

Bishop Nazir-Ali gives a master class in hypocrisy and double-speak

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On Sunday, the *Telegraph* [reported](#) that a Church of England bishop, Michael Nazir-Ali, has written to the European Court of Human Rights warning of Britain's "aggressive secularism" (yawn) and complaining that the protection of the rights and dignity of the human being is simply going too far.

His letter is a master class in hypocrisy and double-speak. He wrote: "The Christian faith and our Judeo Christian values are the cornerstone of our freedoms, prosperity and liberty in Europe". This is a claim often made. However, I have yet to see a single piece of evidence offered to support it. On the other hand, there is plenty of evidence that our freedoms, prosperity and liberty came about *despite* the protests of political Christianity, and not because of it. Unlike Mr Nazir-Ali, I will now present some actual evidence to back up this claim.

For the record, I believe strongly that Christians should be able to live in accordance with their faith (and wear a crucifix if they wish) and that this is a fundamental right – one of the rights provided by the **secular** UN Declaration on Human Rights.

Human rights — as we know them today — were defined by the newly created United Nations following the Second World War. Later, in 1953, the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) came in to being. This was incorporated in to the UK's laws by virtue of the Human Rights Act 1998. Article 10 ECHR provides for freedom of expression, which Nazir-Ali specifically highlights as "precious". The Article states: "Everyone has the right to freedom of expression. This right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers".

However, it wasn't until 2008 that the blasphemy laws in this country were abolished. Prior to this, and across recent centuries, committing blasphemy in Britain could land you in serious trouble – including a sentence of flogging or death. (The last prosecution for blasphemy in Britain was as late as 1977.) In fact, just prior to the abolition of blasphemy laws in Britain, a House of Lords select committee on the matter declared that any prosecution for blasphemy was likely to fail because it was incompatible with the European Convention on Human Rights, which guarantees freedom of speech and religion. In other words, it is the very Act (the Human Rights Act) of which Mr Nazir-Ali complains, that provided our right to free expression, while removing political Christianity's ability to restrict that right. Not exactly the best example of "Judeo Christian values being the cornerstone of our freedoms" then.

Here's another right provided by the ECHR: Article 14 prohibits discrimination based on "sex, race, colour, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth or other status". Note the first one – sex. Article 14 prohibits discrimination based on a person's sex. Now, let's look at the record of organised Christianity in this area.

For a start, the Church of England is currently tying itself up in knots debating whether or not to "allow" women to be bishops. On its website, [the Church states](#): "those who dissent from, as well

as those who assent to the ordination of women to the priesthood and episcopate are both loyal Anglicans". This is clear – those who object to women bishops are "loyal Anglicans". It goes on to recommend that provision be prepared that would "seek to maintain the highest possible degree of communion with those conscientiously unable to receive the ministry of women bishops". Again, quite clear, if you don't want to answer to a bloody woman, that's fine. We'll accommodate you.

As it stands, there are no female bishops in the Church of England. No protection for rights and freedoms stemming from "Judeo Christian values" on this occasion either it seems.

The Church of England is a feminist paradise however when compared to that other valiant "Christian" protector of human rights and freedoms in Europe – the Vatican. Women are not even "allowed" to be priests in the Catholic Church, and the view of the Vatican on the equality of women is also pretty clear. In 2010, the Vatican was so freaked out by the idea of women having any power in the church that it declared the idea of women priests as being among "the most serious crimes". It compared the concept of women priests with paedophilia. What a champion of rights and morality the Vatican is. It is unable to see any difference between women having power and the rape of children (makes sense really, given its record in the area of child-rape).

On the issue of freedom of speech and religion, the Catholic Church for centuries tortured and killed — in the most barbaric ways imaginable — anyone who disagreed with their version of Christianity. I fail to see how they could possibly claim to have in any way contributed to the development of our liberties and freedoms; the very opposite is true. They stamped on freedom for as long they possibly could.

This is getting embarrassing.

Here's another one: Article 3 prohibits torture and "inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment". You might now think I am going too far; surely the Christian churches in Europe are not guilty of "inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment". But they are – on a massive scale. It is no secret that thousands of children were raped, beaten, and yes tortured, by Christian clergy in Europe with absolute impunity for decades (that we know of, the true timeline is likely to be far longer). It is also no secret that women in Ireland were sentenced to hard labour (making money for the church) and were beaten and abused in so-called 'Magdalene Laundries', the last of which closed in 1996. Industrial scale child abuse was carried out in Europe with the full knowledge of church hierarchy who made absolutely sure that the secular authorities never found about it. In fact, in 2012, a number of Catholic priests in Ireland insisted that they would disobey a new law requiring them to report details of sexual abuse to the police.

This really isn't looking good for Mr Nazir-Ali.

On a slightly separate point, it is repeated *ad nauseum* – often by those who worry about the growth of Islam in Europe – that this is a continent of "Judeo Christian values" and that these must be robustly defended in the face of this new and 'foreign' religion. But when exactly did Christianity and Judaism team up in this way? The phrase "Judeo Christian values" paints a picture of sunshine and lollipops: centuries of bliss with Jews and Christians skipping hand-in-hand through the grassy valleys in a spirit of love, peace, and religious harmony ("the hills are alive" etc.).

Give me a break! The Catholic Church in particular has been one of the greatest tormentors of Jews in all of history. There's the forced conversion of Jews to Catholicism and the kidnap of Jewish children, the blood libel ("Jews drink the blood of Christians") which was repeated by the Vatican in its publications until the early 20th century, and of course the chummy deals with Hitler

and silence on the holocaust. Various pictures of Catholic priests saluting the Führer can easily be found on the net. So much for "Judeo Christian" values!

In summary, there are two possible scenarios to put to Mr Nazir-Ali and co: either our rights are not derived from Christianity as he claims, or the Christian institutions of Europe do not believe in or wish to put these values in to practice.

Either way, the men-who-live-in-palaces have got some serious questions to answer.

N/A

Anne Marie Waters was a member of the NSS. The views expressed in our blogs are those of the author and may not necessarily represent the views of the NSS.

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