

Christianity and its persecution of Apostates, Humanists, Pantheists, Deists, Atheists and others

This post by James McDonald originally appeared at heretication.info.



An illustration shows heretics being tortured and nailed to wooden posts during the first Inquisition.

Deorum injuria diis curae (The gods take care of injuries to the gods)
—Emperor Tiberius (42 BC -AD 37), cited by Tacitus, *Annals of Imperial Rome*

Before Christianity, Greek and Roman believers had been content to allow their gods to take care of themselves if they were insulted. Early Christians had taken full advantage of this tolerance to revile those gods. But Christianity was not willing to extend the same sort of tolerance when it took over the reigns of imperial power. It was no longer

permissible to believe in other gods, and neither was it permissible not to believe in God at all. No dissent or criticism could be tolerated. All citizens had to come into the Christian fold, whether they wanted to or not. To deny Christianity was to blaspheme it, and blasphemy was a crime against God.

The codification of Roman Law carried out by the Christian Emperor Justinian in the sixth century was clear. According to his *Corpus Juris Civilis*, famine, earthquakes and pestilence were attributable to God's wrath, induced by a failure to punish blasphemers. This was exactly the opposite of what had been believed three hundred years earlier, when Christians had been blamed for the wrath of the gods. The difference was that now the punishment for blasphemy, fixed by Justinian's code, was death. This code would be influential not only in the East but also in the West. By the time the Holy Roman Empire came into being in AD 800 such ideas were accepted throughout Europe.

Freethought, the rejection of supernatural religion, along with its assumptions and authorities, developed slowly. Dissenting voices were silenced by the threat of death, so they remained silent through the Middle Ages. The path which led to these voices being permitted to speak once again started at the Renaissance. It became possible to deny the doctrines of Christianity step by step over several centuries. We have seen that various proto-Protestant groups doubted mainstream Christian teachings from the twelfth century. Their Protestant successors denied various Roman doctrines from the sixteenth. Anabaptists and Adventists denied even more. In this section we will trace the path by which it became permissible to express even greater degrees of religious doubt, and by which people in the twentieth century came to enjoy the same freedoms that their ancestors enjoyed before the advent of Christianity.

Blasphemy

The term blasphemer was applied to anyone who disagreed with the current line taken by the Church hierarchy. Blasphemers were liable to a range of punishments which tended to stop them repeating their offence. For trivial cases they had their lips cut off, or were burned through the tongue, or had their tongue cut out, or torn out. For more serious cases they could also be sentenced to a quick death (execution) or a slow one (imprisonment on a diet of bread and water). St Thomas Aquinas regarded blasphemers as heretics, and heretics as blasphemers. For him heresy and blasphemy amounted to

the same thing. Like a long line of influential theologians before him, stretching back to St Augustine, he advocated the death penalty for offenders, and this was the prevailing view of Protestant as well as Catholic scholars. The consensus was that there was no choice in the matter because God had been explicit:

And he that blasphemeth the name of the LORD, he shall surely be put to death, and the congregation shall certainly stone him: as well the stranger, as he that is born in the land, when he blasphemeth the name of the LORD, shall be put to death. (Leviticus 24:16).

The limited nature of the biblical definition of blasphemy was ignored completely, while the point was taken to be that to ignore blasphemy would be contrary to the word of God, and therefore a sin in itself. Many Christians advocated death for blasphemers by stoning, in accordance with Leviticus, but the law never adopted this method of execution, despite its being advocated by bishops and judges. Stoning was however frequently adopted by Crusaders and other Christian mobs, who tended to have unconditional trust in the bible's requirements.

Since anyone who disagreed with the Church was necessarily guilty of blasphemy, and therefore liable to the death penalty, there were few people who would voluntarily come forward to declare themselves. There were however, over the centuries, a number of people who were insane, or mentally deficient, or in receipt of revelation from gods other than the Christian one, who made blasphemous statements and paid with their lives. Genuine blasphemers have played very little part in the development of Christian thought, but as we are about to see, alleged blasphemers have played a major role. All of the following have been regarded as blasphemers: apostates, humanists, pantheists, Unitarians, deists, and atheists.

Apostasy

An apostate is someone who decides to leave a religion to which he or she has belonged. Where people had been forcibly converted to Christianity, they often secretly continued to practise their original faith. To Christian eyes this constituted abandoning the Christian Church, and was thus constituted apostasy. Despite the risks, pockets of people throughout Christendom secretly managed to hang on to their original religions for many centuries, even though they must have known that they were likely to be

killed if the Church authorities found out. Well into the Middle Ages remote European communities were still worshipping the gods of their Celtic and Teutonic ancestors in private. In public, everyone was obliged to subscribe the current version of Christian orthodoxy.

Christian authorities had to keep a close watch on other categories of potential defector, since Christians were frequently converted to other religions if they had the opportunity to find out about them. This type of apostasy was common on Christendom's territorial borders where ideas were freely exchanged, but rare in the hinterland where ideas were firmly controlled. Christians who travelled beyond Europe were at risk from new ideas, and the Church has long been embarrassed by the fact that many Crusaders, fired by Christian zeal to kill God's Moslem enemies, had ended their lives as Moslems, killing God's Christian enemies.



Un auto de fé. (Cuadro de M. Robert Fleury.)

Unlike Islam, Judaism did not seek converts from other religions, so there was less of a threat from Jewish beliefs. Even so, Judaism won the occasional convert, though such converts were not likely to enjoy a very full life with their new allegiance. In thirteenth century England a young deacon fell in love with a Jewess and converted to Judaism. For this he was degraded and excommunicated by a Church Council at Oxford in 1222, then burned alive. In 1267 Pope Clement IV ordered the Inquisition to proceed against Christians who converted to Judaism. Three years later two converts were killed at Weissenberg in Alsace (one of them a prior in a Mendicant Order). Presumably the danger continued, for the Papal bull authorising the Inquisition to investigate such cases was reissued in 1274, 1288 and 1290.

Since it was the practice in most mainstream Churches to baptise everyone into the faith as an infant, anyone could be found guilty of apostasy if they elected either to follow another religion, or to deny all religion. All apostasy was blasphemy, and the penalty for it was death, as required by God.

Humanism

Until the Renaissance the Church was able, more or less, to enforce its monopoly of belief. But during the Renaissance, humanism flourished. Humanists emphasised the rights, abilities and achievements of mankind, but did not explicitly deny God. Indeed many key humanists were clerics. Humanism was the most liberal position tolerated at time – though all humanists still ran the risk of offending their more traditional colleagues, and ending up being burned alive at the stake. Humanists were generally highly educated, and they soon opened the doorways to an idea called pantheism.

Pantheism

According to pantheist ideas there is no personal God. What is called God is merely the Universe personified. In other words, the term God is an alternative word for Nature. Pantheism, had been known in ancient Greece and was (and still is) widespread in India. There were a number of variations on this theme, associating Nature with the deity. Here is Alexander Pope's version:

*All are but parts of one stupendous whole,
Whose body Nature is, and God the soul*

Giordano Bruno was a sixteenth century pantheist. He identified God with the universe. He saw the divine everywhere, in every grain of sand, in all life, in the stars, in the infinite universe. For him, God was the soul of the universe. He thought that Aristotle had been wrong, and that existing Christian denominations were petty and narrow. For such heresies he was kept in prison for seven years, examined by a number of cardinals, condemned by a meeting presided over by the pope, and burned at the stake in Rome in AD 1600. The precise charges against him have disappeared from Church records.

A monk called Lucilio (or Julius) Vanini was also a sceptical minded humanist. He made the mistake of referring to nature as the “Queen of the Universe” and was tried by the Parliament at Toulouse. He was convicted of atheism and blasphemy in 1619. His tongue was pulled out with pincers and severed. Then he was garrotted and his body burned at the stake.

In the Netherlands, pantheist ideas were argued by the philosopher Spinoza (1632-77), who attracted violent reaction from both Christians and Jews. Although pantheists would continue to be executed as blasphemers, Spinoza made pantheism respectable, at least among educated humanists, who soon started asking themselves about doctrines such as the Incarnation and the Trinity.

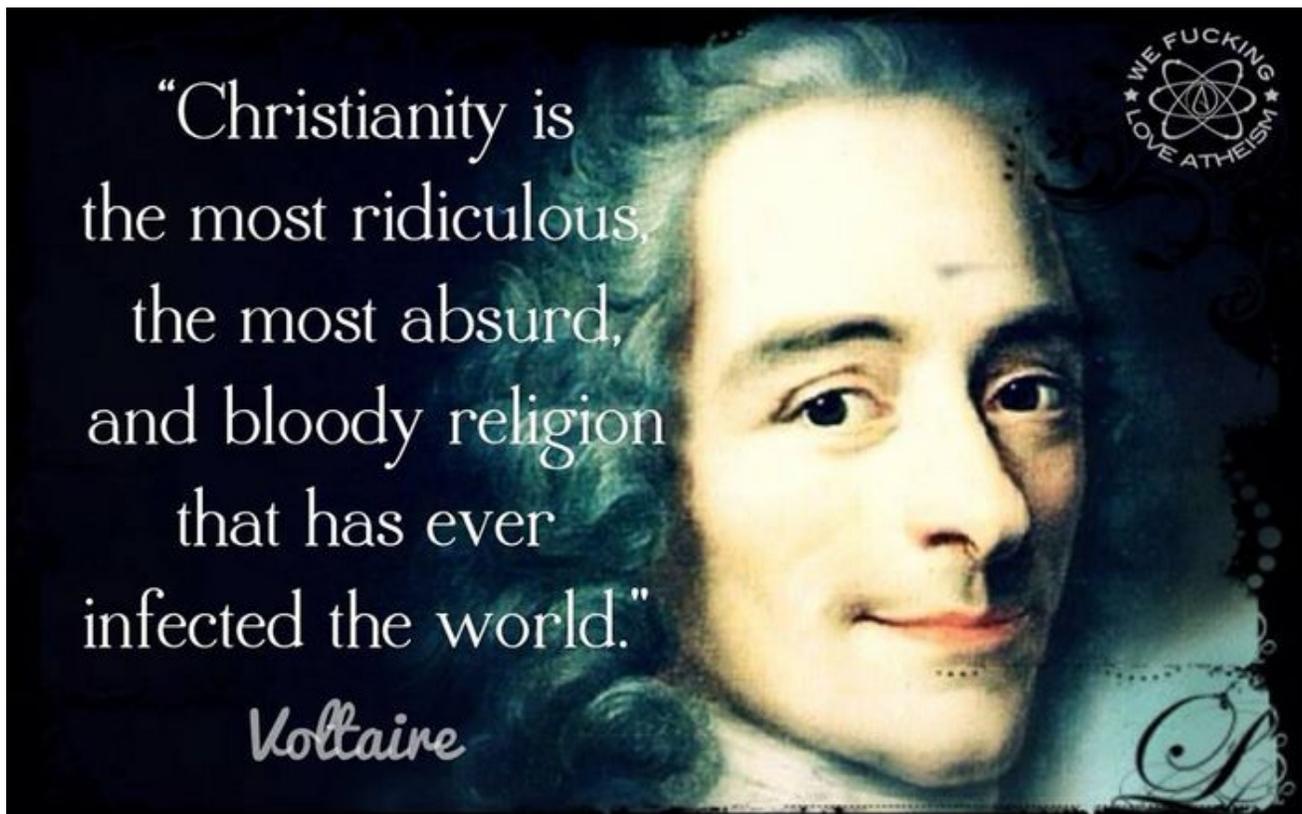
Unitarianism

During the Enlightenment, scholars became aware that the concept of the Trinity had developed over hundreds of years, that its only explicit mention in the bible was a fraudulent insertion, and that many early Christians had denied Jesus’ divinity. These scholars adopted, or returned to, the belief that there is a single God – or rather (in theological-speak) that God has one person rather than three persons. They are thus known as Unitarians (as opposed to mainstream Trinitarians). But to question either the Incarnation or the Trinity was regarded as blasphemous, and therefore deserving of death, a position held by Roman Catholics and Protestants alike. Michael Servetus, the famous anatomist, was burned in 1553 – perhaps the first Unitarian to die at the stake for his views. He had narrowly escaped the Inquisition, only to be arrested by Protestants in Geneva. Despite a safe-conduct, he was sent to the stake by Calvin.

The burning of Unitarians caused public unease in England, even in the sixteenth century. Further disquiet was expressed in 1612 when Unitarians were burned in London

and Lichfield. But the established Church, the Church of England, was adamant. Unitarianism was blasphemous. In 1648 an Act was passed which specifically prescribed the death penalty for Unitarian and atheist beliefs, both of which were again classified as blasphemous. Few prosecutions were brought because Unitarians tended to be thoughtful and well educated – which meant that they were generally also rich, influential and intelligent enough to be discrete.

Religious doubt was by now common amongst the educated classes. Thomas Hobbes came as close to being an unbeliever as was then possible while keeping his life. He seems to have been largely responsible for an explosion of atheism among the upper classes in the mid-seventeenth century – and some who could not countenance outright atheism became pantheists. Unitarianism also flourished in the upper reaches of society. Men like Isaac Newton, who lived while the 1648 Act was still on the statute books, were obliged to conceal their Unitarian leanings. John Locke was fortunate to escape prosecution in 1695 for his Unitarian views. The poet Milton also kept his Unitarian views to himself during his lifetime. Joseph Priestly left England for North America where Unitarianism was the religion of the educated élite. Harvard University for example was largely Unitarian, prompting the sneer that its preaching was limited to the fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of man and the neighbourhood of Boston.



In England, a new Blasphemy Statute was passed in 1698 to protect Christianity from criticism. Under the Act it was an offence to deny the truth of Christianity, or any of the persons of Trinity. Penalties included loss of civil rights and imprisonment. Prosecutions continued. In 1763 John Wilkes, the parliamentary reformer, was charged with blasphemy, along with a number of other offences. In continental Europe the Church had a stronger grip than in Britain. In 1766 a French boy, the Chevalier de La Barre, was accused of singing irreligious songs, mocking a religious icon, damaging a crucifix, and failing to remove his hat while a religious procession passed in Abbeville. He was sentenced to 'the torture ordinary and extraordinary' to have his tongue cut out, to have his right hand cut off, and to be burned at the stake. Voltaire fought for his life and the case was referred to the French Parliament. The clergy insisted on the death penalty. The boy was tortured, then beheaded, and his body was burned along with a copy of Voltaire's Philosophical Dictionary.

Deism

In the late 17th century Philosophers had developed a theory known as Deism, the most important form of which asserted that God did indeed exist, and had created the world, but he had simply set it going, then left it to its own devices. In particular, he no longer interfered with human affairs. It was as though he had wound up the universe like a clockwork toy, then gone away and left it running. This has been described as atheism with God. To conventional Churchmen it was atheism cleverly dressed up to avoid prosecution. Whether or not its proponents honestly believed it, and whether or not they were really atheists, we have no way of knowing. In any case if it was a ruse it did not work, for early deists were burned at the stake, or otherwise executed as blasphemers. In 1697 an eighteen year old medical student called Thomas Aikenhead was hanged in Edinburgh for holding deist views, and specifically for denying the Trinity. He was denied counsel, and despite recanting was condemned to death. There seems to have been no legal basis for this sentence, but he swung from the gibbet anyway, the last person in Britain to be executed by the state for his religious beliefs.

Rich, educated and powerful Deists flourished while others, less well connected, went in fear of execution. In the seventeenth twenties Thomas Woolston was put under house arrest for the remainder of his life for voicing doubts about the resurrection and other bible stories. The Deist Thomas Paine, who was not so well connected, was obliged to flee the country after being outlawed in 1792 (following the publication of his Rights of

Man). He was therefore not personally available for prosecution for blasphemous libel when *The Age of Reason* was published.

Although famous and influential people tended to escape prosecution, they were still persecuted in various ways. Adam Smith and David Hume for example suffered for their known scepticism. Hume was denied the chair of moral philosophy at Glasgow because of 'the violent and solemn remonstrance of the clergy'. In France, Denis Diderot was imprisoned in 1749 for his *Lettre sur les Aveugles*, and lived under constant threat of persecution for his *Encyclopédie*.

Explicit Atheism

Outright atheism had been known in ancient Greece. Some of the best known philosophers in the ancient world had been atheists. Before Christianity appeared many educated Romans were also atheists, regarding all gods, including the Christian one, as man-made. Christianity would not countenance such ideas. Atheism was plainly blasphemous, which meant that atheists could expect to die unpleasant deaths if they admitted to their lack of belief. Those original enough to work out their own atheist ideas were generally intelligent enough to keep their ideas to themselves, though there were occasional exceptions. In Ireland Adam Duff O'Tool espoused views that had been common in early times but which seemed blasphemous in the fourteenth century: He denied the Trinity, doubted the Virgin birth, and regarded bible stories as fables. For these beliefs he was burned alive in Dublin in 1327.

Many beliefs that had been held by early followers of Jesus, or by his critics, had been suppressed by the Church. Somehow these beliefs survived and emerged again and again throughout the centuries. These claims struck conventional Christians as highly offensive: the bible was a fiction; the Trinity was an unwarranted innovation; Jesus had been not God incarnate but an ordinary, if illegitimate and homosexual, man; far from being divine his father was either a Roman centurion or a pimp; Mary had not been a virgin but a prostitute; conventional Christianity was an imposition. All of these views dated from early times, and survived down the centuries, even though those caught repeating them could expect death. Christopher Marlowe, the poet and dramatist was one of many who echoed the ancient charges. He commented that the Angel Gabriel had been a bawd [i.e. pimp] for the Holy Ghost. He held that Jesus had been a bastard

and a homosexual, and noted that the New Testament was “filthily written”. He was facing a charge of atheism when he was murdered in mysterious circumstances in 1593.

Sir Walter Raleigh, a suspected atheist, was condemned to be hanged, drawn and quartered in 1604 not only for treason but also for holding “the most heathenish and blasphemous opinions”. In fact, he was beheaded instead. Alexander Agnew of Dumfries (known as Jock of Broad Scotland) held that the Bible was false. There was no God, no Christ, no Heaven or Hell, and no human soul. There was only nature. For these beliefs he was hanged from a gibbet on 21st May 1651. In 1675 John Taylor of Surrey was accused of blasphemy and brought before the House of Lords. He had uttered a number of blasphemies, including the ancient charge that religion was a cheat and “the virgin Mary was a whore and Jesus Christ was a bastard”. The Lords were reluctant to be heavy handed because of memories of the James Nayler case twenty years earlier, when the Commons had harshly punished an eccentric Quaker. Nayler’s treatment had generated public sympathy, and the Lords did not want to make the same mistake. They locked John Taylor up in Bedlam on a diet of bread and water, supplemented by “Bodily Corrections”. He was sent to trial before the King’s Bench in 1676 where he received a relatively lenient sentence from Matthew Hale, the Lord Chief Justice (a fine of 1000 marks, which he could not possibly pay, ensuring that he would spend the rest of his life in prison). This case established that Christianity was part of the Laws of England. From now on blasphemy would be recognised as a Common Law offence, and *Rex v Taylor* could be cited as a precedent in any jurisdiction that recognised the English Common law.

Atheism was something of an intellectual problem for Church scholars. Although men like Hobbes, Spinoza and Paine never claimed to be atheists, Christian apologists nevertheless described them as such. This seems to have been the first time that the Church had fully countenanced the reality of atheism since it had eliminated it from the educated classes of the Roman Empire many centuries earlier. The very idea of it was apparently seen as such a threat that Christians in the eighteenth century started to proclaim that there could be no such thing as atheism. It was literally unthinkable that there was no God. Scholars debated whether there were, or had ever been, any genuine atheists. Atheism seemed so perverse, so bizarre, that a prevalent view in Britain was that atheism simply could not exist. Lord Hardwicke’s Act of 1754, which did away with traditional secular marriages in England made no provision for the marriage of atheists.

Christians continued to assert that atheism could not exist during the entire course of the century, although it became increasingly possible for influential people to admit to being atheists without suffering the full force of the law. Atheism became a sort of open secret. In 1770 Baron d'Holbach had become the first person in Christendom to dare to publish an openly atheistic work. When David Hume mentioned at dinner given by d'Holbach that he had never seen an atheist, the Baron pointed out that there were fifteen of them among the eighteen at the table. By 1781 a man called William Hammon felt safe enough to try to publicly dispel remaining doubts in Britain about the existence of atheists: "...as to the question whether there is such an existent Being as an atheist, to put that out of all manner of doubt, I do declare upon my honour that I am one".

It was not until around 1830 that more than a few isolated people dared to profess open and explicit atheism at all. Early claimants included Feuerbach, Nietzsche, and Marx. All suffered from Christian intolerance in various forms. It might be possible to be an atheist and live, but publicising the fact could still invite problems. As an undergraduate at University College Oxford, Shelly had published a pamphlet entitled *The Necessity of Atheism* in 1811. He escaped prosecution because of his family background and the fact that the pamphlet was successfully suppressed, but he was sent down from the University for it.

Publishing radical ideas was also felt to warrant severe punishment. When a publisher reprinted some of Thomas Paine's writings in 1812 he was imprisoned and pilloried. But times were changing. Instead of attacking him in his pillory, the public applauded him. The public would not now tolerate death sentences for atheism, and using the law at all to curb freethought often resulted in positive publicity for the cause of the godless. Prosecutions of sceptics for blasphemy were almost always successful, but the prosecution of men and women for honestly held views only served to propagate their arguments. As more and more people heard the evidence, more and more became sceptical. As it has always done, the creation of martyrs helped their cause enormously. Each new case put one or two of sceptics out of circulation, but resulted in the conversion of hundreds or thousands.

Thomas Paine's *The Age of Reason* has never been out of print, and is still seen as a danger by the mainstream Churches. In the nineteenth century William Wilberforce, Vice-President of the Society for Suppressing Vice, organised prosecutions against both

publishers and sellers of it. Richard Carlile was prosecuted in 1819 for republishing the works of Paine and others. He suffered huge fines which he could not possibly pay, and was imprisoned as a result. Despite his business premises being repeatedly ransacked, his wife Jane continued to edit his magazines and publish his books, until she was also imprisoned (along with her baby) in 1821. Carlisle's sister Mary Anne then took over. When she was imprisoned as well, a succession of others took over. Scores were prosecuted, but support came from all over the country. The law was rapidly falling into disrepute.

Without the fear of torture and death people were now more willing to break the law. Most who did so used pure reason, but some were more liberal in their approach. Charles Haslam, described the bible as a vile compound of filth, blasphemy and nonsense; as a fraud and a cheat. It would, he said, disgrace orangutans, let alone men. Its author must have been a random idiot, and people should burn it "in order that posterity may never know we believed in such abominable trash". When the authorities investigated the author could not be found, so his publishers were prosecuted in his stead.

Despite the combative position of people like Haslam, public opinion continued to become more liberal and sympathetic to secular ideas. After voicing uncomplimentary views about Christianity and colonisation in 1842 G J Holyoake was imprisoned. While he was in gaol his daughter died of starvation. The public had by now had enough, and prosecutions dried up. Christian vigilante organisations tried private prosecutions, but they failed to win the verdicts they wanted. No serious work of literature would be successfully prosecuted in England for blasphemy for well over a hundred years – until 1979, when the Christian cause found a new champion in Mrs Mary Whitehouse.

The British authorities still had the option of using the Press Acts, which had been framed to suppress radical publications like those of Carlile. In the 1860s the Government acted against Charles Bradlaugh, requiring large sureties against the possibility that his weekly publication National Reformer might print something blasphemous or seditious – though he had never published material warranting prosecution. He soon incurred penalties of millions of pounds for failing to raise the required sureties. Once again the law was falling into disrepute, and as a result the Press Acts were repealed in 1869.

The treatment of Bradlaugh showed up other problems with the law. According to a judgement handed down by Lord Justice Sir Edward Coke (1552-1634) unbelievers (“infidels”) had no rights at all in law. Thus for example, contracts with them need not be kept and debts need not be paid. “All infidels are in law perpetui inimici; for between them, as with devils whose subjects they be, and the Christian, there is perpetual hostility...”. This still represented the Law in the nineteenth century. When Bradlaugh had been prosecuted in the 1860s, his atheism had been held to amount to sedition. Since he did not believe in God he was not permitted to give evidence in court. This problem was resolved by the Evidence Amendment Act of 1869, which allowed atheists to affirm. But a similar problem arose when Bradlaugh was elected to the House of Commons in 1880. When he tried to take his seat he was prevented from taking the oath that all new Members were required to take, and excluded from the House. Several times he was re-elected and each time he was excluded from the House by the Speaker, even though he was willing to take the oath. He finally took his seat years later under a new Speaker, and the law was subsequently changed by the Parliamentary Oaths Act of 1885. Similar restrictions in Scotland were removed by another Oaths Act in 1888.



Cayetano Ripoll was the last person to be murdered by the Spanish Inquisition.

The last vestiges of persecution and discrimination were disappearing. Open agnosticism also became possible. T H Huxley coined the word in 1868, originally to express the idea that if there was a God, he was unknowable, but agnosticism has now come to denote the state of not being able decided whether or not God exists. In the twentieth century, for the first time since pre-Christian times, anyone could safely espouse agnosticism or atheism, although the Blasphemy Statute of 1698, survived until recent times. The clause about the Trinity had already been rescinded in 1813, and the rest of Act was quietly repealed in 1967.

Many Christians now espouse views that were once blasphemous and that people were burned for. Examples are denying the inerrancy of the bible, denying the virgin birth, and doubting the resurrection. Many clergymen share these views but most are wary of expressing them too freely. Blasphemy is still an offence at common Law, and sceptics still run the risk of prosecution. It was only in the most indirect way that Monty Python's *Life of Brian*, a film released in the 1980s, could hint at the ancient traditions concerning Jesus' parentage.

Blasphemy laws exist in many European Countries, and in some American ones, including some states of the supposedly secular USA. The founding fathers of the USA had been heavily influenced by eighteenth century Deism and rationalism, and these influences ensured that the Constitution of the USA was firmly secular. Even so, the Constitution could be easily circumvented. As already mentioned, the case of *Rex v Taylor* in 1676 stated that blasphemy was a Common Law offence, and this precedent was to be cited not only in England but also in America – since the English common law carried over to the common law of the USA. Courts in New York, Pennsylvania and Delaware have all agreed that blasphemy was a criminal offence under the common law.

Like England, Colonial America had blasphemy statutes as well as the Common Law. They punished Atheists and Blasphemers in much the same way as the Mother Country. Offenders were sometimes executed, sometimes flogged. Sometimes they were pilloried as well. Their tongues were bored with hot irons, bodkins or stilettoes. Ears were cropped, noses split, and faces branded. As in England, atheists were not permitted to testify in court, and so were effectively debarred from filing both civil suits and criminal charges, and were thus denied access to justice. The following statement was made by the Supreme Court of Tennessee in 1871:

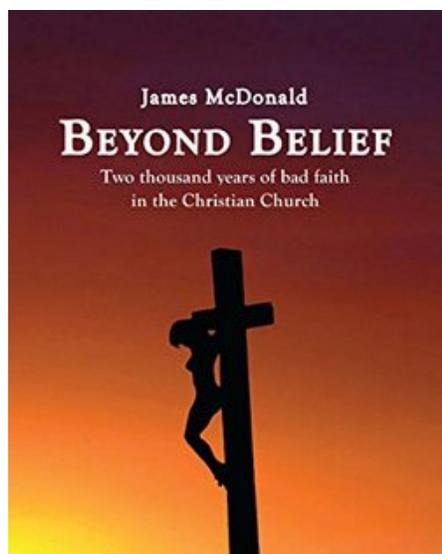
The man who has the hardihood to avow that he does not believe in a God, shows a recklessness of moral character and utter want of moral responsibility, such as very little entitles him to be heard or believed in a court of justice in a country designated as Christian.

Atheists have been denied not only legal redress themselves, but even the right to sit on juries. The underlying idea is that people cannot be trusted unless their morality is conditioned by a fear of God. This sort of view survived, even among influential people, into recent times. Ronald Regan, while President of the United States, observed that one could not believe anything the Soviets said because they did not believe in God.

Atheists are still discriminated against in the courts, for example in child custody cases where Christian judges have taken the view that a Christian parent is more likely to be moral than an atheist one, despite the available evidence. Theologians still wonder whether atheists really exist. As one Jesuit put it “...the man who does not fear God somehow does not exist, and his nature is somehow not human”.

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Beyond Belief: Two Thousand Years of Bad Faith in the Christian Church

By James McDonald

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THOMAS PAINE: Apostle of Freedom from RODERICK BRADFORD on Vimeo

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Andrew · 17 weeks ago

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You must not know that Catholics and Protestants believe different things. Their doctrines are so different, in fact, that they should be considered different religions entirely.

Twelve Differences Between Catholics and Protestants:

1. The Pope. Catholics have a Pope, which they consider a vicar for Christ — an infallible stand-in, if you will — that heads the Church. Protestants believe no human is infallible and Jesus alone heads up the Church.
2. Big, Fancy Cathedrals. Catholics have them; Protestants don't. Why? Well, Catholicism says that "humanity must discover its unity and salvation" within a church. Protestants say all Christians can be saved, regardless of church membership. (Ergo... shitty, abandoned storefront churches? All Protestant.)
3. Saints. Catholics pray to saints (holy dead people) in addition to God and Jesus. Protestants acknowledge saints, but don't pray to them. [Note: There is much debate about the use of the word "pray" in this context, so let me clarify: Saints are seen by Catholics as an intermediary to God or Jesus. Although Catholics do technically pray to saints, they are not praying for the saints to help them directly but to intervene on their behalf. They are asking the saints (in the form of a prayer) to pray for them. It's like praying for prayers. Hope this helps.]
4. Holy Water. Catholics only.
5. Celibacy and Nuns. Catholics only.
6. Purgatory: Catholics only.

7. Scripture: The be-all, end-all for Protestants is "the Word of God." For Catholics, tradition is just as important as scripture — maybe even more so.

8. Catechism: Protestant kids memorize the Bible. Catholic kids get catechism.

9. Authori-tay: In Catholicism, only the Roman Catholic Church has authority to interpret the Bible. Protestants hold that each individual has authority to interpret the Bible.

10. Sacraments: Catholic are the only ones to have the concept of the seven sacraments (baptism, confirmation, the Eucharist, penance, anointing of the sick, holy orders, and matrimony). Protestants teach that salvation is attained through faith alone.

11. Holidays: Catholics have 10 Holy Days of Obligation (which mean they must go to Mass). Protestants are more like, "Just come to church on Christmas, that's all we ask."

12. Communion: In Catholicism, the bread and wine "become" the body and blood of Jesus Christ, meaning that Jesus is truly present on the altar. In Protestantism, the bread and wine are symbolic.

The Roman Catholic Church even killed Christians because they refused to submit to the pagan practices of the Roman Catholic Church.

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Goodgulf · *2 weeks ago*

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The High English church is just catholicism a little bit watered down. All religions were made by powerful men, for themselves, to keep women, children and the poor downtrodden.

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[Report](#)

Lauren · *10 weeks ago*

0

As an atheist, I question, will Church and State feature an article about the history of atheists killing theists? Such as during the French Revolution and under the Soviet Union?

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