

The Hazards of Western Religion

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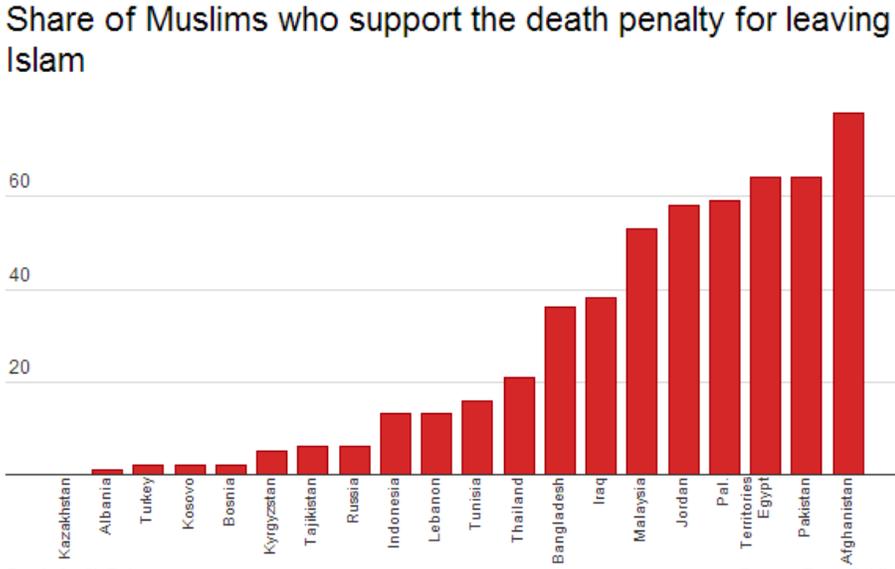
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The Hazards of Western Religion

Is Western religion hazardous to humanity and its progression? This is a question that will cause many people to become uneasy, because of its potentially controversial answer, yes. Approximately 84% of the world claims to be religious, and 55% of those claim to be either Christian or Muslim according to a worldwide poll done by The Pew Forum (The Pew Forum, 2010). Any rational and sympathetic person would look to the evidence and realize just how

regressive and detrimental these two commanding religions are when put into practice. The Bible and Quran, which are the sacred texts of



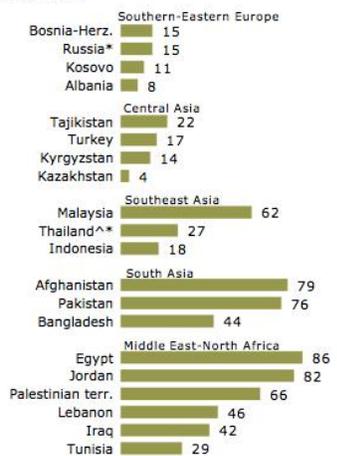
Christianity and Islam, respectively, condone and even endorse attacks against humanity such as; slavery, sexism, death to apostates, death to pregnant women and children, and a multitude of other heinous crimes against humanity. All of this goes without mention to the many times religion has been used to denounce various scientific inquiries and advancements which include; Heliocentrism, evolution, and even stem cell research.

Islam is a very controversial religion to some for its practices and restrictions it has. The Quran appears to support sexism with one excerpt detailing how two female witness testimonials account for one male witness testimonial, putting women at a lesser value (Quran, Sura 2:282). Another controversial thing within Islam is even drawing your vision of the Prophet Muhammad

can yield frightening results such as death to those depicting him. Of course, to paint all Muslims with this brush would be wrong, but when it is a widely accepted practice to not draw something or someone for fear of death, something is wrong. In the Quran, Prophet Muhammad writes about non-believers: “They wish you would disbelieve as they disbelieved so you would be alike. So do not take from among them allies until they emigrate for the cause of Allah. But if

**Death Penalty for Leaving Islam**

Among Muslims who say sharia should be the law of the land, % who favor the death penalty for converts



Based on Muslims who favor making sharia the law of the land.  
 \*Based on Muslims who favor making sharia the law in Muslim areas.  
 ^Interviews conducted with Muslims in five southern provinces only.  
 Results for Azerbaijan not shown due to small sample size.  
 PEW RESEARCH CENTER Q79a and Q92b.

they turn away, then seize them and kill them wherever you find them and take not from among them any ally or helper” (Quran, Surat An-Nisa’ 4:89). According to Muslims, The Quran is the infallibly written word of Allah and is to be followed by Muslims. What’s more, is that according to a 2013 worldwide poll done by the Pew Research Center approximately 64% of Muslim in Egypt and Pakistan support death for apostasy while 78% of Afghan Muslims support the same idea. Certainly, not all Muslims will follow this passage, but that is only a sign of the secularity some adherents have, fortunately. Furthermore, it is important to note

that about 75% of Muslims in Egypt and 95% in Pakistan say they support religious freedom.

While this appears contradictory, and it is, it is a sign of hope for a paradigm shift towards a more religiously tolerant middle east.

Both Christianity and Islam have a figure known as the Devil and some image of what Hell is. To the vast majority of adherents of these religions the Devil is a fallen angel that serves as temptation for people now. Although Islam does not hold the belief that sin is the problem in humanity and salvation is the answer as



The Last Judgement, Hell, circa 1431, by Fra Angelico



Prophet Muhammad, along with Buraq and Gabriel, visit Hell, and see "shameless women" being eternally punished for exposing their hair to the sight of strangers. Persian, 15th century.

Christianity does, they do believe in a positive afterlife and a negative afterlife, known as Paradise and Hell, respectively (God is Not One, Page 42-43). Hell is often illustrated to be a place of eternal torture and fiery punishment for the evil things done here on Earth which can leave an everlasting imprint on one's mind, especially a child's. Some may categorize this type of teaching as mental child abuse, which wouldn't be too far off, and others

might say that is too harsh of a label, but either way it cannot be easily denied that it is too much to teach a child. The general belief in Christianity is that God will judge those after death and it will be determined whether they're sent to Hell or to Heaven. Many moderate Christians are against the idea that God actually sends people to Hell and often rationalize this by saying that people send themselves there by their own actions. It is completely dishonest to say that God is creator of all things, including the criteria by which souls are judged, then turn around and say that he does not send them to Hell. It can be easy to change to criteria to allow all souls to go to Heaven, and some Christians believe this idea. They will assert that with true repentance you can be admitted into Heaven on Judgment Day. Either way, for the vast majority of adherents, the Devil is something to avoid and even feared.

Science and religion have always been an interesting conversational piece given their different views. Science is committed to enhancing the human's understanding of the universe and all that it encompasses, while religion arguably does the same thing. The two vastly differ in how they go about determining what is true and real and what is not. Science goes about determining truth and realness from an unbiased evidence-based point of view while religion is the opposite, often citing faith or God as the answer for something. There are quite a few things

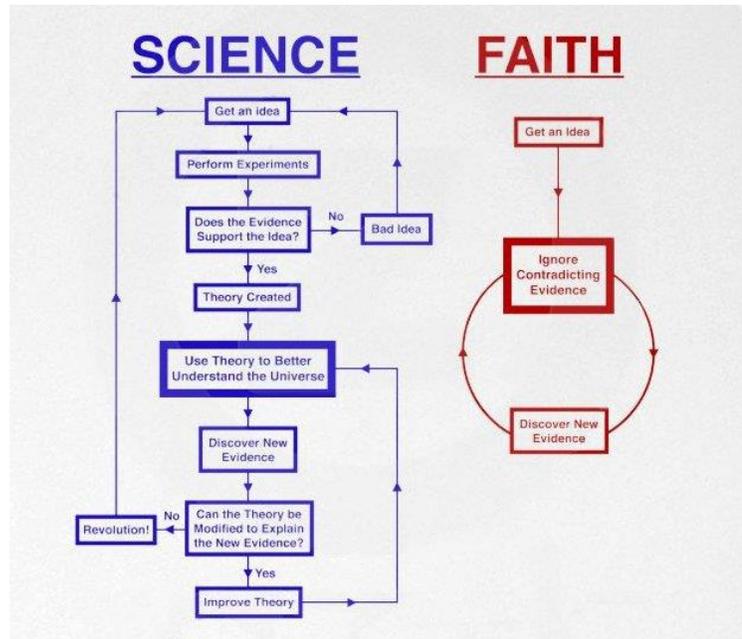
that have happened throughout the lifetime of modern science starting with Galileo Galilei that western religion has seemed to be uncomfortable about.

Modern science has been around since the 1600s and was first started with Galileo Galilei. Galileo was a physicist, mathematician, astronomer, and philosopher who came under fire by the Catholic Church for his proposed idea of heliocentrism, the model which describes the sun as a stationary star being the center of the solar system and has the earth and planets revolving around it. This was in direct opposition with the church's view which was geocentrism, the model which describes the earth as the center of the solar system with the planets and sun revolving around it. Now, the idea of geocentrism was not a biblical idea -- although some passages may be interpreted to support geocentrism such as; Psalms 93:1 and 1 Chronicles 16:30 just to name a few -- but the Catholic Church being in power at the time, condemned any new ideas that opposed their belief in geocentrism, which is exactly what Galileo did when he witnessed and brought forth heliocentrism.

During Galileo's time the Catholic's had a ruling hand in what could and could not be taught, and they decided that heliocentrism was not welcome so Galileo was forced to renounce his ideas concerning heliocentrism or be threatened with torture, imprisonment and even being burned at the stake. However, despite his renouncement, he was still condemned to house arrest for the rest of his life and was forced to recite the seven penitential psalms once a week for three years as punishment. Pope Urban VIII, formerly Cardinal Maffeo Barberini, was one of the people Galileo felt comfortable discussing his scientific ideas with, and it was Barberini who made Galileo feel as if though he was safe to think freely. Galileo and Urban had a friendly relationship and soon after it was decided that Galileo may think of the heliocentrism as a hypothesis, but never a reality and never present it as such.

It was unfortunate to be told that it is wrong to think ideas outside of church doctrine despite the amount of evidence one may have. Urban definitely played an important role in the promotion of Galileo’s findings, but it is quite sad that the Catholic Church had opposed it for so many years in favor of their own religious agenda. It truly marks just how willingly ignorant religions can be in the face of evidence.

Evolution is often a tough subject for western religions to handle considering their holy books often depict contrary ideas. In both the Quran and Bible humans are said to have been created from the ground of some sorts. In the Quran the man, Adam, was created from clay and mud, and the woman, Hawwa, or Eve,



is created from Adam in some way; the Quran does not detail how Hawwa was created only citing that she was made from the same nature and soul to serve as a mate for Adam (Quran 15:26; Quran, 7:189). Similarly, the Bible says that Adam was made from the dirt and Eve from his rib to be his companion (Genesis 2:4-7; Genesis 2:8-25). Conversely, it is said in the Quran that life began in the water, which is supportive to the idea that life began at the sea, but does not account for the evolution of species.

Evolution can be described as the process by which there becomes a change in alleles over a generational period of time within a specific specie. It’s not hard to imagine that many religious folks nowadays believe in the theory of evolution, but it hasn’t always been that way.

First off, evolution is *not* an explanation for the origins of life nor does it say that humans “evolved from monkeys.” Secondly, the word theory does not simply mean “a hunch,” it is an explanation or model that is based on observation, experimentation, and reason that has the ability to explain and predict natural occurrences. In a nutshell, evolution only explains the variation in species, but does not describe the origins of life.

What started off as a publicity stunt for the city of Dayton, Tennessee, ended up bringing a much needed light to the debate between science and religion. In 1925 there was a very famous case that took place in Dayton, Tennessee known as the “Scopes Monkey Trial” which involved science, religion, and the public schooling system. It starts on March 21, 1925 with the banning of teaching evolution by Tennessee Gov. Austin Peay. The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) began to seek a teacher who would be willing to defy the new law in hopes of the case bringing attraction to the city of Dayton. A man by the name of John Thomas Scopes agreed to claim that he taught evolution in classrooms, despite his lack of memory as to whether he truly taught it or not. While the staged trial served its purpose in bringing attraction to the town, with a movie even made about it, it also shone a light on the subject of the much debated theory of evolution brought forth 66 years ago with Charles Darwin’s first book, *The Origins of Species*.

The trial publicized the clash between modern, who said evolution and the Bible are compatible, and fundamentalist, who said evolution is not compatible with the Bible, Christians. Fundamentalists will claim that all things were created by God as said in the Bible, even the creation of Eve. The reason for its existence is to “promote continuity and accuracy” says George M. Marsden in “Fundamentalism and American Culture.” Despite today’s public schooling system banning religious teachings, this fundamentalist-modern controversy is a still ongoing clash. The fact that evidence for evolution was brought forth over 150 years ago and yet there is

still religious opposition speaks volumes about the kind of growth, or evolution, that is still needed and the kind of shackles that religion can attempt to put on scientific research and inquiry.

Fast forward to the 21<sup>st</sup> century and again the conflict between science and religion can easily be found. Stem cells. Yes, stem cell research is currently under fire from none other than Catholic adherents, and others certainly. Stem cell research is the process of examining and studying specialized cells that have potential to become other types of cells in the human body. The American Medical Association states that there are two types of stem cells: Adult, although they note that despite the name they can be found in infants and children, and embryonic stem cells. Adult stem cells are cells that occupy already developed tissue while embryonic stem cells, the ones that seem to garner the most attention for their potential to become a human, are cells that form once the fertilized egg begins to divide. Both adult and embryonic stem cells have the potential to become any cell inside a living body, but the embryonic cells have potential to become a human because of their nature. Embryonic stem cells exist as the egg splits and can become a human fetus or a cell within that fetus whereas adult stem cells are in existence inside an already-developed human and therefore can form another human. Furthermore, current stem cell research is exploring the possibility of “curing diseases and injuries such as Parkinson’s disease, type 1 diabetes, heart disease, spinal cord injury, Duchenne's muscular dystrophy, Alzheimer’s disease, strokes, burns, osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, vision, and hearing loss. Stem cells could also be used someday to replace or repair tissue damaged by disease or injury” (American Medical Association).

Many western religions are against the study of stem cells on the grounds that an embryonic stem cell has the potential to become a human being. The U.S. Conference of

Catholic Bishops supports adult stem cell research while opposing embryonic stem cell research because it destroys human embryos. In 2004 the Episcopal Church's General Convention stated that they were in favor of stem cell research so long as studies were done on cells that would have been destroyed anyway; in others words, they do not condone the creating of stem cells for research purposes. The U.S. Roman Catholic Bishops oppose the research saying that life is sacred from the moment of conception. Islam also shows to be divided on the issue with some Muslim leaders giving the green light for stem cell research because stem cells lack a soul while other oppose it for moral reasons. Of course, atheists and non-denominational theists alike can oppose stem cell research, but with some religious organizations preaching that life begins at conception it really does make it hard to see how it is the person and not the religion that opposes it. It is quite sad that in the face of promising results religious leaders will continue to instruct adherents to oppose this kind of human advancement. Lastly, there very well may be excellent moral reasons to oppose stem cell research, and that's fine, but to cite the reason as being one of religious origin has no merit in a debate that requires logic, reason, and free thinking.

Fairy tales and myths are acceptable for young children and ignorant people, but to condemn people for not believing in such things is an attack on logic, reason, and free thought. Society's advancement and progression hinges on the ability to reason its way through situations, think logically about important decisions and think outside the confines of religious oppression. To teach a child absent of any evidence that an entity exists in a way humans cannot understand is unjust especially when that child is expected to believe this throughout their life.

Many arguments exist simply to prove the existence of a god, but they always lack a certain element which makes them fallacious and illogical. Not to mention something cannot necessarily be proven through logical arguments alone. Instilling this kind of flawed thinking

into a person can be detrimental to their reasoning skills and keep them under the impression that they need that religion for support, it's a crutch that nobody should be taught they need.

Western religion and humanity will be continue to be joined at the hip for a very long time, if not the rest of humanity's existence, unfortunately. Western religion certainly brings positive things into the lives of billions of humans such as; community, sense of love and compassion for one another, and even answers to big questions one might have, even though they are without evidence, but will never come without a price tag. The price paid for adhering to these doctrines is subscribing to a group that promotes flawed thinking, inhibits scientific advancements, and attacks humanist ideas.

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