

Changing focus

Amnesty International's report on U.S. prisons a publicity stunt



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Amnesty International, defender of the weak and oppressed, has taken its fight to the big time.

Instead of protesting violations of small countries, the human rights organization has decided to pick on someone their own size.

The target: The United States of America.

That's right. Land of the free. Home of the brave. Home sweet home. Human rights abusers.

Last Tuesday, Amnesty International released a 150-page report detailing alleged human rights violations in America's penal system.

Just what qualms do the good folk at A.I. have with our country?

Well, to make part of a (painfully) long report short, they feel that prisons are bad.

Hmm, prisons are bad ... How do I say this?

Duh, that's the point.

Apparently, Amnesty International doesn't agree.

They want the U.S. to make prisons more amicable.

Mind you, they didn't say how the U.S. is expected to do that. Amnesty's report was long on accusations and short on suggestions.

Therefore, I'll offer up my two cents. I'd offer more, but I don't make that much working here.

(Editor's note: He's not kidding.)

First of all, we need to eliminate the varying levels of security that exist.

After all, why should the murderers and terrorists in maximum security feel inferior to the work-release prisoners?

Think about it. Combining them makes perfect sense. It would boost the egos of the really evil inmates. Plus, it would increase the deterrent factor for

white-collar criminals, like embezzlers and tax cheats.

Besides, serial killers need good investment advice just like everyone else.

It's a win-win situation.

Second, Amnesty complains about leg irons, belly chains and handcuffs being used to restrain prisoners.

Well, we wouldn't have to chain 'em up if they'd stay put. It's that whole escape thing that makes handcuffs necessary.

I have an alternative to handcuffs, but Amnesty International probably doesn't approve of duct tape.

Amnesty International would rather we let convicts run around like 6-year-olds in a restaurant, I guess.

I did hear a rumor that Amnesty's research and development branch is working on a humane way of regrouping lost convicts.

Apparently it involves the phrase, "Here bad guy, bad guy, bad guy. C'mere bad guy, bad guy, bad guy. Good convict."

Dear God, it's Mr. Rogers, Texas Ranger.

Lastly, Amnesty opposes the conditions in women's prisons.

See, while it's bad for men to wear handcuffs, it's super, double-dog bad for women to wear them. (Do you know how hard it was to keep that clean?)

I find that a bit hypocritical coming from the group that condemns the U.S. for not ratifying the Convention on the Eradication of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

Apparently, discrimination against women is bad, but discrimination for them is OK.

Isn't that still discrimination?

Finally, Amnesty International calls for a halt to non-lethal methods of capture.

No, that wasn't a typo. They're protesting non-lethal methods.

I guess Amnesty International wants us to shoot criminals first, then peaceably arrest them.

Why not? Texas has been doing it that way for years.

But Amnesty has a particular warm spot in its heart for pepper spray.

The report states that more than 60 people (61? 63? 69? It

doesn't say) have died this decade from pepper spray.

Folks, I've been pepper-sprayed, twice. It hurts like hell.

(On a side note, I did it to myself both times. Accidentally, of course. I am not a stalker, just very clumsy.)

To experience pepper spray at home, go into the kitchen. Now turn on the stove, full blast. Put your face 2 inches from the burner and throw a handful of cayenne pepper into the fire.

That's what pepper spray feels like. Granted, I've never been clubbed or shot (yet) but I bet it hurts a lot worse and lasts longer than pepper spray.

Not to mention what gunshots can do to your clothes. Let's just say Liquid Tide won't make a dent.

However, in the long run, it doesn't really matter what Amnesty thinks or protests.

See, Amnesty International has started down the same road that all too many organizations have taken.

They're bowing to the almighty power of publicity. Let's face it, there are tons of countries in this world that make U.S. prisons look like double coupon day at Disney World.

Countries like Bosnia, Somalia and China.

But who does A.I. choose to protest? The United States.

Forget all about ethnic cleansing, genocide and political persecution.

That's not near as important as getting into every newspaper and on every newscast in this country.

It's all a Howard Stern-sized publicity stunt. Nothing more, nothing less.

It's sad, really, watching a group that I used to respect stoop to the lowest common denominator.

The Great God Publicity. Congratulations, Amnesty International, you've gotten my 25 inches of publicity.

Don't spend it all in one place.



MATT HANEY/DN

Conflicting words

People should use common sense, logic to determine meaning of the Bible



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I want to start by saying that I do believe in God. I'm also a member of a church in my hometown. Still, I question the specifics of the Bible and the relevance of many Bible stories to the 20th century.

Unfortunately, there are many people today who believe that the Bible is the literal "Word of God." Just as we have adapted the Constitution to modern times, we must do the same with the Bible. "The Living Bible" has about 42 authors combined in the Old Testament and the New Testament. I counted at least 11 books of the Bible that have unknown authors. Other denominations of the Christian religion may have fewer or more books.

My Bible showed that the first book, Genesis, was written in 1420

or 1220 B.C. by Moses. That's almost 4,000 years ago! Keep in mind that the printing process wasn't invented until the A.D. 1450s.

So, when all the books of the Bible were written, the only method of copying text was by hand. Copying text as in-depth and lengthy as the Bible has got to leave room for many human errors.

How can we be for sure that all the words written in the Bibles we have today are accurate? The fact is that we can't prove the accuracy of any Bible.

With at least 11 unknown authors, many of the Bible's books could have been written by anyone, whether they knew the true "Word of God" or pretended to.

Not only were there many authors, but the Bible has been translated into so many languages that the original meaning may have been distorted in the process. The Bible was written originally in Hebrew. Later, it was translated into Greek, Aramaic, Latin, English and almost any other language imaginable.

The many language translations, as well as copying of text by hand for hundreds of years, allows for important information to be left out or added in.

I think that religion is a good thing, as long as the Bible isn't

always taken literally. People need to use reason, logic and knowledge when discerning the meaning of the Bible. We need to think about whether the stories in the text are realistic.

Jim Gordon, pastor of the East Lincoln Christian Church, says it's always difficult to know what portions of the Bible to interpret literally or figuratively.

"Try to crawl under the skin of the original writers and understand the historical background and culture of their time," Gordon said.

"Take the Bible's principles and apply them to modern circumstances."

In the book, "What Your Minister is Afraid to Tell You About the Bible," author Terry Cain lists some examples of contradictions and irrelevant ideas. According to Cain, the Bible mentions that it is really better if people don't marry (1 Corinthians 7:1, 8, 26-27). But the text also says that we should marry (1 Corinthians 7:2, 9). So, which is it? This is a big contradiction.

Cain also lists that a woman can have long hair, but a man can't (1 Corinthians 11:1-16). This is a statement that seems to be irrelevant to our time because many men grow their hair longer than some women. This also could be a contradiction. It

can't be proven what Jesus looked like, but in every picture I have ever seen of him, he had long hair.

The Bible also was written in a time when women were just beginning to be seen as nothing other than a man's property. Therefore, derogatory statements referring to women are not relevant to us, now that women are seen as equal to men.

For instance, women were frequently sold into slavery by their husbands to settle a debt (Matthew 18:25). Obviously, this reference is extremely old-fashioned.

Times change, as should our application of the Bible's message to our daily lives.

There are also many contradictions as to whether God is vengeful or forgiving. In the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, two angels came to visit a man named Lot in the city of Sodom.

Lot invited the men into his home for a feast (Genesis 19:2-3). Other Sodomites came to his home to tell Lot that he must surrender the men so that the city members could rape them (Genesis 19:4-5).

Lot refuses, and instead offered his virgin daughters to the hands of angry Sodomites (Genesis 19:6-8). Lot and his family were spared when God destroyed the evil cities of Sodom and Gomorrah with a rain of

fire and flaming tar from heaven (Genesis 19:23-24).

So in conclusion, God destroyed all of the sinners of Sodom and Gomorrah except Lot. Tell me if I'm wrong, but isn't it sinful of Lot to try to give his daughters to rapists?

Where is the line drawn for sinners and non-sinners? It seems like a very selective judgment process.

But in the New Testament, Jesus advocates forgiveness and loving of enemies.

"Don't you believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words I say are not my own but are from my father who lives in me. And he does his work through me," (John 14:10).

Jesus forgave sinners, so why do some stories portray God as not so forgiving but instead as punishing?

It is up to you to decide for yourself how to interpret the meaning of the Bible. And like my grandpa always says, "Believe nothing you hear and only half of what you see."

With the knowledge of the 20th century and the use of common sense, it is hard to believe that anyone would believe the entire Bible to be the literal Word of God.

It is easy to regurgitate exactly what we are taught but more difficult to question the reasoning behind the teachings.