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INTRODUCTION

IN THE SUMMER OF 2011, a horrendous mass murder occurred in Norway, with more than nine people, most of them teenagers and even children, being slaughtered in a co-ordinated bomb and gun attack. Various Islamic groups initially claimed responsibility, and had been promising an attack on Norway for some time because of that country's commitment to the Afghanistan war, Oslo's prosecution of a specific Islamic war criminal, and Norway's refusal to ban the publication of a cartoon of Mohammad that many Muslims found offensive. The nature and implementation of the attack – first a diversionary explosion to attract security and emergency services, followed by a targeted gun slaughter – resembled the work of Islamic terror groups, who had perfected the approach in the Middle East and other parts of Europe. In the end, the killer, Anders Behring Breivik, was revealed to be a native blond, blue-eyed Norwegian, a strange and disturbed loner, whose motivation was partly political and whose ideology seemed in some confused, confusing way to be based on an objection to Islam, multiculturalism, and Marxism. Yet within hours of Breivik's attack, there were countless accusations in newspapers and on radio and television that the gunman was a Christian fundamentalist, motivated by his evangelical Christian religion to hate progress, change, and, in particular, Muslims. Why, therefore, he should attack a group of young people who were themselves mostly Christians was not fully explored, especially when there were myriad Islamic targets in Norway. But the sudden, new, self-evident "fact" that he was a "Christian fundamentalist" was repeated over and over again in media reports, until it was considered virtually treasonous to question the statement.

The reason he was now a Christian bogeyman was that he allegedly regarded himself as a Christian, and that he had posted some comments on a Christian fundamentalist blog. Flimsy evidence at best, but it was sufficient to set off anti-Christian alarm bells the world over. What was not really explained, or certainly understood or even taken into account, however, was that Breivik was an active Freemason, which was pretty obvious to anybody paying attention in that the standard photograph of him published by the media showed him posing in his Masonic regalia and apron. A journalist worth the name, or even an onlooker with any sense, would have realized that Christian fundamentalism regards Freemasonry as an anti-Christian cult, one that is more in league with the anti-Christ than Christ. Fundamentalist churches forbid Masons from being members of their congregations, as do most mainstream evangelical denominations. Roman Catholicism also condemns Freemasonry, and Catholic and evangelical publishers offer a series of books explaining why no follower of Christ can be a Mason. All of this, it seemed, was too esoteric and complex for the Christianbashers who suddenly smelled relativism and blood. Or, perhaps, bloody relativism.

It also quickly emerged that Breivik was supportive of the gay community, which again would make him an impossible fundamentalist. Nor did he have any known affiliation to any church, which is crucial for an evangelical in good standing, and for a Catholic, who is obliged to receive the Sacraments. We also soon discovered that he had never written anything about his supposed fundamentalist Christian beliefs, did not quote Scripture, and

was within hours of investigation shown to be the most eccentric Christian fundamentalist in the history of Christian fundamentalism. But facts should never be allowed to get in the way of a good story, and doubly so when the story centres on evil Christians. Indeed, in his personal manifesto the killer wrote:

Regarding my personal relationship with God, I guess I'm not an excessively religious man. I am first and foremost a man of logic. However, I am a supporter of a monocultural Christian Europe. If you have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and God then you are a religious Christian. Myself and many more like me do not necessarily have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and God. We do however believe in Christianity as a cultural, social identity and moral platform. This makes us Christian.

No intelligent person, and certainly no informed Christian, would regard this as the statement of a follower of Christ, let alone a fundamentalist follower of Christ. It's more the soggy confession of a secularist, who likes tradition and Christmas holidays, but rejects every tenet of classic Christian belief. At this stage, however, there was no stopping the journalists and the bloggers who seemed hysterically committed to blaming grotesque violence on Christians and Christianity; the folk tale of the Norwegian Christian mass murderer was firmly rooted in the psyche of mass opinion. Now, and especially then, if anybody dared to gently suggest that the real issue was the victims, and the actions of an insane man, and had nothing to do with love-based, gentleness-based, forgiveness-based Christianity, they were condemned as apologists and deniers, and even threatened and attacked. Actually, none of this came as much of a surprise, in that the same thing occurred when American right-wing extremist Timothy McVeigh carried out his deadly attack in Oklahoma in 1995, killing 168 people and injuring more than 800. He was an atheist, whose letters had repeatedly outlined his hatred for God. "Science is my religion," he'd said, and had abandoned the Roman Catholicism he had been born into many years before he became a deranged killer. He proudly told those around him that of course he did not fear Hell, because Hell did not exist. Hardly the opinion of a Christian. But he was white and Western, so he'll make do as a Christian for those whose prejudice drowns their reason.

The media did it for Breivik, they did it for McVeigh, and they do the same whenever some isolated monster attacks an abortion doctor or attacks an abortion clinic. Spend any time watching television dramas or listening to anti-Christian rhetoric, and you would assume that Christian-inspired terrorists were constantly murdering or trying to murder abortion doctors. Yet, according to NARAL Pro-Choice America, one of the most influential and vociferous pro-abortion organizations in the world,

Since 1993, seven clinic workers – including three doctors, two clinic employees, a clinic escort, and a security guard – have been murdered in the United States. Seventeen attempted murders have also occurred since 1991.

That is, of course, appalling. But it means that seven people have been killed in more than fifteen years, or one every two years. Each time such a rare incident occurs, all of the leading pro-life organizations condemn the action, offer rewards for the capture of the culprit, and

join with leaders of the Protestant and Catholic churches in screaming from the spire top that such violence is wrong, wrong, wrong! It makes very little difference to those who have already made up their minds, and whose narrative was written long ago. From a rare and intensely unusual action, they argue, we can comfortably and confidently construe that Christians are dangerous, to be feared, and are always just one step away from violence and death.

How radically different all of this is from when attacks are committed by Muslims, in the name of Islam, with the vocal support not only of millions of Muslims, but of numerous Islamic leaders, including leading and senior theologians and clerics. It is estimated that more than seventeen thousand jihadist attacks have been successfully carried out or attempted since the September 11, 2001, atrocity, most of them on fellow Muslims in the Islamic heartland of the Middle East and Asia; almost every time such an attack occurs, we hear the same arguments: that all of this is more about poverty and injustice than it is about Islam and the Koran, and that the “Christian” world is rushing to judgement. We even hear that the massive number is vastly exaggerated, which exposes an ironic racism within so many allegedly liberal and progressive people who write and broadcast in the Western world; what they mean is that there have not been seventeen thousand attacks in Europe and North America! Quite so. Most of the murders have been committed, as already explained, in the Middle East, Asia, Africa, and other parts of the developing world, and most of the victims are other Muslims. It is the nature, theology, and ideology of the perpetrator, not of the victim, that should concern us.

These same self-appointed experts and guardians of the moral conscience within the mainstream, supposedly responsible, media also make every effort to qualify or disguise the words Muslim or Islamic. The killers are jihadist, Islamist, militant, or extremist. Indeed, to directly call them Muslim or Islamic is seen as being so politically incorrect as to provoke waves of angry letters and complaints to various editors and control boards, and even reprimands, suspensions, or dismissals. Large media corporations such as the BBC steadfastly forbid their reporters to refer to “Islamic” or “Muslim” terrorism, in spite of what the terrorists themselves would rather we said and believed. On the one hand, we have a passionate, perennial explanation that evil is committed by Christians, juxtaposed with a aching refusal to ever link Islam with violence and terror. And these journalists tend to be the same people who accuse more conservative reporters of being extreme and unfair.

In the field of comedy, surely a little extremism and unfairness can be forgiven, as long as you’re funny. But there are many contemporary comics who are not only unfunny, but consider themselves important shapers of political opinion through what they falsely assume to be their satire: a satire that makes of Christianity a constant whipping boy. Why? That’s easy. It provokes easy and cheap laughs from people who cannot or dare not think outside of their own padded box. Comedian Bill Maher’s grotesque hatred of religion has made him a lot of money, and a hero of the mindless classes. In 2008, he discussed a polygamous Mormon cult in Texas, and compared it to Roman Catholicism:

Whenever a cult leader sets himself up as God’s infallible wingman, here on Earth, lock away the kids. Which is why I’d like to tip off law enforcement to an even larger child-abusing religious cult. Its leader also has a compound, and this guy not only operates outside the bounds of the law, but he used to be a Nazi and he wears funny hats. That’s

right, the Pope is coming to America this week and ladies, he's single! Now I know what you're thinking: Bill, you shouldn't be saying that the Catholic Church is no better than this creepy Texas cult. For one, altar boys can't even get pregnant. But really, what tripped up the little cult on the prairie was that they only abused hundreds of kids, not thousands, all over the world. Cults get raided, religions get parades. How does the Catholic Church get away with all of their buggery? Volume, volume, volume!

Imagine for a moment if something like this had been said about Jewish people, homosexuals, or people of colour. Remember, more than 85 percent of the victims of the tirade were Catholics, and the number of Catholics priests who were abusive were teenage boys, and their abusers were homosexual men, many of whom were also having sex with other adult men. But no Christian comic, and no comic in general, would or should make wild, cruel, inaccurate generalizations about gay people because of this, and certainly not for a cheap laugh. Actually, they would not receive a laugh at all, and would doubtless lose their careers. Indeed, many journalists and performers in North America and Europe have lost their jobs for making even marginal critical comments about minority groups, some of them deservedly so because they have been ugly and wrong, but others merely because they were correct and irksome. Maher, of course, is far from atypical, and much of his and others' anti-Christian material is merely crude and scatological. These comics run in fear from mocking other faiths, ideologies, and political and sexual causes for a whole variety of reasons, but have no trouble attacking Christianity and the Catholic Church.

Yet it all goes much further than mere comics. "I make fun of Christianity, therefore I am a Christian." The credo of the liberal, the atheist, the agnostic, the trendy, the dinner-party *poseur*, the journalist, the activist, the student, the fool who merely follows the times. There are lies told and propagated, and myths accepted and encouraged about all sorts of ideologies, religions, people, and philosophies. Some of them are largely harmless, but others are aggressive and damaging. Sometimes the strength or security of the victims makes the dishonesty innocuous or even irrelevant: while, for example, it might be historically irritating to believe something untrue about Napoleon III or the Treaty of Blois, or plain dumb to misunderstand the genuine teachings of Buddhism or syndicalism, it doesn't really change the way we treat others and influence the manner in which people are obliged to conduct their lives. This is not the case with some of the various ideas, individuals, and beliefs that have enormous contemporary resonance. Words have consequences. It is one of the reasons we have laws of libel and slander, so as to protect the reputations and by extension the well-being and integrity of various men and women who might otherwise suffer. Unfortunately, they may be fluffy celebrities who are merely trying to take advantage of access to lawyers, and want to protect their reputations, but they can also be significant figures who are open to all sorts of public abuse and media dishonesty. Even so, we can be too protective of feelings.

Ideologies and religions come into a different category. Things are said, for example, about capitalism, neo-conservatism, socialism, or liberalism that are absurd and hurtful. It can lead to shouting and arguing, or to anti-intellectualism and a closing of the mind. Sometimes it can be far worse, as for leftists and left-wing sympathisers who lost their jobs in the United States in the 1950s – although this phenomenon has been massively exaggerated, and some of those who did indeed lose their jobs supported an authoritarian regime in Moscow that murdered and incarcerated far more people than even that moral gargoyle Hitler. Forty and fifty years

later we have conservatives being denied work in education, entertainment, and elsewhere. Attacks on an ideology can also be quite sinister: terms such as “Zionist” being used as euphemism for “Jew,” and as a consequence disguising gutter anti-Semitism and enabling it to morph into an allegedly progressive political creed. The list goes on, and there are a number of people, and all sorts of religious people, who could claim to have been repeatedly caricatured.

Yet I would argue, and I believe that the evidence is overwhelmingly on my side, that Christianity is the main, central, most common, and most thoroughly and purposefully marginalized, obscured, and publicly and privately mis-represented belief system in the final decades of the twentieth century and the opening years of the twenty-first. Islam was hardly known about beyond the obvious in general circles in the West until the mass terror attack of 9/11, but since then there has been a distinctly divided approach. While some have tried to paint the Muslim faith as being universally violent and intolerant, these are relatively few and generally powerless. Far more common is what we are told is the considered, balanced analysis, where commentators are at pains to point out the nuances of Islam, and how it is misunderstood and treated unfairly. Much of this is the product of the Western guilt industry and an obsession with supporting anything that seems critical of Christianity, and Western and especially American interests. It is always stunning how some people will work so hard to justify or explain one of a plethora of grotesque episodes of violence committed by Muslims specifically and explicitly in the name of Islam, but will blithely blame Christianity for some horror performed by someone with only the most tenuous link to the Christian religion, and sometimes by people who are actually anti-Christian but happen to have been born in a vaguely Christian country.

If anyone doubts that such concerted attacks on Christianity occur, the chances are that they are not Christian, have various biases, or simply don't get out very often. It's rather like the white person from the suburbs who argues that antiblack racism is long dead. No, it's not, it's just that they have never experienced it, and lack the empathy to realize that it's out there. As for the anti-Christian attitudes, for many of us, we can take it, even though we shouldn't have to. But sometimes, in fact often, the victims of this anti-Christian campaign are the most vulnerable. In 2009, in Lexington, Kentucky, for example, a group of young teenagers at East Jessamine Middle School were treated in a way that almost defies belief. The website *beliefnet* gave what, according even to other commentators from the non-religious media, is an objective and balanced account:

The mother of a student who attends the school was killed in a tragic accident. Many students gathered at school the next day between classes to pray for the family. Some teachers told the students to stop praying immediately. At lunchtime, students gathered to pray again. Someone from the school called the police and officers arrived at the school to investigate. Some students who prayed between classes and during lunch were called to the principal's office and told that prayer was not allowed at the school. After many students and parents complained, and the local news media began to investigate what had happened, the school decided the next day to allow the students to pray. Some teachers stated that the students should not have been allowed to pray on campus, however, and it is unclear whether student-led, student-initiated prayer will be permitted in the future.

If this were a unique, or even relatively isolated case, it would be irrelevant in the great scheme. Sadly, it is far from being so.

In peaceful, traditionally tolerant, and self-consciously pluralistic Canada, to give another example, there have been numerous attacks on Christians and Christianity, often supported by state-funded and state-empowered human rights commissions. Take the case of Scott Brockie, a quiet, generally apolitical, gentle man who runs a medium-sized printing firm in Ontario. In the late 1990s, he was approached by some people who asked him to print explicit and political material from a gay organization. He explained that he was an evangelical Christian, and that while he had gay clients, the issue here was not the sexuality of the client, but the nature of the material he was being asked to reproduce. He gave the activists the names and telephone numbers of other printers in the area who would be only too happy to take their money and print their material, so that nobody would be inconvenienced. It all seemed to be a moderate compromise, satisfying to all. But no. Brockie was taken to a government-backed and -financed human rights commission, ordered to print the material, and fined several thousand dollars for not doing so when he was first asked. More than a decade later, he was told to pay \$40,000 in legal fees to the Gay and Lesbian archive and the human rights commission, was given a \$5,000 fine, and has now spent almost \$100,000 in legal costs defending himself – the human rights commissions in question do not give any legal or financial aid to the person answering a complaint.

And those answering complaints are so often Christians! Also in Canada, but a couple of thousand miles away in a Knights of Columbus hall in British Columbia, the Knights inadvertently rented their property to a lesbian couple for their marriage party. Homosexual marriage runs directly contrary to Roman Catholic teaching, and once the Knights of Columbus discovered that the event was a gay union, they apologized for any inconvenience and agreed to find another location and to pay for new invitations to be printed. Once again it was not enough. The men in the Knights of Columbus, who spend most of their time raising money for local charities, were taken to the province's human rights commission.

Christian activist Mark Harding was convicted in Ontario of a hate crime because he distributed leaflets to Muslims condemning Islamic violence and calling on Muslims to become Christian. He was never violent or physical – even though he himself was spat at and threatened – and he called for peace and love. Yet he was convicted, by the courts this time ordered to perform community service, and now has a criminal record, and cannot enter the United States. In the same town, Muslim groups regularly hear sermons calling for death and conquest, yet no hate crimes charges have been laid and no arrests have so far taken place. Nor should they, of course. A crime is a crime, and hatred should not be considered a crime.

On the other side of the Atlantic, in the United Kingdom, there is no separation of church and state, but an increasingly vehement campaign against Christianity. The Archbishop of York, Dr. John Sentamu, a black African originally from Uganda and a man who understands the reality of suffering and racism more than most, has termed the phenomenon “a campaign of mounting persecution.” In 2009, to give one of many possible examples, according to Britain's *Daily Mail*,

A school receptionist faces the sack after seeking the support of Christian friends when her five-year-old daughter was scolded for talking about God in class. Jennie Cain's daughter Jasmine was ticked off by a teacher for discussing Heaven and Hell with a

fellow pupil and came home in tears. After comforting her distraught daughter, Mrs. Cain, who works at the school, sent a private email to ten close Christian friends asking them to offer prayers for the families and the school. But a copy fell into the hands of Gary Read, headmaster at Landscore Primary School, in Crediton, Devon. Now Mrs. Cain, 38, is being investigated for professional misconduct for allegedly making claims against the school and staff members. She may be disciplined and even faces dismissal. The case has caused fresh outrage in the Christian community, which fears its members are becoming the most discriminated against people in society.

In the same year in Britain, a Christian nurse, Caroline Petrie, was suspended from her job for offering to pray for a patient's recovery. The BBC, hardly a friend of Christianity, reported:

The patient complained to the health trust about Mrs. Petrie, who follows the Baptist faith. She was suspended, without pay, on 17 December and is waiting to find out the outcome of her disciplinary meeting.... Mrs. Petrie, who carries out home visits in North Somerset, said she had asked the patient if she would like a prayer said for her after she had put dressings on the woman's legs. The patient, believed to be in her 70s, refused and Mrs. Petrie insists that she left the matter alone. The sick woman contacted the trust about the incident and Mrs. Petrie was challenged by her superiors. Mrs. Petrie said: "The woman mentioned it to the sister who did her dressing the following day. She said that she wasn't offended but was concerned that someone else might be. I was spoken to by my manager. She said, "I've got a letter in one hand and an incident form in the other. You won't be able to work until we've investigated this incident." Mrs. Petrie, who qualified as a nurse in 1985, said she became a Christian following the death of her mother. "My faith got stronger and I realised God was doing amazing things in my life. I saw my patients suffering and as I believe in the power of prayer, I began asking them if they wanted me to pray for them. They are absolutely delighted." A spokesman for North Somerset Primary Care Trust said: "Caroline Petrie has been suspended pending an investigation into the matter."

Britain has also seen foster parents with outstanding records of care for some of the most unfortunate children in society losing their right to foster because of the social consequences of their Christian faith, one couple being removed from the foster list because one of the children they cared for later converted from Islam to Christianity.

In 2006, a check-in worker for British Airways at London's Heathrow Airport was suspended for wearing a small crucifix. Nadia Eweida, fifty-five, explained, "British Airways permits Muslims to wear a headscarf, Sikhs to wear a turban and other faiths religious apparel. Only Christians are forbidden to express their faith."

In 2010, Dale McAlpine was charged with causing "harassment, alarm or distress" after a homosexual police community support officer (PCSO), a part-time cop, overheard him reciting a number of "sins" referred to in the Bible, including blasphemy, drunkenness, and same-sex relationships. According to Britain's *Daily Telegraph*, McAlpine was forty-two years old at the time, and a devout Baptist, who had for some time preached his evangelical Christian faith in Workington, Cumbria, in the north of England. He was adamant then, and now, that he had

said nothing about homosexuality while delivering a sermon from the top of a stepladder. But, he did admit that when a passerby asked him his views about the issue, he said that he believed homosexuality went against the word of God. The police claimed that he made the remark in a loud voice, and that it could be heard by many people in the street. He was charged by the police with using abusive or insulting language, contrary to the *Public Order Act* – which is now used quite regularly in Britain to deal with what is considered provocative comment, but was introduced in 1986 largely to deal with racist soccer thugs and far-right wing hooligans. McAlpine was taken to a police station and held in a cell for seven hours. I felt deeply shocked and humiliated that I had been arrested in my own town and treated like a common criminal in front of people I know,” he explained. “My freedom was taken away on the hearsay of someone who disliked what I said, and I was charged under a law that doesn’t apply.”

The *Public Order Act*, which outlaws the unreasonable use of abusive language likely to cause distress, has been used to arrest religious people in a number of similar cases. Harry Hammond, a pensioner, was convicted under Section 5 of the *Act* in 2002 for holding up a sign saying “Stop immorality. Stop Homosexuality. Stop Lesbianism. Jesus is Lord” while preaching in Bournemouth. Stephen Green, a Christian campaigner, was arrested and charged in 2006 for handing out religious leaflets at a Gay Pride festival in Cardiff. The case against him was later dropped.

We see similar attacks in the United States, with secularists and humanists purposefully misinterpreting the reality of church-state separation, and obsessively intervening almost every time they manage to find a reference to Jesus, God, the Bible, or the Ten Commandments – not an exclusively Christian litany – somewhere on public property. Invariably, when these expensive cases occur, most people wonder why the fuss and why the expense. Do reminders of how to live our lives in moral and ethical ways, those that have made us better people for thousands of years, really do such harm when they are seen in town halls or public places, they ask? But the voice of the majority is seldom heard and rarely respected in such conflicts.

One of the most unkind and crass examples of this was when a piece of twisted iron from the 9/11 terror attacks that had mysteriously – and some argued, even miraculously – formed itself into the shape of a crucifix was to be placed in a museum to commemorate the dead of that terrible day. The campaign against this proposal began immediately. This cross must not be included, the opponents insisted, because it violates the sacred (forgive me) concept of the separation of church and state. That the majority of the first responders who died on 9/11 were Roman Catholic, and that the first such person to give his life was a Roman Catholic priest, fell on deaf ears and closed minds. Catholic League president Bill Donohue put it extremely well when he commented on the cross controversy, and on New York City mayor Michael Bloomberg’s decision to ban the clergy from speaking at the 9/11 ceremony that took place on the tenth anniversary of the attack.

After the Twin Towers were leveled on 9/11 ten years ago, two steel beams in the shape of a cross were found; they were subsequently moved to St. Peter’s Roman Catholic Church. Last month, when it was announced that the World Trade Center cross was being moved to its new home at the 9/11 Memorial Museum, American Atheists sued on church-state grounds to stop it. Almost everyone, including non-

believers, was critical of this mean-spirited gambit by American Atheists. Among those who could not summon the courage to condemn it was Mayor Bloomberg; without criticizing these activists on moral grounds, he simply affirmed their constitutional right to sue. But when it comes to granting the clergy their constitutional right to freedom of speech on the tenth anniversary of 9/11, he does not equivocate: he simply elects to ban them. The reason given for this grand act of censorship is spurious: Bloomberg's office says the focus should be on the families who lost their loved ones. According to this logic, when the clergy are invited to speak at public events, or to open ceremonies with an invocation, they are detracting – not adding – to the overall theme. There is little doubt that if the families were asked about the propriety of allowing the clergy to speak, most would gladly say yes.

None of this, of course, compares to the persecution of Christians in the Islamic, developing, and Communist world, a cruel phenomenon that shows signs of increasing rather than diminishing. British journalist and political adviser Anthony Browne has been a business reporter and economics correspondent for the BBC, an economics correspondent, a health editor, an environment correspondent for the *Observer* newspaper, and environment editor in Europe correspondent, and chief political correspondent for the *Times*. He describes himself as a liberal democrat atheist. With this combination of vast journalistic experience and declared lack of religion considered, an article he wrote about Christian persecution is deeply significant:

I am no Christian, but rather a godless atheist whose soul doesn't want to be saved, thank you. I may not believe in the man with the white beard, but I do believe that all persecution is wrong. The trouble is that the trendies who normally champion human rights seem to think persecution is fine, so long as it's only against Christians. While Muslims openly help other Muslims, Christians helping Christians has become as taboo as jingoistic nationalism. On the face of it, the idea of Christians facing serious persecution seems as far-fetched as a carpenter saving humanity. Christianity is the world's most followed religion, with two billion believers, and by far its most powerful.... Across the Islamic world, Christians are systematically discriminated against and persecuted. Saudi Arabia – the global fountain of religious bigotry – bans churches, public Christian worship, the Bible and the sale of Christmas cards, and stops non-Muslims from entering Mecca. Christians are regularly imprisoned and tortured on trumped-up charges of drinking, blaspheming or Bible-bashing. Furthermore, Saudi Arabia has announced that only Muslims can become citizens.

Browne goes on to explain that Christians in Egypt are banned from numerous public offices, face regular persecution, and, although they are the original inhabitants of the country and account for between 10 and even as high as 17 per cent of the population, they are given very little influence and representation. "In the Islamic Republic of Pakistan," Browne writes, "most of the five million Christians live as an underclass, doing work such as toilet-cleaning. Under the Hudood ordinances, a Muslim can testify against a non-Muslim in court, but a non-Muslim cannot testify against a Muslim. Blasphemy laws are abused to persecute Christians. In the last few years, dozens of Christians have been killed in bomb attacks."

gun attacks on churches and Christian schools. In Nigeria, 12 states have introduced Sharia law, which affects Christians as much as Muslims. Christian girls are forced to wear the Islamic veil at school, and Christians are banned from drinking alcohol. Thousands of Christians have been killed in the last few years in the ensuing violence.”

With the removal of the older authoritarian but generally anti-fundamentalist and nationalist regimes from several Arab countries during and after the so-called Arab Spring, the situation of Christians is even worse in the Middle East. Rather than being replaced by liberal and secular governments, the ruling classes in these states are now more likely to be strictly Islamic, and in Syria, Palestine, and Iraq, for example, where Christians were historically tolerated, life is becoming increasingly difficult if not impossible for followers of Jesus. So the argument that Christians are uniquely persecuted in the opening years of the twenty-first century is really beyond dispute. Some of this new hatred is based on anger, some on neurosis, some on a misplaced self-loathing, some on mythology, some on sexual and political extremism, and much on simple lies. Lies told about Christianity and Christians.

It is my intention here to tackle just a few of the more common and most egregious of those untruths. If a lie is told often enough, it transforms itself into an ugly truth. The National Socialists taught us that. Some of the lies – there are masses of contradictions in the Bible, Jesus did not exist, Christianity has fundamentally changed its beliefs over the centuries – are simply products of ignorance and paperback wisdom. Others – Hitler was Christian and Nazism was a creature of Christianity, Christianity is racist and encourages slavery, Christians resist progress and are frightened of science and change – are cruel deceptions, leading to social dislike and even physical violence and persecution. It is my intention in this book to deal with some of the more common lies, and reveal them to be just that. There are entire books covering some of the subjects to which I can devote only a chapter, but as a primer of logical Christian self-defence, as a handbook for followers of Christ who want to intellectualize the instinctive and provide a solid response to the increasingly malicious anti-Christian propaganda campaign, I hope this can be a guide and guard. My intention is to provide just a few metaphorical arrows, to be shot back at the snipers and the swordsmen who thrust and fire away so often. The chapters showing that Christians are far from being stupid, and have frequently led social reform, are strong biographical, and will give readers a few large, beefy friends to walk alongside down the dark alleys and mean streets that are full of atheist bullies. They should prove to Christians they are not alone.

Some of the other chapters are more historical, such as those dealing with the reality of pagan Nazism, and the truth of the Christian response to slavery. Others are more theological and philosophical, but never so much so – I sincerely hope – that they become more words than worthwhile. Christianity is a living, breathing religion, and this book will succeed only if it empowers readers, who can use its contents to strengthen their faith, and to defend the faith when it is attacked. As for the atheists and assorted God-haters, some of you may perhaps rethink your position after reading the book; for those who hate the very idea of such a volume, buy it and burn it – it’s very much in the atheist tradition to do so.

This is very far from being the last word, and it is certainly not even the first word. But it is the word of truth and the word of defence, in an age when truth is often the last thing that people want to read and hear. That is so terribly sad. So much so that to a good, thinking

person, it is downright heresy.

 JESUS DIDN'T EXIST AND CHRISTIANITY IS A LATER CREATION

THIS HAD TO BE THE FIRST CHAPTER, because if Jesus did not actually live, and if basic Christian concepts and beliefs were made up much later on in history, the rest of the defence of Christianity would be a little redundant, to say the least. A warning: Because we need to establish the evidence, we need to listen to the early witnesses, and because we need to listen to the early witnesses, we need to hear them at length and in their own words. Remember, though, that what you are reading are the writings of people who were alive only a few years after Jesus walked the earth and was present here among us. We have a lot of witnesses, and a lot of evidence, which is delightfully distressing to anti-Christians when they argue that there's "just no proof." There is, and plenty of it. Whether Jesus was the Messiah is, in the final analysis, a matter of faith – though there are legions of logical arguments – but that Jesus *lived*, and that in the first decades after His life and ministry people knew what He had said and what He demanded of us, is beyond intelligent dispute. In fact, we know more about Him than we do about most other people who lived two thousand years ago, including those whose existence we take for granted and never question. It's just that it's so much less challenging to accept the historical reality of Julius Caesar or Cleopatra than it is to admit that Jesus existed.

So the denial of His existence, and the allegation that He did not do what we think He did and did not say what we think He said, is now incredibly common. The new atheists and the old bores tell us that to believe in Jesus Christ, in God, and to believe in the Christian religion is as intellectually *jejune* and immature as believing in Santa Claus or the Tooth Fairy. As with so many of these arguments, this one is painfully thin and illogical. Children believe in Santa Claus, the Easter Bunny, and the Tooth Fairy, but abandon these beliefs as soon as they reach the age of reason. A belief in Jesus and God, however, tends to come about *after*, not before, reaching the age of reason. Children believe in God, but they cannot understand the true significance and depth of their belief until they grow older; they come into full realization of the faith as they develop. So whereas we jettison some ideas as childish myths, we fully embrace another as adult reality. What the attack is really about, of course, is trying to discredit, abuse, and delegitimize Christianity, and to equate it with something that is self-evidently silly and not worthy of serious debate. It's very bad logic. The atheist does not believe in God, and does not believe in Santa, so God and Santa have to be equally unbelievable to a thinking person. The Christian believes in God, so he has to believe in Santa as well, and if he believes in Santa as an adult, he is a fool. This is rather like arguing that because Stalin smoked a pipe, and you smoke a pipe, you are a Communist mass murderer.

Putting all that aside, we need to respond to the fundamental accusation that there is no proof Jesus ever even existed and that Christianity and the Christian Church as we know it today is a later invention. It's one of the dumber of the attacks, but also one that some people find difficult to answer, because they assume that the people who make it know what they are talking about. Thankfully, that's not so. Let's begin very early, with Cornelius Tacitus,

Roman historian who lived in the first and second centuries. He was one of the finest historians of the ancient world, and is used today to give proof and backing to the authenticity of numerous characters and incidents from the ancient world. He said this:

Christus, the founder of the [Christian] name, was put to death by Pontius Pilate, procurator of Judea in the reign of Tiberius. But the pernicious superstition, repressed for a time, broke out again, not only through Judea, where the mischief originated, but through the city of Rome also.

Some critics argue that Tacitus took his ideas from the Christians whom he knew, and who were biased and therefore unreliable, but this doesn't make very much sense. He was not a particular friend of Christianity, and often more of an enemy; he was also an extremely reliable source, highly respected both by pagan contemporaries and by modern scholars. It is simply too convenient and facile to suddenly disregard him. There is no evidence that would lead us to conclude that this particular comment is not to be taken seriously, and if anyone had influenced him in his opinion, it would not have been a Christian but Pliny the Younger, and this strengthens rather than weakens Tacitus's commentary – more of Pliny later. It is vital to remember that Tacitus is not writing about Jesus in a positive manner, not writing as a follower or as a believer. He describes Christianity as a superstition, and as lacking the urban sophistication of Rome's various cults. It's his acknowledging that Jesus lived and died, not that He was or was not the Son of God or had any holy status, that is so significant.¹

Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus, another noted Roman historian, also worked as a court functionary under the Emperor Hadrian. He wrote at the end of the first century and the beginning of the second. In his evocative and compelling *Life of Claudius*, he stated that, “the Jews were making constant disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, [Claudius] expelled them from Rome.” This is a fascinating, and terribly sad and resonant passage full of pathos, as it refers to the suffering of the Jewish followers of Jesus, who were persecuted by both the Roman occupiers and the Jewish leadership. It shows how very early the church was established, and how much opposition there was to Christianity only a few years after the Resurrection. Some critics of this commentary have argued that the spelling – Chrestus – reveals that this is not Jesus of history who is being described, but some other local leader. Yet Chrestus was not, in fact, an uncommon variation of Jesus Christ at the time, with even noted and famous Christians such as Justin Martyr using it.

Pliny the Younger, mentioned earlier, lived between A.D. 63 and 113, and was responsible for interrogating, torturing, and executing numerous Christians because of their faith. So he was, in his grimy way, an expert on Christianity, and what he saw as its threat to Rome. He was governor of Pontus/Bithynia from A.D. 111 to 113, and wrote a whole set of letters to the emperor Trajan on a variety of political matters. The letters are extraordinary in what they reveal about the daily life of early Christianity, how individual Christians behaved, and what the pagan world thought of them and how it treated them. In one of them Pliny wrote:

It is my practice, my lord, to refer to you all matters concerning which I am in doubt. For who can better give guidance to my hesitation or inform my ignorance? I have never participated in trials of Christians. I therefore do not know what offenses it is the practice to punish or investigate, and to what extent. And I have been not a little

hesitant as to whether there should be any distinction on account of age or no difference between the very young and the more mature; whether pardon is to be granted for repentance, or, if a man has once been a Christian, it does him no good to have ceased to be one; whether the name itself, even without offenses, or only the offenses associated with the name are to be punished. Meanwhile, in the case of those who were denounced to me as Christians, I have observed the following procedure: I interrogated these as to whether they were Christians; those who confessed I interrogated a second and a third time, threatening them with punishment; those who persisted I ordered executed. For I had no doubt that, whatever the nature of their creed, stubbornness and inflexible obstinacy surely deserve to be punished. There were others possessed of the same folly; but because they were Roman citizens, I signed an order for them to be transferred to Rome....

Soon accusations spread, as usually happens, because of the proceedings going on, and several incidents occurred. An anonymous document was published containing the names of many persons. Those who denied that they were or had been Christians, when they invoked the gods in words dictated by me, offered prayer with incense and wine to your image, which I had ordered to be brought for this purpose together with statues of the gods, and moreover cursed Christ – none of which those who are really Christians, it is said, can be forced to do – these I thought should be discharged. Others named by the informer declared that they were Christians, but then denied it, asserting that they had been but had ceased to be, some three years before, others many years, some as much as twenty-five years. They all worshipped your image and the statues of the gods, and cursed Christ. They asserted, however, that the sum and substance of their fault or error had been that they were accustomed to meet on a fixed day before dawn and sing responsively a hymn to Christ as to a god, and to bind themselves by oath, not to some crime, but not to commit fraud, theft, or adultery, not falsify their trust, nor to refuse to return a trust when called upon to do so. When this was over, it was their custom to depart and to assemble again to partake of food – but ordinary and innocent food. Even this, they affirmed, they had ceased to do after my edict by which, in accordance with your instructions, I had forbidden political associations. Accordingly, I judged it all the more necessary to find out what the truth was by torturing two female slaves who were called deaconesses. But I discovered nothing else but depraved, excessive superstition.²

Celsus was not a Roman, but a Greek: a philosopher of the second century. He became one of the most active and thorough enemies of Christianity and Christians, having contempt for the early church but also a prescient awareness of how influential, and thus what a danger, it was likely to become. He was an authority on the religions of the Middle East, and was well-versed in Jewish literature and theology. He steadfastly denied the claims of Christianity, but the significance of his writing is that he responded to what was claimed by Christians extremely early in the chronology of the Christian faith. He wrote:

Jesus, on account of his poverty, was hired out to go to Egypt. While there he acquired certain [magical] powers.... He returned home highly elated at possessing these powers, and on the strength of them gave himself out to be a god.... It was by means

of sorcery that He was able to accomplish the wonders which He performed.... Let us believe that these cures, or the resurrection, or the feeding of a multitude with a few loaves ... these are nothing more than the tricks of jugglers.... It is by the names of certain demons, and by the use of incantations, that the Christians appear to be possessed of [miraculous] power....

This is extremely important. Celsus knows of Jesus's miracles, and does not even deny them as such – but tries to attribute them to sorcery or magic. Of the Virgin Birth he writes:

Jesus had come from a village in Judea, and was the son of a poor Jewess who gained her living by the work of her hands. His mother had been turned out by her husband, who was a carpenter by trade, on being convicted of adultery [with a Roman soldier named Panthera]. Being thus driven away by her husband, and wandering about in disgrace, she gave birth to Jesus, a bastard.³

Again, there is a clear acknowledgement here of what Christians believed was the Christian story, followed by the repetition of a libel popular at the time, and propagated by many Jewish leaders and Talmudic scholars: that Jesus's father was a Roman soldier. There is, by the way, no evidence for this, but the allegation was damning when it was said – which is why it was made – because a lack of pure Jewish blood, combined with a sexual relationship not only with a Gentile but with an occupier, was about the most venomous and condemning thing that could be said about the mother of Jesus. It's pertinent that after 1800 years of the myth being largely forgotten, it is now being given rebirth by the latest wave of atheism. We see a similar approach when Celsus writes about the Apostles, explaining that Jesus had assembled

ten or eleven persons of notorious character ... tax-collectors, sailors, and fishermen.... [He was] deserted and delivered up by those who had been his associates, who had him for their teacher, and who believed he was the savior and son of the greatest God....

On whether Jesus was God or not, Celsus wrote:

One who was a God could neither flee nor be led away a prisoner.... What great deeds did Jesus perform as God? Did he put his enemies to shame or bring to an end what was designed against him? No calamity happened even to him who condemned him.... Why does he not give some manifestation of his divinity, and free himself from this reproach, and take vengeance upon those who insult both him and his Father?

In both passages we see, again, that while Celsus doubts the Christian claims of divinity and also sometimes doesn't know the entire truth of what was claimed, he accepts the outline of the story, because it was so well-known and accepted even by non-Christian and anti-Christian writers and witnesses.

The same is true of Lucian of Samosata, a Greek rhetorician and satirist of the early to middle second century, who was renowned for his wit and cynicism. He was one of the greatest political comics of his day, not to be confused with modern political comedians, who tend to stay away from dangerous targets, but, like the contemporary examples, Lucian had a

obsession with Christians. He made fun of many fashions and theories of the time, but particular Christianity, which he and many others despised as being rural, lacking sophistication, and being at heart a religion of peasants and slaves. Yet in *The Death of Peregrinus* he writes:

The Christians, you know, worship a man to this day – the distinguished personage who introduced their novel rites, and was crucified on that account... It was impressed on them by their original lawgiver that they are all brothers from the moment they are converted and deny the gods of Greece, and worship the crucified sage, and live after his laws.

Again, we would not expect Lucian to accept and affirm Christ as the Messiah, but we see him acknowledging that the church certainly did so, and that its beliefs were widely known.

Even earlier than Lucian was Mara Bar-Serapion, a stoic philosopher from Syria, who wrote a letter from prison to his son, also named Serapion. He says the following:

What advantage did the Athenians gain from putting Socrates to death? Famine and plague came upon them as a judgment for their crime. What advantage did the men of Samos gain from burning Pythagoras? In a moment their land was covered with sand. What advantage did the Jews gain from executing their wise King? It was just after that their kingdom was abolished. God justly avenged these three wise men: The Athenians died of hunger. The Samians were overwhelmed by the sea. The Jews, ruined and driven from their land, live in complete dispersion. But Socrates did not die for good. He lived on in the teachings of Plato. Pythagoras did not die for good. He lived on in the statue of Hera. Nor did the wise King die for good. He lived on in the teaching which He had given.

Once again, Bar-Serapion was not a Christian, but spoke of the Jewish people and the “wise king.” Think of a letter written to a friend in which we describe an American president or a British prime minister. We might despise the person, and their party and politics, but we don’t suddenly deny that they are president or prime minister, pretend someone else is president or prime minister, or make up an entirely false story about their opinions. It’s the history, not the interpretation of that history, that matters to us here.⁵

Now let us move on to Josephus, because everybody else who writes on early Christianity does. He occupies a tremendously important place in any understanding of early Jewish history, and of the Roman world of the first century. Titus Flavius Josephus lived from A.D. 37 to 100. This Jewish priest and military leader took part in the famous but ultimately fruitless Jewish revolt against the Romans, but managed to avoid execution, became a Roman citizen, and wrote extensively about Jewish history and the period of early Christianity. In *Antiquities*, he wrote:

Now there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man, for he was a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews and many of the Gentiles. He was the Christ, and when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men among us, had

condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him. For he appeared to them alive again the third day. As the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him. And the tribes of Christians so named from him are not extinct at this day.

And later in the book,

But the younger Ananus who, as we said, received the high priesthood, was of a bold disposition and exceptionally daring; he followed the party of the Sadducees, who are severe in judgment above all the Jews, as we have already shown. As therefore Ananus was of such a disposition, he thought he had now a good opportunity, as Festus was now dead, and Albinus was still on the road; so he assembled a council of judges, and brought before it the brother of Jesus the so-called Christ, whose name was James, together with some others, and having accused them as lawbreakers, he delivered them over to be stoned.

There are various beliefs among historians as to the authenticity of these passages, but it is vital that we do not throw out the early Jewish baby with the early Jewish bathwater. Some historians believe that the passages are entirely accurate, others that certain parts of them were tampered with by Christians in later centuries, but no credible historian without an obvious agenda claims that they are totally unreliable. Josephus has been used as a vital source and an essential commentator for generations, on any number of issues, personalities and events of the first century; it would be absurdly selective and intellectually dishonest to discount him on one single subject, that being where he speaks of Jesus and Christianity.

When it comes to actual Christians speaking of Christ and Christianity, we certainly have to be more discerning about what is said and written, if not aggressively critical or even doubtful. But sometimes the evidence for the authenticity of these writings and the objectivity and accuracy of the authors is overwhelming, particularly when we realize how early they were writing and how widely read they were. Clement of Rome, for example, was killed for his Christian faith in A.D. 98. He had first-hand knowledge of the events surrounding the life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus. He wrote:

The Apostles received the Gospel for us from the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ was sent forth from God. So then Christ is from God, and the Apostles are from Christ. Both therefore came of the will of God in the appointed order. Having therefore received a charge, and being fully assured through the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ and confirmed in the word of God with full assurance of the Holy Ghost, they went forth with the glad tidings that the kingdom of God should come. So preaching everywhere in country and town, they appointed their first fruits, when they had proved them by the Spirit, to be bishops and deacons unto them that should believe.”⁶

Ignatius of Antioch was another such Christian writer; he was made a bishop by St. Peter himself. He was a student of John the Apostle, was born just a few years after the Resurrection, and was one of the most informed of Christian writers in the first century. He

was surrounded by people who knew firsthand about Jesus and His followers, and the would have been the first to criticize Ignatius if he had been inaccurate or had played the role of propagandist. Ignatius wrote:

Jesus Christ, who was of the race of David, who was the Son of Mary, who was truly born and ate and drank, was truly persecuted under Pontius Pilate, was truly crucified and died in the sight of those in heaven and on earth and those under the earth. Who moreover was truly raised from the dead, His father having raised Him, who in the like fashion will so raise us also who believe in Him.

And,

He is truly of the race of David according to the flesh but Son of God by the Divine will and powered, truly born of a virgin and baptized by John that all righteousness might be fulfilled by Him, truly nailed up in the flesh for our sakes under Pontius Pilate and Herod the tetrarch ... that He might set up an ensign unto all ages through His resurrection.⁷

Quadratus of Athens was one of the earliest and most able defenders of Christianity, justifying and explaining his faith in the public square until his death in A.D. 126. Again, he was writing early in the history of the church, when there were numerous people in the Christian community who had seen the truth or had heard it from direct witnesses who were anxious for him to be accurate, as well as opponents of Christianity who were only too eager to pounce on any inaccuracies that he allowed to enter his writing. Quadratus stated:

The deeds of our Savior were always before you, for they were true miracles. Those that were healed, those that were raised from the dead, who were seen, not only when healed and when raised, but were always present. They remained living a long time, not only while our Lord was on earth, but likewise when he had left the earth. So that some of them have also lived to our own times. ⁸

Aristides the Athenian, a second-century Greek Christian, wrote:

When the Son of God was pleased to come upon the earth, they received him with wanton violence and betrayed him into the hands of Pilate the Roman governor. Paying no respect to his good deeds and the countless miracles he performed among them, they demanded a sentence of death by the cross.... Now the Christians trace their origin from the Lord Jesus Christ.... The Son of the most high God who came down from heaven, being born of a pure [Hebrew] virgin, for the salvation of men.... And he was crucified, being pierced with nails by the Jews. And after three days He came to life again and ascended into heaven. His twelve apostles, after his ascension into heaven, went forth into the provinces of the whole world proclaiming the true doctrine.... They who still observe the righteousness enjoined by their preaching are called Christians.⁹

Justin Martyr was a Christian saint of the early second century, and one of the most

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