supernatural tended to be relegated to fantasy film and literature.)

Students of religious history and of heresy are familiar with ways in which theological debates and religious images resurface at different points in history. It is therefore perhaps not surprising but still striking how many moments or figures of historical schism were re-appropriated and become effective symbols in the war effort. Martin Luther, for example, became a model for aggressive nationalism in Germany. The 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his posting of the Ninety-Five Theses in 1517 became, in Jenkins words, a “messianic hymning of the German spirit” (175). These 1917 festivities also saw an invigorated attempt of certain “cranky pastors and scholars” to attempt to purge Christianity from its Jewish roots. Jenkins—ever the Christian historian—connects these attempts to the heresy of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century Marcion, a figure who was resurrected by German theologians such as Adolf von Harnack. Jenkins takes a highly critical view of such thinkers, arguing that Harnack’s “critical facilities vanished” (81) during the war years.

If Luther became German crusader in 1917, the Anglo world created their own medievalist hero just a few months later when British Edmund Allenby conquered Jerusalem. Although this was a famous story, it is revealing to read Jenkins’s account of how, using the bible as a guide to Palestine, “Allenby of Armageddon” became the “ultimate crusader” and the subject of a neo-medieval mythology. Allenby made a point of respectfully entering the conquered Holy City on foot, but according to the legendary account, he also entered Jerusalem, a Bible in one hand and a crucifix in the other, proclaiming “today the wars of the crusades are completed” (178-79).

These kinds of medieval images, already popular in pre-war Europe, provided the models for knights, crusaders, angels, and bowmen that were common in the statements, propaganda, rhetoric, rituals, art, and even first-hand accounts of the war. Jenkins relates many examples, some well known (the Angel of Mons, Cecil B. DeMille’s *Joan the Woman*), but also explores in provocative detail multiple lesser-known medievalist European shrines and monuments erected in the early twentieth century. Another example of the power and controversy over Christian images is given with the story and image of a young Canadian soldier supposedly “crucified” in the trenches which was used as a form of wartime propaganda to both stir up hatred and to encourage people to enlist or buy war bonds.

Not surprisingly, despite its attempt to be inclusive, the book does tend to be strongest in the sections related to Christianity. The sections on Judaism, Africa, and Islam, while informative and valuable, often tend toward the encyclopedic. But Jenkins does succeed in reversing commonly held assumptions about the War. According to the often-accepted narrative of World War I, the event left nations and individuals cynical about religious claims, and traditional church structures (the Vatican and Christian Europe, for example) weakened beyond recognition. Instead, Jenkins demonstrates that while the war altered the specific forms religion took, it also revived faiths and provided new ways for religious organizations and individuals to both look forward and to assess the past.

Most reviews and accounts of this book focus on the large revisionist themes. For me, however, and I would guess for many readers of this newsletter, the most valuable take away from this book are the various pieces that make up the whole. The book is full of details and treasure to be mined: subjects for further exploration, topics for your undergraduate or graduate students, and—perhaps more importantly for many of us—vast resources for identifying primary texts. For readers interested in alternate expressions of belief – in heresy, in religious schism, and the relationship between belief and violence – the book offers rich material to show how we are just now beginning, as Jenkins concludes, to see “how utterly the war destroyed one religious world and created another” (377). This new religious world is the one we still live in, and—as many other contributions to this very newsletter point out—one we are still trying to understand.

# The Journal of Heresy Studies

## Rationale

The only academic journal dedicated to scholarship on heresy, blasphemy, and unbelief

Current academic discussions of religion often either pass over subjects of heresy, blasphemy, and non-belief in contexts of literature, art, and culture, or they give these subjects a confessional turn. The *Journal of Heresy Studies* aims to correct this critical blind spot by offering an intellectual “home” for scholars and artists who engage critically and openly with matters of heterodoxy, in all forms.

# heresyjournal.com

## Objective

*The Journal of Heresy Studies* is an open-access, blind-peer-reviewed interdisciplinary journal published online. We encourage submissions from scholars in a variety of academic fields including but not limited to, literary studies (in any language or genre), art history, religious studies, secular studies, theology, history, philosophy, psychology, sociology, humanism and any other related disciplines. Submissions should demonstrate a relationship to the themes of heresy, blasphemy, unbelief, or religious heterodoxy whether in an organized community or in the wider culture. The journal takes no ideological stance and makes no value judgments as to the concept of heresy in general or towards particular heresies. The only standards that are upheld concern the academic rigor and intellectual originality of the submissions.

### Submit:

articles of up to 25 pages and  
book reviews of up to 3 pages  
in MLA format to

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