

Blasphemy Rights Day Is a Farce

By [Bill Donohue](#)

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Friday is International Blasphemy Rights Day. On paper, its stated goal appears eminently worth defending: it is opposed to laws, such as those in Muslim-run nations, that punish the free speech rights of those who criticize religion.

For example, it says, "Sometimes religious militants make their own laws, deciding for themselves that expressions of dissent justify brutal killings, like the grisly murders of secularists in Bangladesh, or attacks on religious minorities in Pakistan."

No one could reasonably argue with this assessment. But upon closer examination, it is clear that those who sponsor this event are not friends of liberty: they are rabidly opposed to religion, harboring a special hatred of Catholicism. In short, the whole project is a farce.

The [Center for Inquiry](#) is the force behind International Blasphemy Rights Day. It was once a respectable organization, but that ended in 2010 when its founder, philosopher Paul Kurtz, was forced out by a new board of directors. Led by Ronald A. Lindsay, the new board was comprised of militant, religion-hating, atheists. Kurtz died two years later.

When he was a young man, Kurtz studied under Sidney Hook, the brilliant New York University political philosopher whose intellectual migration traveled from Marxist to neo-conservative. I, too, studied under Hook, though more than two decades after Kurtz did. Hook had a tremendous effect on me

(though not on my religious convictions), and to this day I remember him with affection. Both of these men were atheists, but neither was a hater. In fact, they both hated the religion haters.

Kurtz founded several secular humanist organizations, and was the editor of "The Humanist," an organ of the American Humanist Association. He insisted on putting a positive face on atheism while simultaneously adhering to a religion-friendly line. Unfortunately, over time American atheists became increasingly extreme, and so, too, did those drawn to organizations such as the Center for Inquiry.

By the time Kurtz was forced to resign, he had had it with what he called the "angry atheists." He was referring to the "new atheists," writers such as Christopher Hitchens and Richard Dawkins. He properly called them "dogmatic" and atheist "fundamentalists," men whose malice toward religion was deeply offensive.

In 2010, just before Kurtz left the Center for Inquiry, he witnessed the first International Blasphemy Day. He was not happy with what happened. With good reason, he objected to a "Free Expression Cartoon Contest": top prize was given to a bishop ogling altar boys.

Two days before the event, I wrote a news release slamming it for its scheduled foray trashing Catholicism.

"Artist Dana Ellyn will wander to Washington, D.C. to show her masterpiece, 'Jesus Does His Nails,' a portrait of Jesus polishing a nail jammed into his hand. In Los Angeles, there will be a film about a gay molesting priest and another about a boy who is so angry about being sent to bed that he asks God to kill his parents."

One person who loved these displays of bigotry was PZ Meyers. He correctly said that the day was established to "mock and insult religion without fear of murder, violence, and

reprisal.” The University of Minnesota professor is known for intentionally desecrating a consecrated Host with a rusty nail.

In recent years, the participants at these Blasphemy Rights Day events have been better behaved—owing to the backlash—but the fundamental problem remains. The Center for Inquiry believes that “free speech is the foundation on which other liberties rest.” Wrong. Freedom of religion is the foundational liberty, but to admit that would undercut its mission.

To demonstrate how committed the Center for Inquiry is to hate speech, consider that it will soon be home to the Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason & Science. Dawkins is to Catholics what the Imperial Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan is to blacks. A few months ago, he said, “I’m all for offending people’s religion. I think it should be offended at every opportunity.”

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