

**Jesus and Mo**

*Ha ha!*

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## **Foreword**

### **by Jerry Coyne**

This is the eighth collection of cartoons from the estimable Jesus and Mo strip, now going strong for fourteen years. Have a look at the cover. It's just a greeting from the boys to the reader, and it's pretty tame, right?

Wrong. Given the hypersensitivity of some believers, this simple image can be—and was—seen as hateful and offensive. On October 3, 2013, two students from the London School of Economics, Christian Moos and Abhishek Phadnis, showed up at the Freshers Fair wearing teeshirts sporting the image on this cover. They were there as representatives of the school's Atheist, Secularist, and Humanist Society.

It wasn't long before university security arrived with the message that there had been unspecified "complaints", and asked the pair to either remove their teeshirts or leave the premises. Moos and Phadnis refused. University administrators then appeared, warning the pair that the innocuous depiction of Jesus and Mo constituted "harassment" and might "offend others" by creating an "offensive environment." Moos and Phadnis gave in, but showed up the next day wearing the same shirts, this time with bits of tape covering the "offensive" parts. They were again asked to remove the shirts and threatened with university action for "damaging the Schools' reputation."

Eventually LSE came to its senses and apologized, but the fracas over the "How ya doin'?" cartoon wasn't over. Phadnis and Moos appeared on a pre-recorded BBC show, "The Big Questions", along with Maajid Nawaz, a Muslim reformer and head of Quilliam, an anti-extremist organization. The students pulled up their sweaters to show the controversial teeshirts, and, sure enough, the BBC's broadcast blurred the images of Jesus and Mo. Channel 4's report on this also involved censorship, blacking out the image of Mo but not Jesus. That shows you not only who gets offended, but also how craven the media can be when it comes to religion, afraid to show even a tame image for fear offending believers who could become violent.

One of the benefits of religious Offense Culture is that you can get others, like the BBC and Channel 4, to do your censorship for you. I’ve had a similar experience. Every week I repost a Jesus and Mo cartoon on my website, and about once a year my hosting platform, WordPress, informs me that they’ve removed some cartoons at the behest of the Pakistani government, which has declared them blasphemous and a violation of the law—“The Prevention of Electronic Crime Act”, to be precise. Yet WordPress is an American enterprise, and showing Jesus and Mo doesn’t violate US law. But rather than lose business in Pakistan, WordPress simply deletes the cartoons from my site. In effect, a U.S. company enforces Pakistan’s blasphemy laws in places where they don’t apply.

But the Jesus and Mo kerfuffle didn’t end with censorship by British television. On the BBC show with Phadnis and Moos, Nawaz declared that “I don’t find this image offensive” and later retweeted the cartoon with his caption: “This Jesus & Mo cartoon is not offensive & I’m sure God is greater than to feel threatened by it.” Well, maybe it didn’t threaten God, but it threatened many of Nawaz’s fellow Muslims, who started a campaign to demonize him. That involved a petition to have him dismissed as a Liberal Democratic candidate for Parliament, accompanied by the now-familiar crusade on social media, complete with vilification and death threats to Nawaz from those offended by his lack of offense.

Why was the cover cartoon seen as offensive and threatening? Because for many Muslims, *any* depiction of Muhammad is considered blasphemous. But it’s more than just the image of Mo that was blasphemy—it is what he and his pal Jesus represent in the cartoons: the persistence of repressive values in an era which doesn’t need them, the endurance of superstition in an increasingly rational world, and the collision between faith, represented by Jesus, Mo, and, Moses (who makes a sporadic appearance on behalf of Judaism) and empiricism, represented by the barmaid. As the Divine Duo assert repeatedly, asking why they see their beliefs as true is simply not on.

And so in these pages you’ll find repeated instances of what many consider blasphemy, that is, criticism of religion and its doctrines. It’s not the Christians we have to fear—for Christianity has largely lost its power to injure those who mock it—but the many Muslims

who are easily inflamed and who see Jesus and Mo as a big box of matches. No wonder the strip's creator remains anonymous!

To add insult to injury, we see Mo not only cohabiting with Jesus, and even sleeping in the same bed with his friend, but also drinking: frequenting the bar and quaffing a Guinness while watching the telly. These acts are surely blasphemous to many Christians and Muslims. But even worse—and this is of course the point of the strip—the boys, while trying to defend and promulgate their faiths, reveal themselves as confused, delusional, and hypocritical.

The cartoons speak for themselves, so there's no need to dilate on what can be shown in four panels. I'll mention just a few themes that recur in this collection. One is the word salad that passes for "sophisticated theology", especially the enigmatic muddle of "substitutionary atonement"—the idea that the crucified Jesus, as a scapegoat who also happens to be his own father, somehow absolves us of our sins. This simply makes no sense, but is *the* central doctrine of Christianity.

And then there's the so-called "feminism" of Islam. Sporting a burka, Mo repeatedly tries to convince us that covering yourself in a cloth sack is liberating and empowering. We also see the "it's okay when *we* do it" hypocrisy of flaunting your own faith while decrying others that are no more credible, including Hinduism, scientology, Norse religion, and even the nonreligious faith of reiki therapy. And let it not be said that the boys ignore the zeitgeist, for here Jesus and Mo deal with current issues like microaggressions, the Regressive Left, deplatforming of speakers, fake news, cultural appropriation, sensitive college "snowflakes", and global warming. I was especially pleased to see that my own field of evolutionary biology—which of course the boys reject—appears in five strips.

It's easier to silence your opponents than answer them, so Jesus and Mo use various tactics to immunize their beliefs from criticism. These include cherry-picking scripture to quietly shelve the bad bits ("strong"); fobbing off those bad bits as mere metaphor ("full"); dismissing extremist branches of religion as "not true faith" ("human"); claiming that all faiths demand respect ("homo"); and, when all else has failed, resorting to threats and intimidation ("media"). I especially love the begging-the-question strips in which religious

punishments are justified because they're sanctioned by scripture (e.g., "speak", "await", and "obey"). But why should we obey scripture? Because it says *itself* that it's true!

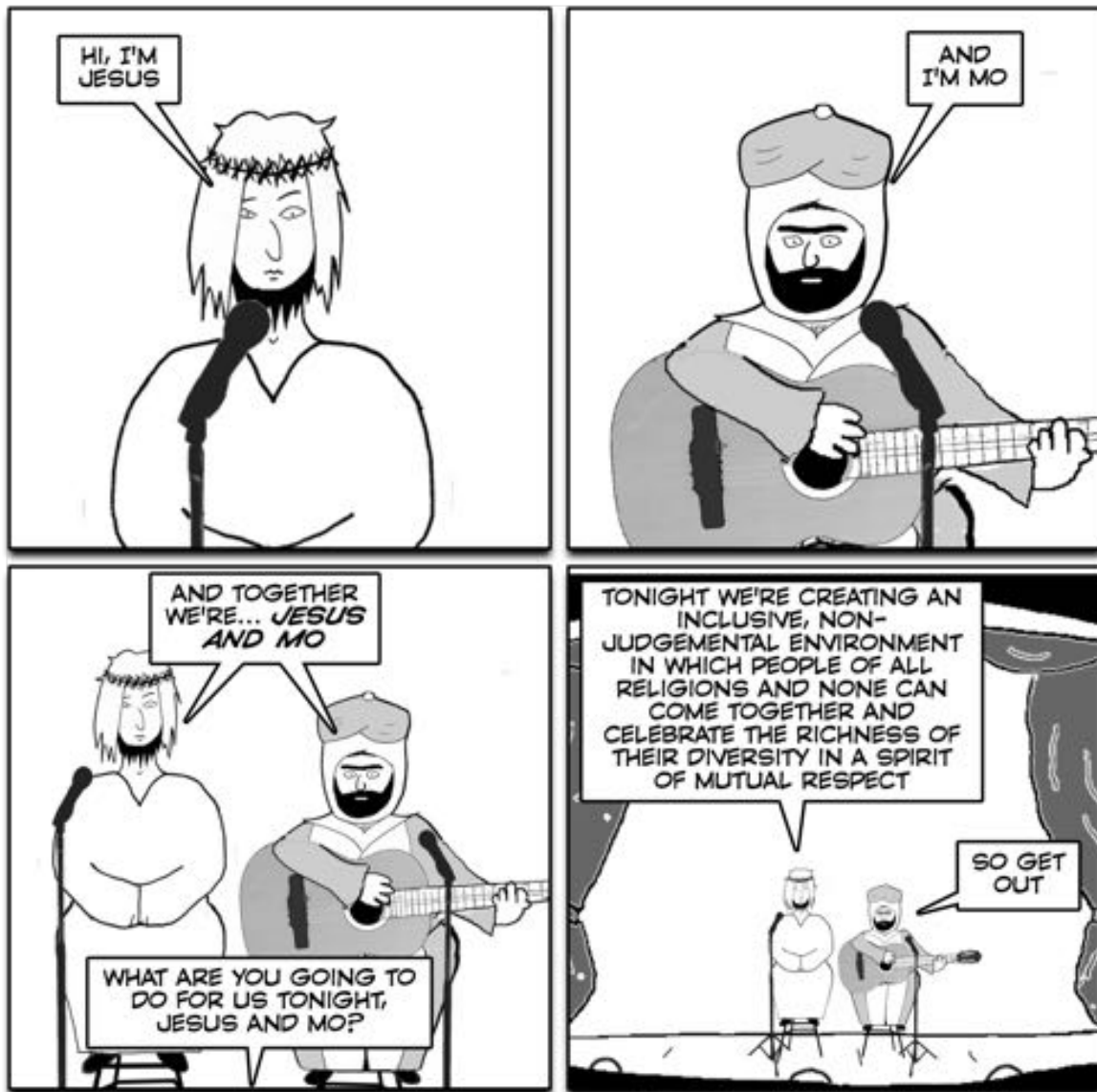
In today's world, blasphemy gets a bad rap. While it's not okay to be bigoted against believers simply because they're believers, religion itself, with its power, huge numbers of adherents, tendency to oppress and proselytize, and lack of evidence for its assertions, must be constantly questioned. That is the difference between "Islamophobia" on the one hand, which is understood as bigotry against Muslims, and criticism of Islam—or any faith—on the other. The Jesus and Mo cartoons fall firmly into this second camp.

Yet despite the value of *constructive* blasphemy, 69 of the world's 195 countries have laws on the books against the act, though in places the laws are vestigial and unenforced relics of an earlier time. But you can still be fined for criticizing religion in Italy, Brazil, Switzerland, Austria, Finland, and the Philippines, jailed in Germany, Poland, El Salvador, India, Finland, Ireland, India, Turkey, Morocco, and Algeria, and put to death in Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan. That doesn't count places where sharia courts can pronounce death sentences not enshrined in civil law, nor acts of murder committed by offended believers in countries like the Netherlands.

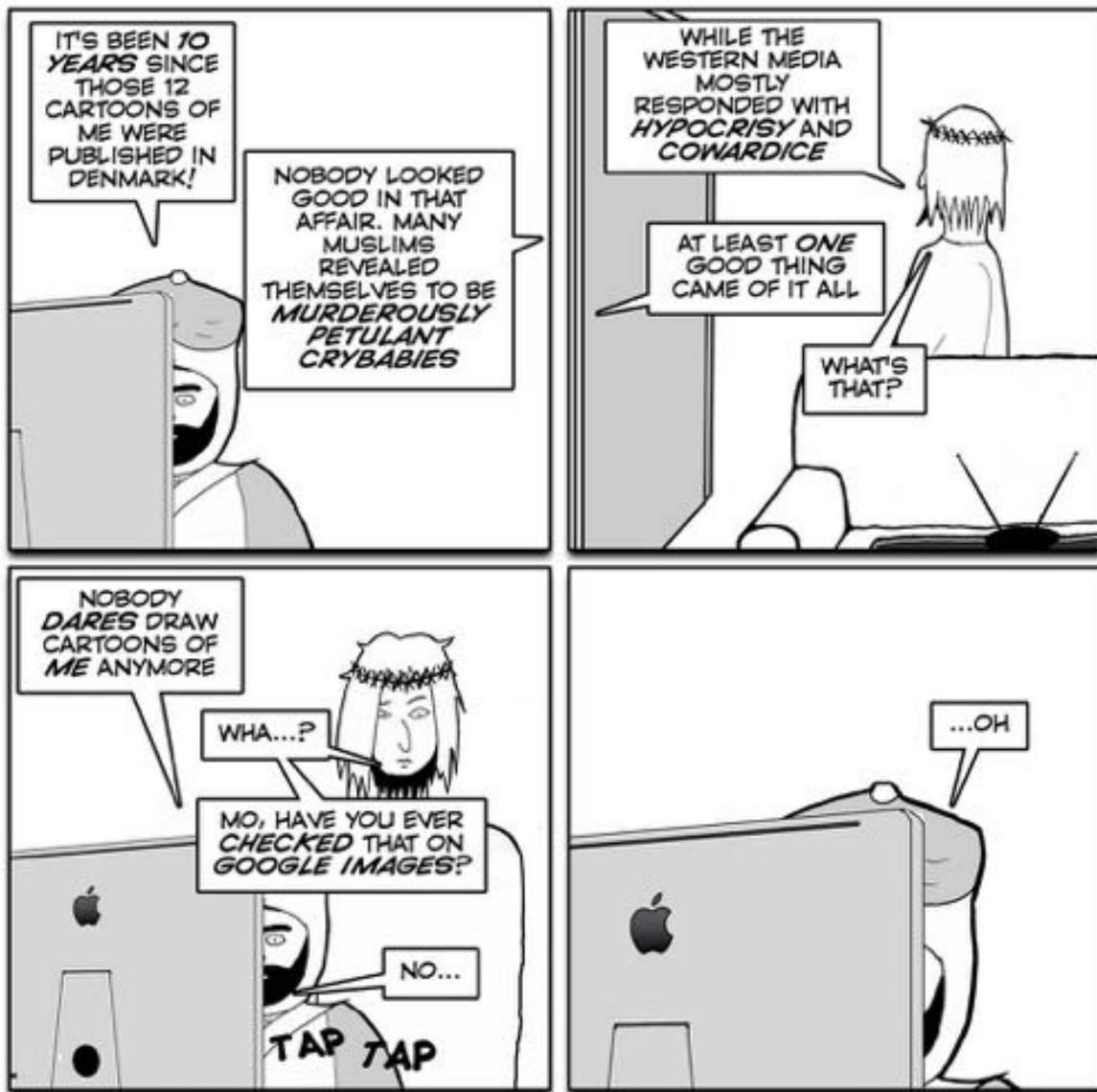
The continuing complaints about Jesus and Mo demonstrate the falsity of a common claim on American and British campuses: that you can have free speech and "inclusiveness" too. This can't be true, for every act of speech that has ever moved society forward has offended someone, thus reducing "inclusiveness." This became obvious when, in apologizing to Phadnis and Moos, the director of the LSE said that, when banning their tee shirts, the school was trying "to manage the competing interests of complaining students and yourselves in a way that they considered to be in the best interests of all parties." But when you're dealing with rationality opposed to the oppressive and even deadly superstitions of believers, the only way to "manage competing interests" is to allow freedom of speech.

Long live blasphemy, and long live Jesus and Mo!

out



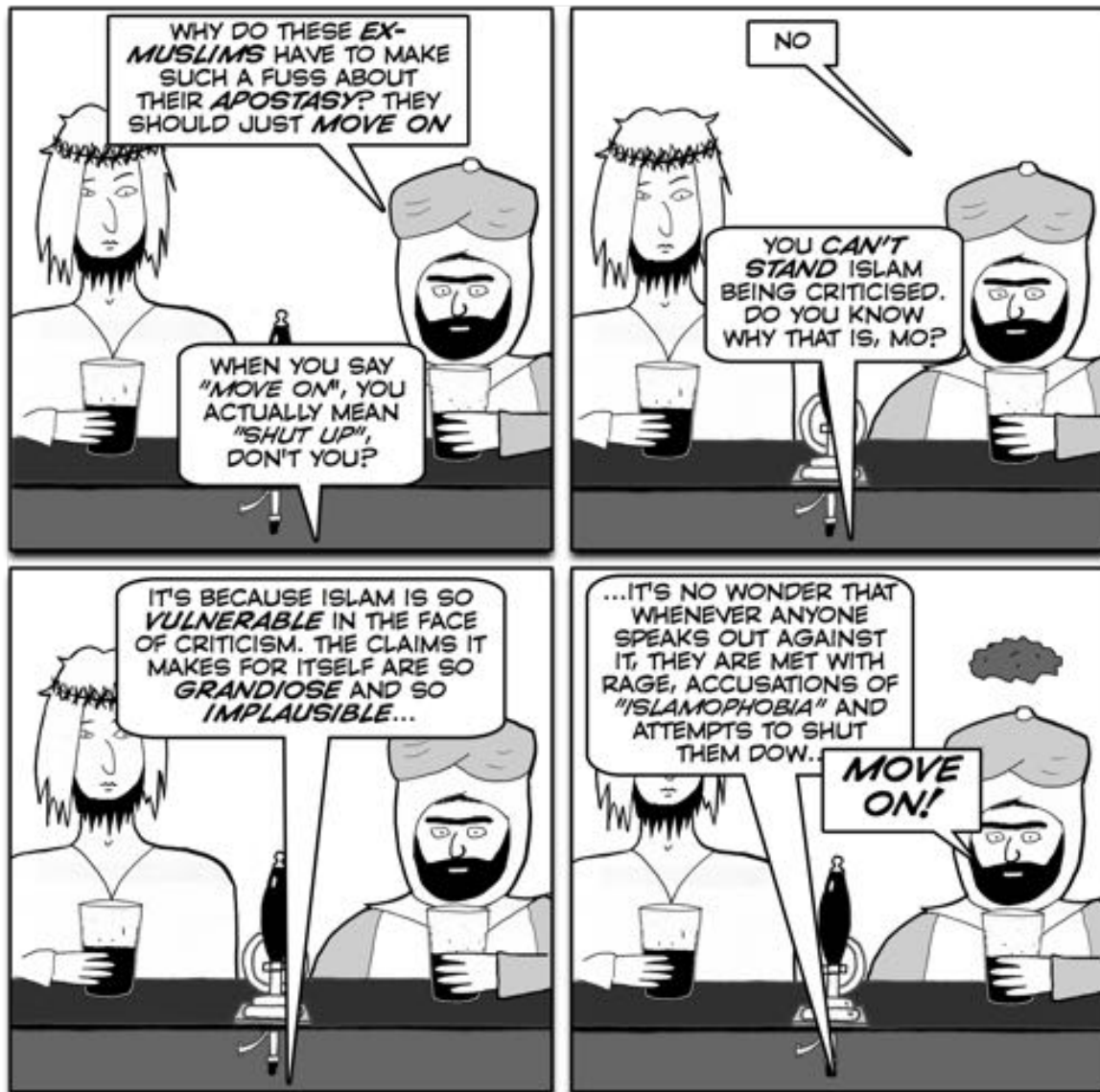
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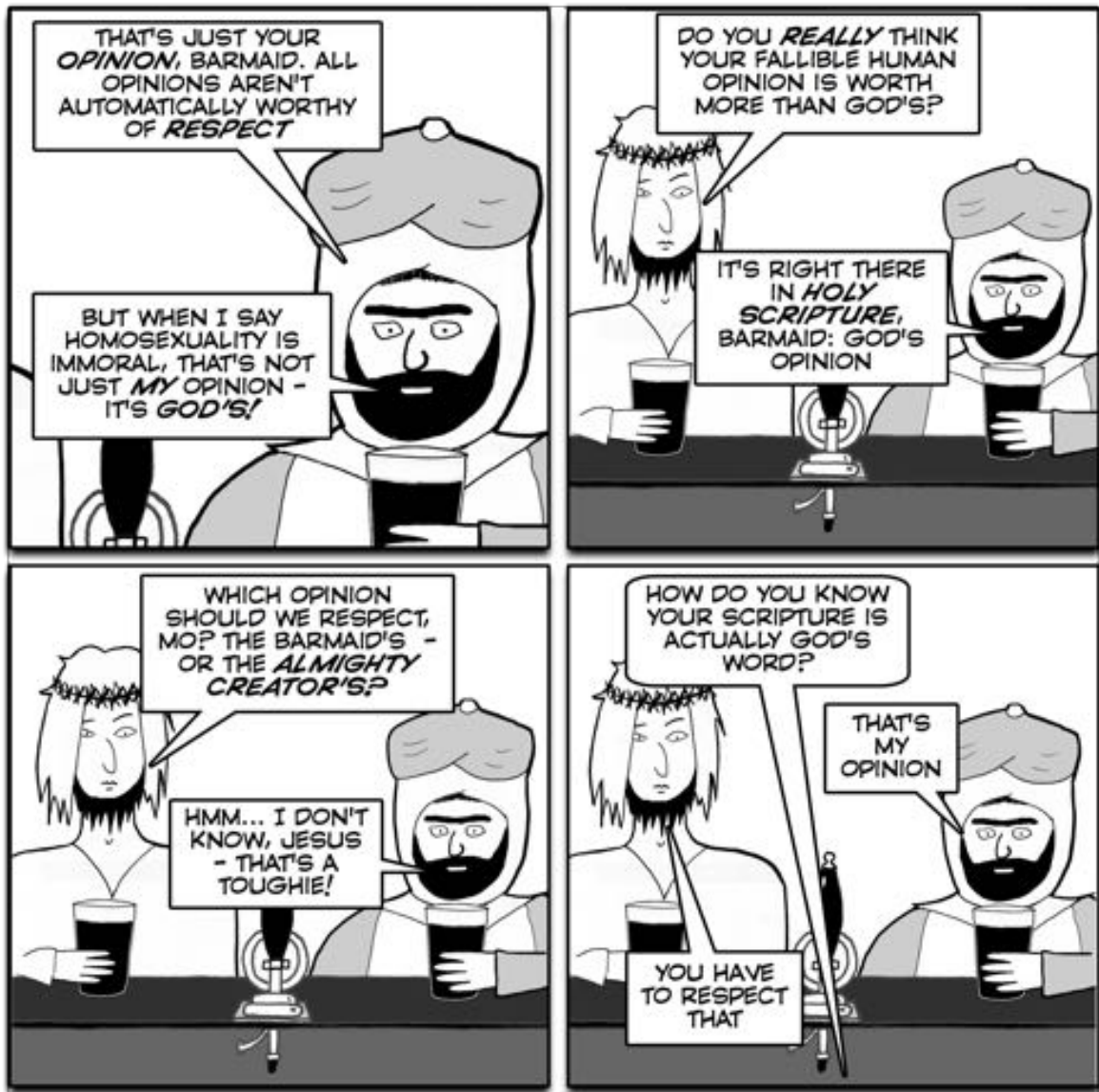
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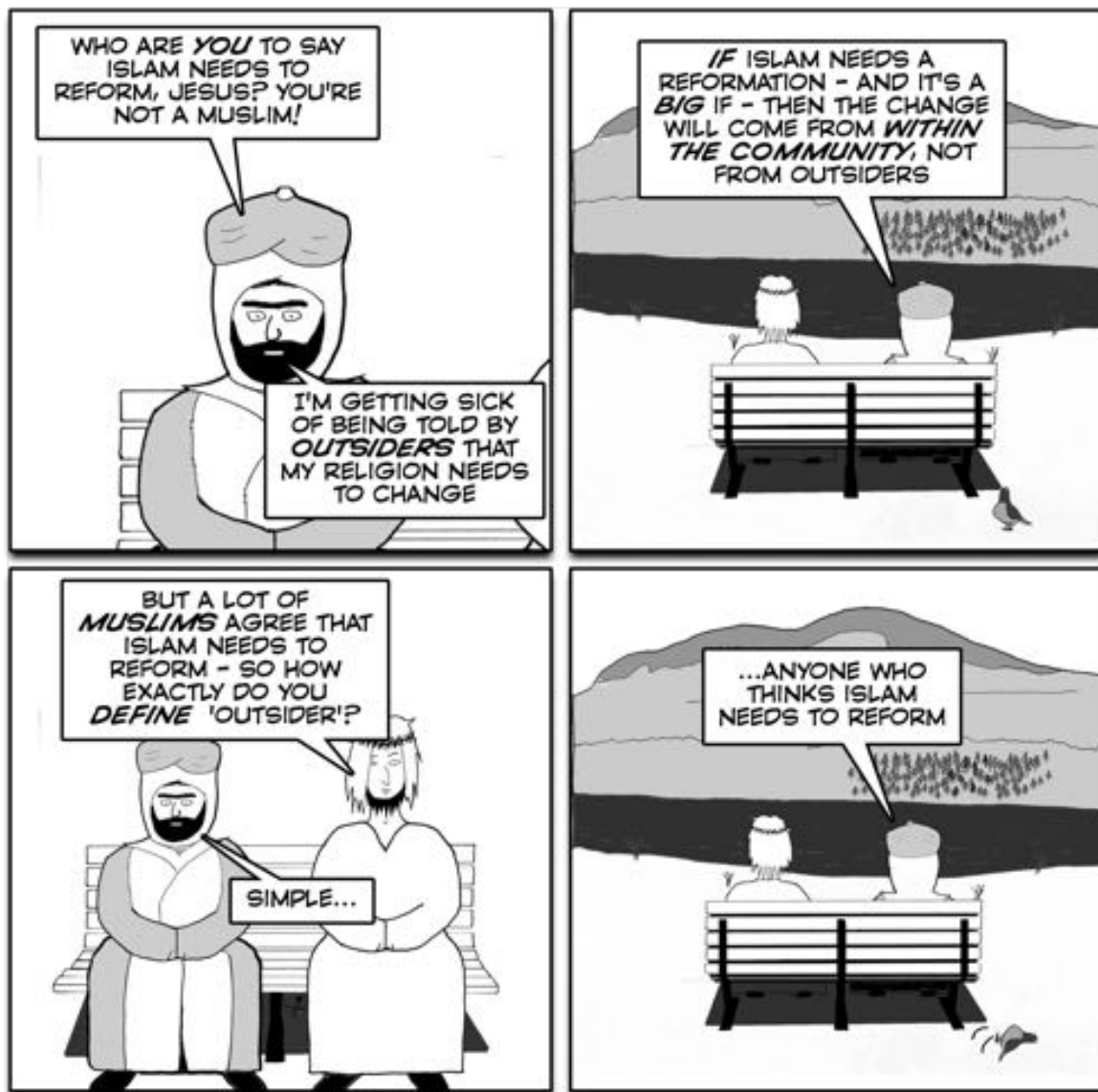
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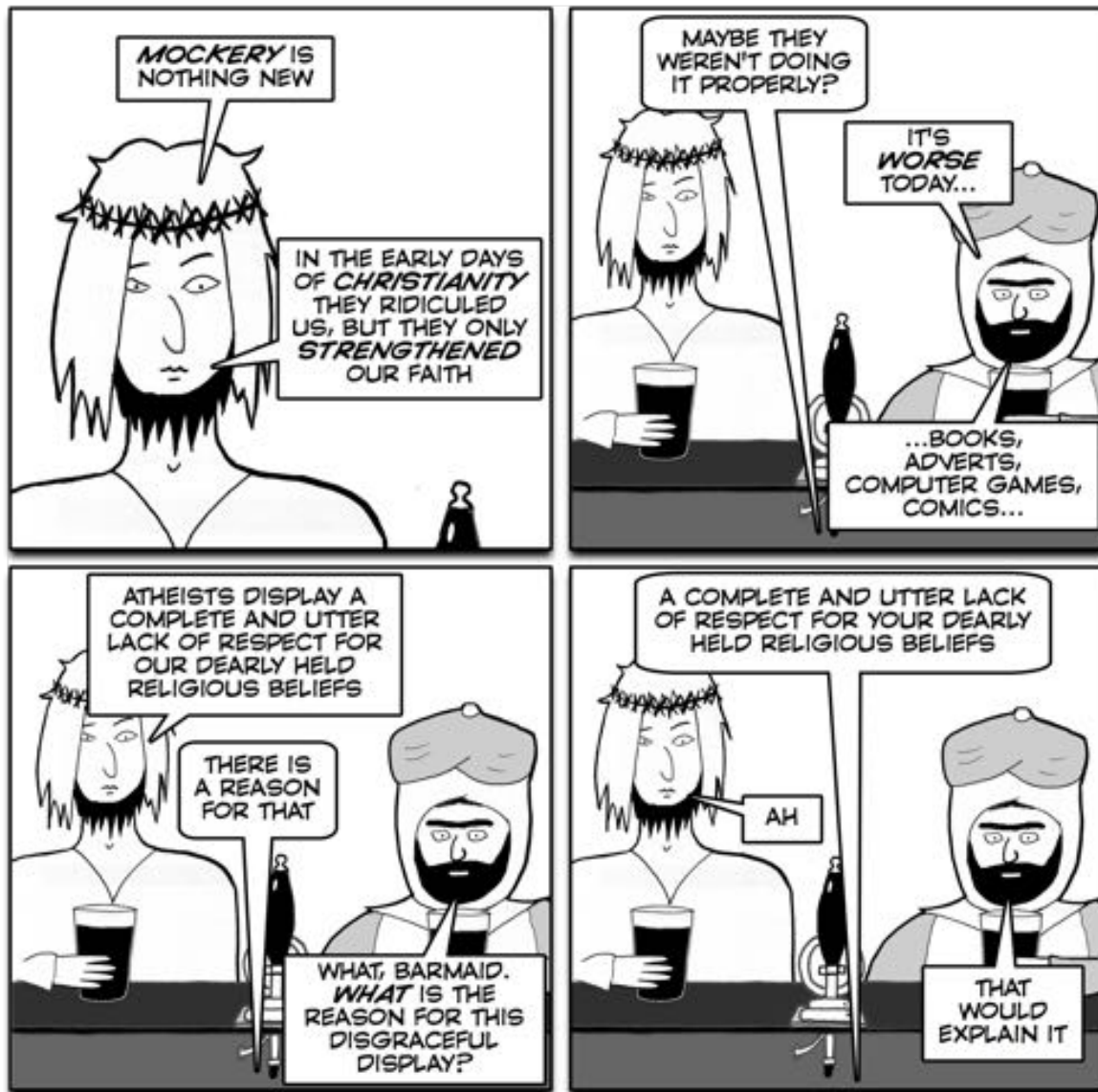
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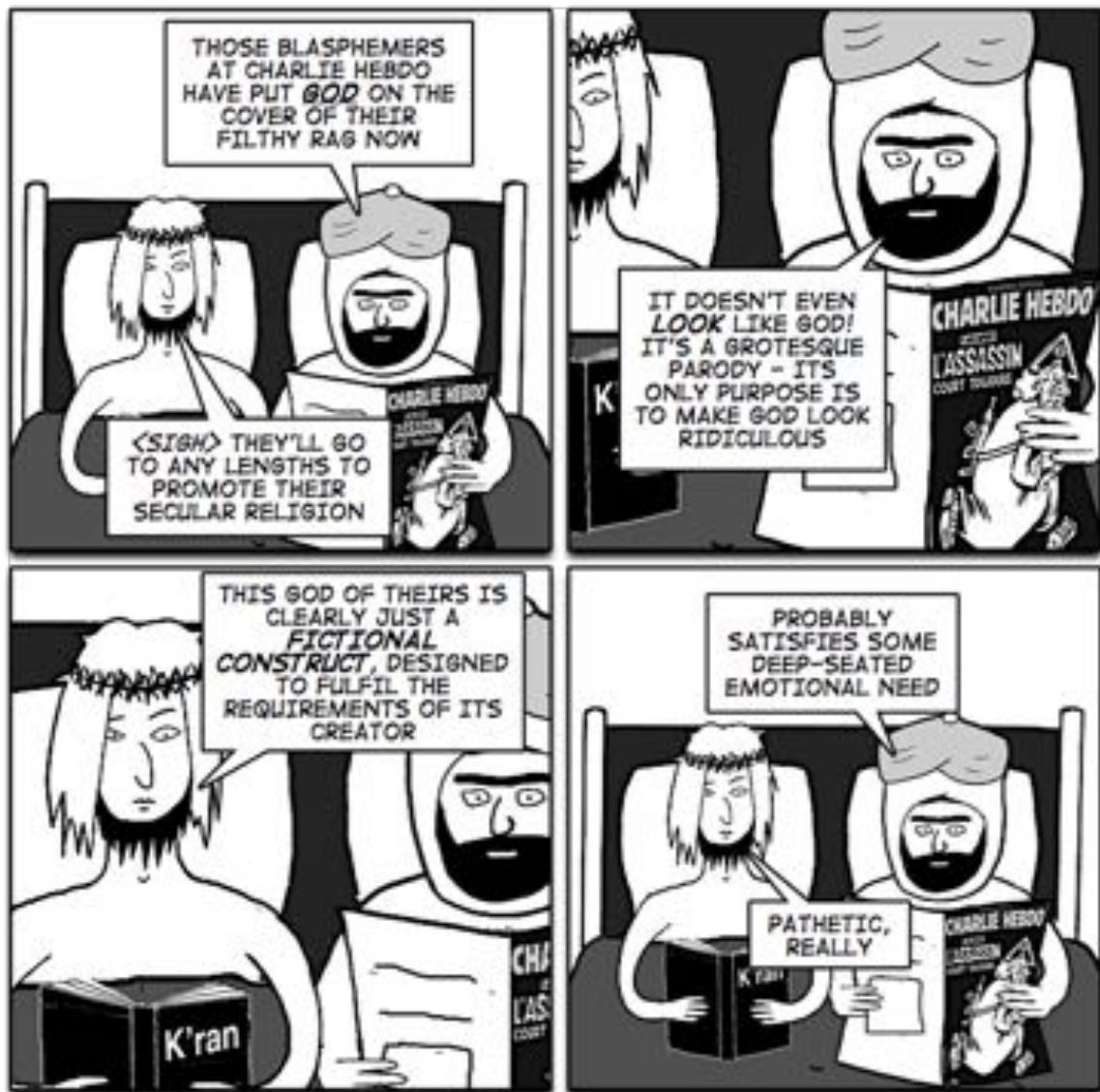


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maybe

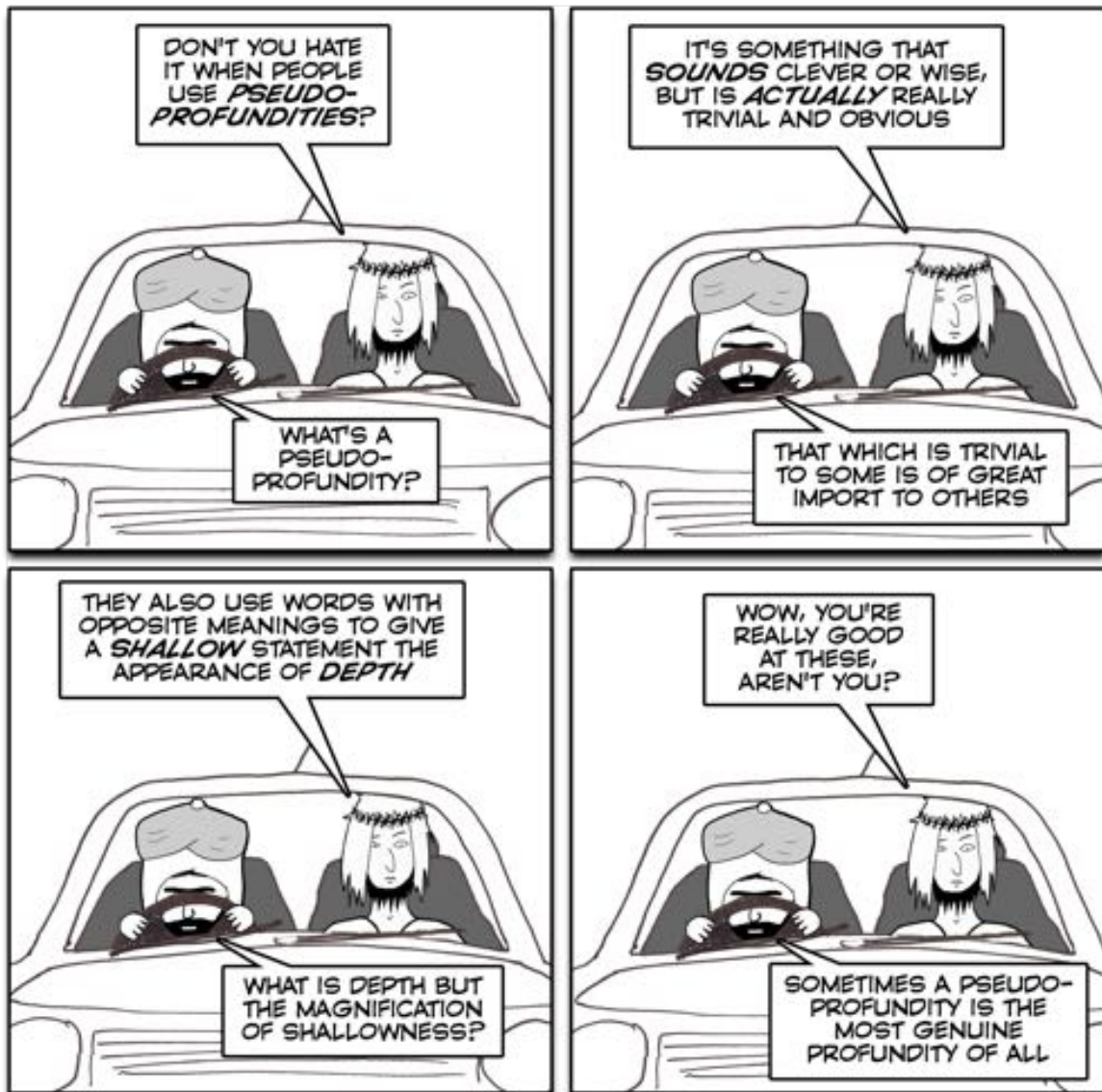




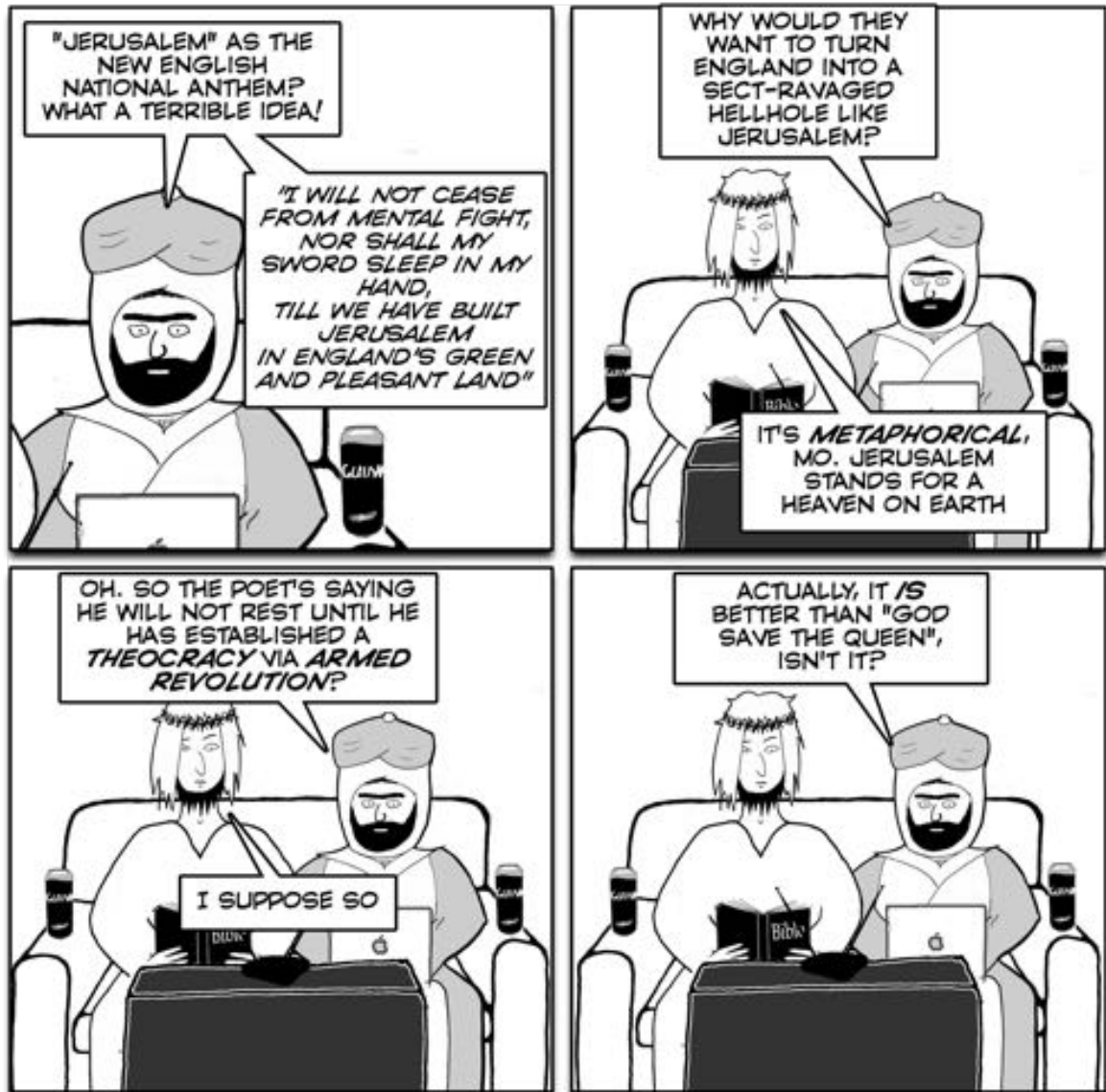
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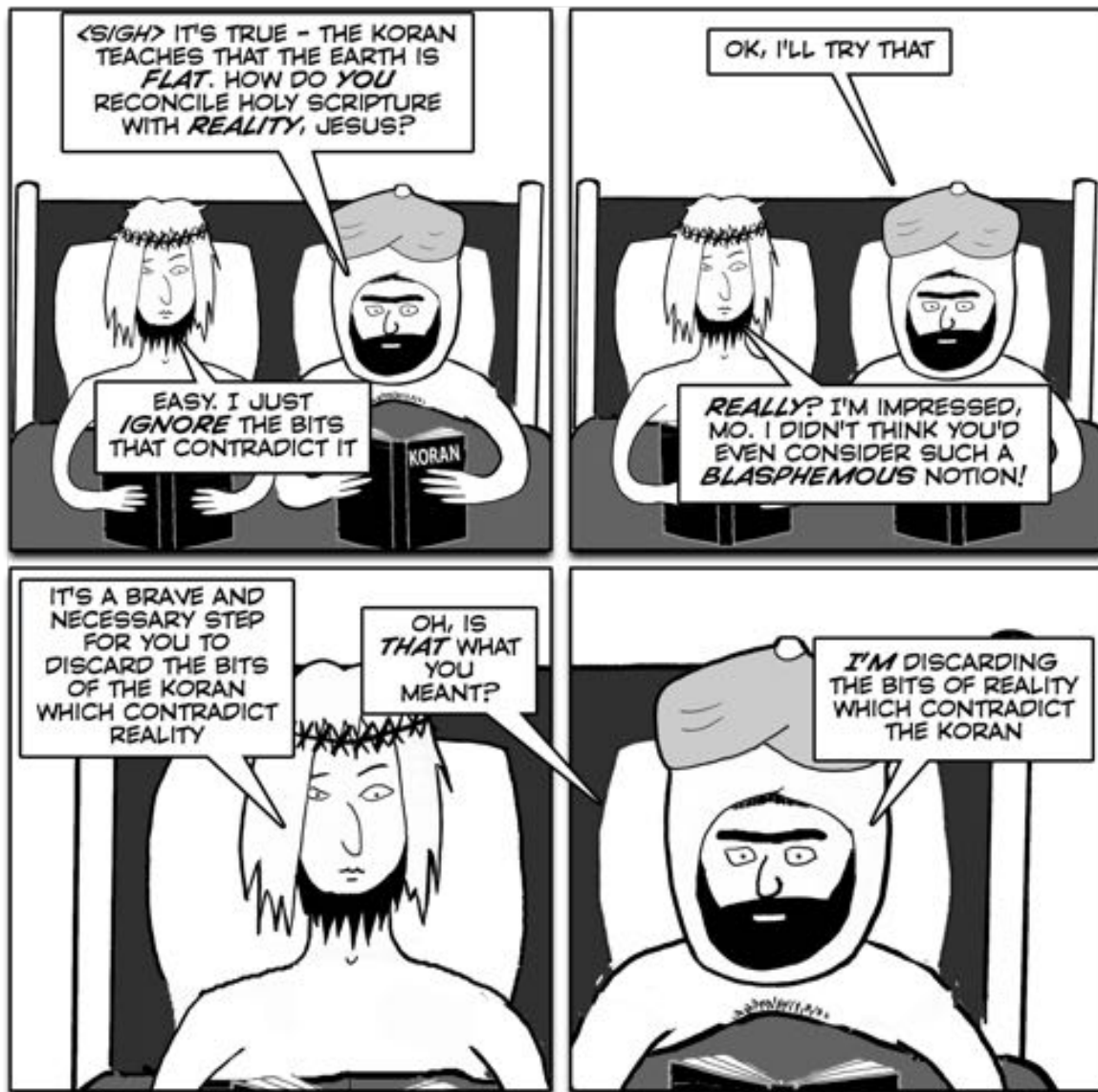
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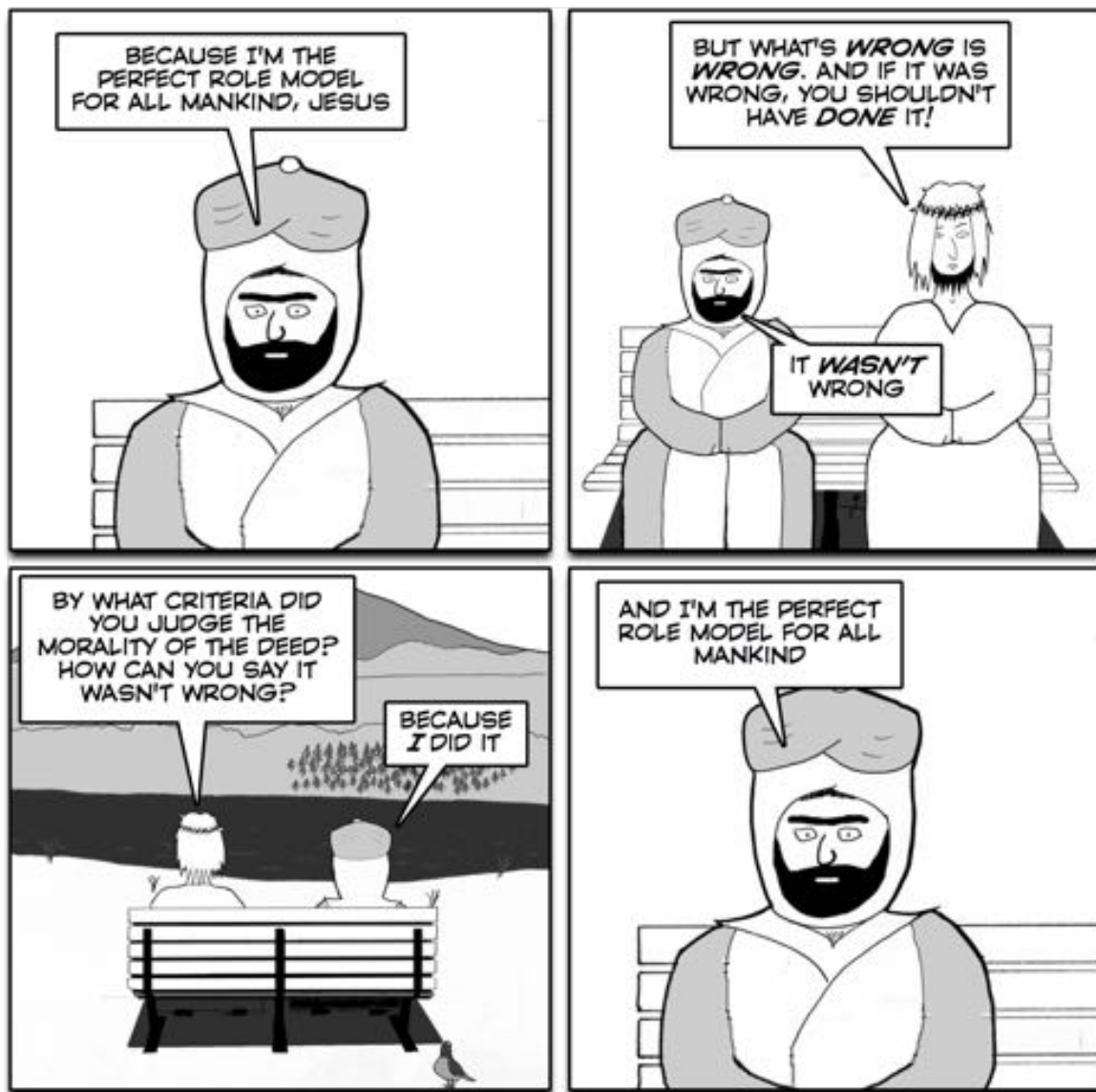
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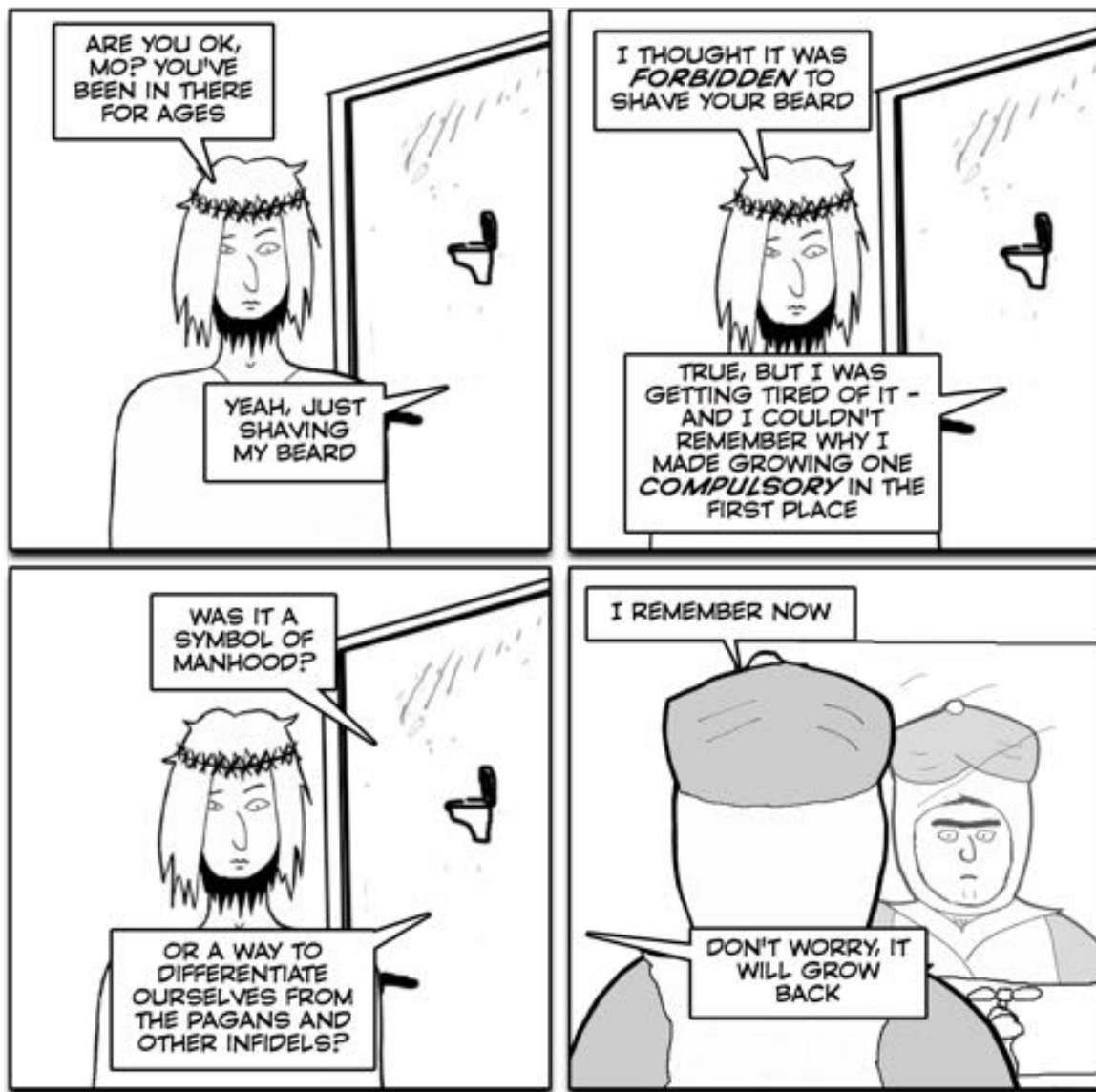
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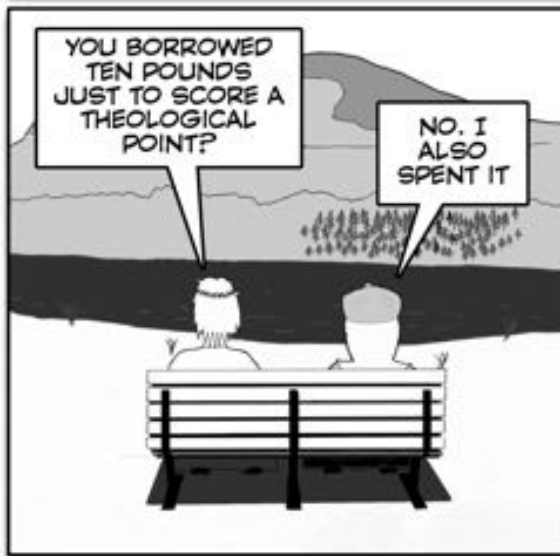
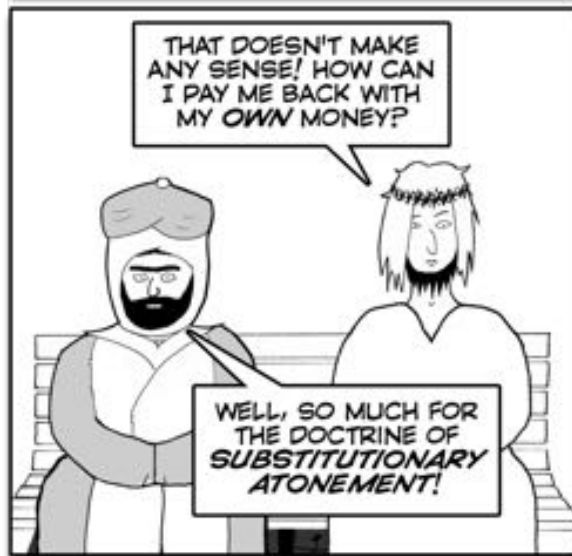
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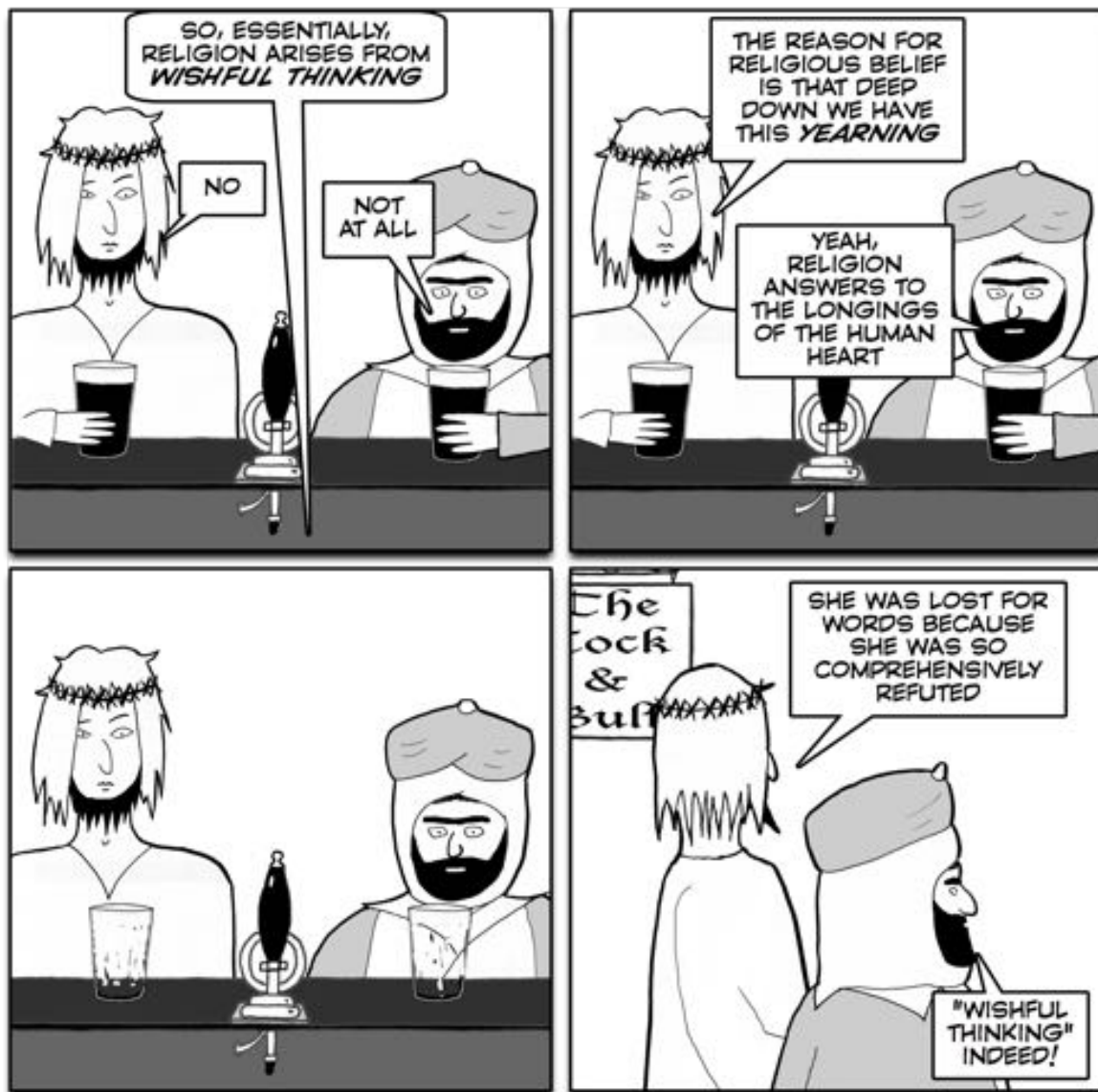
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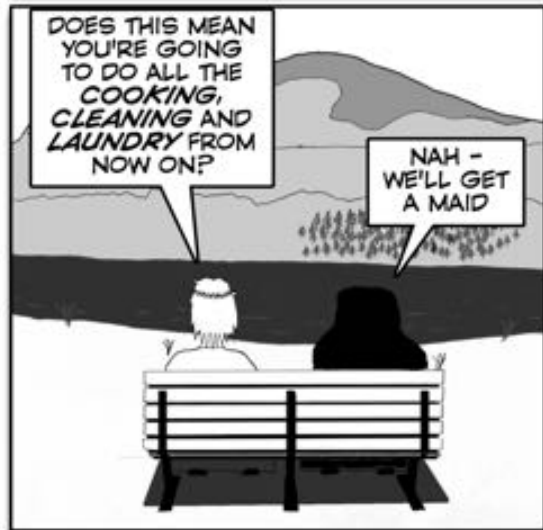
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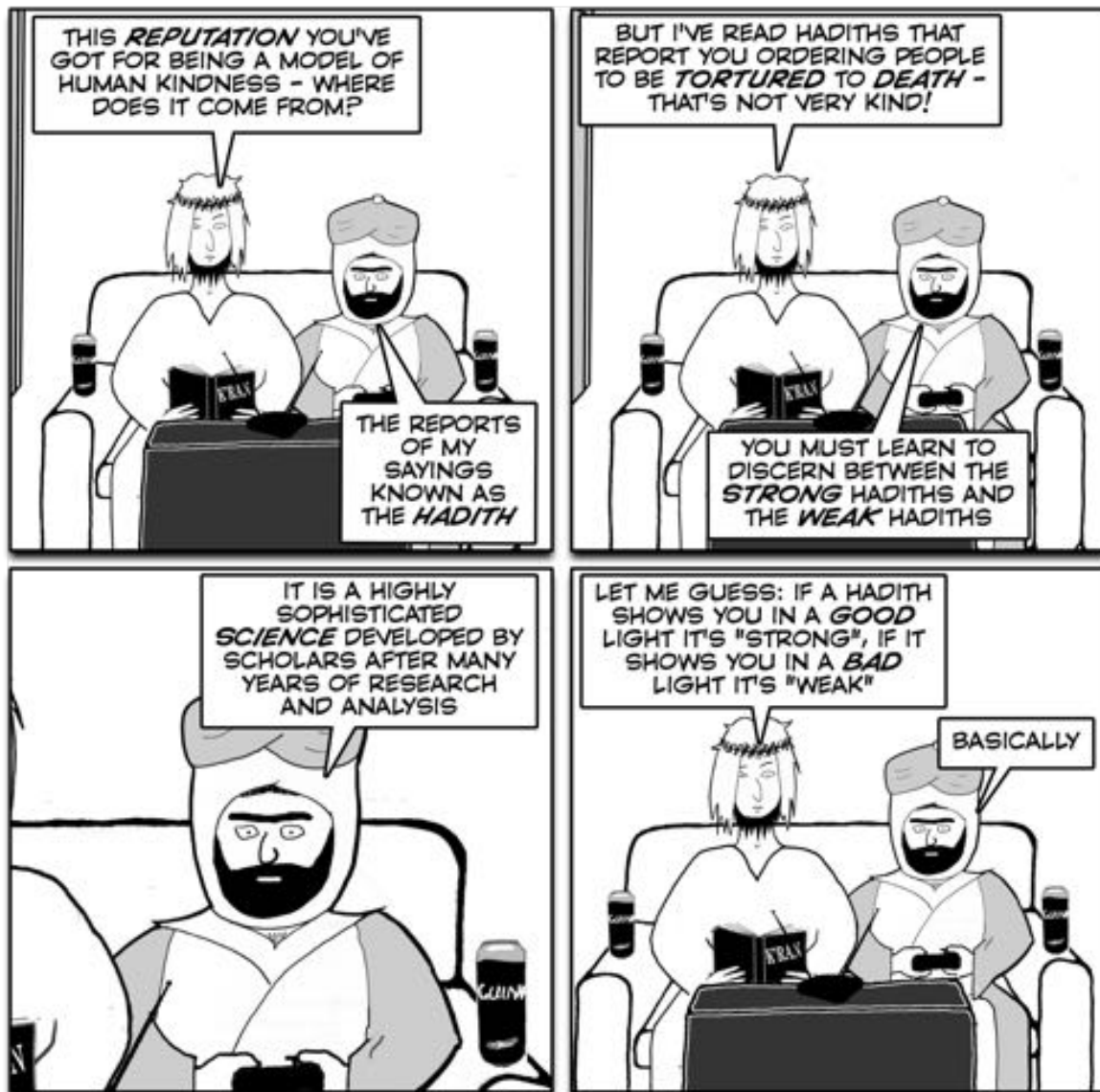
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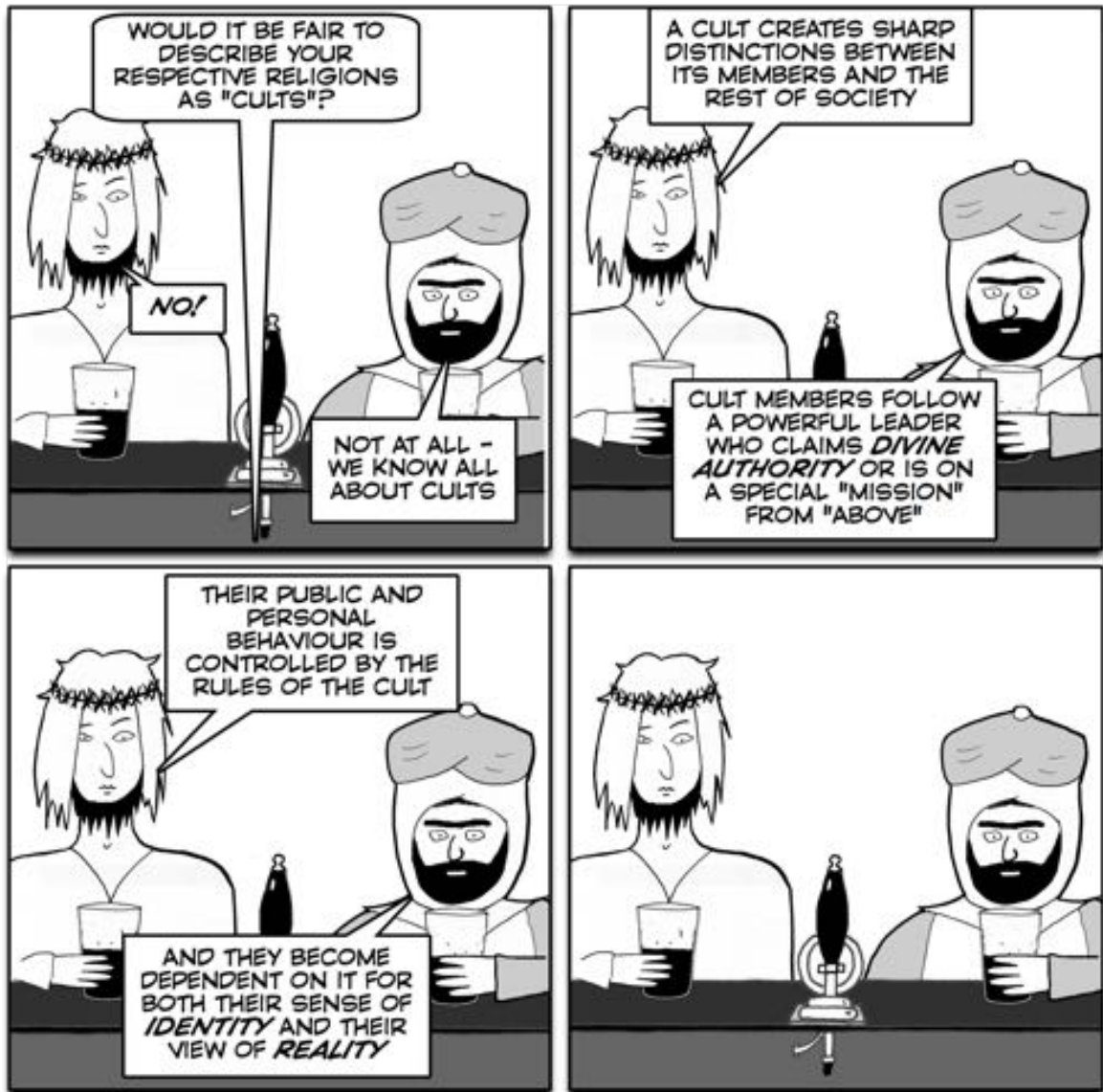
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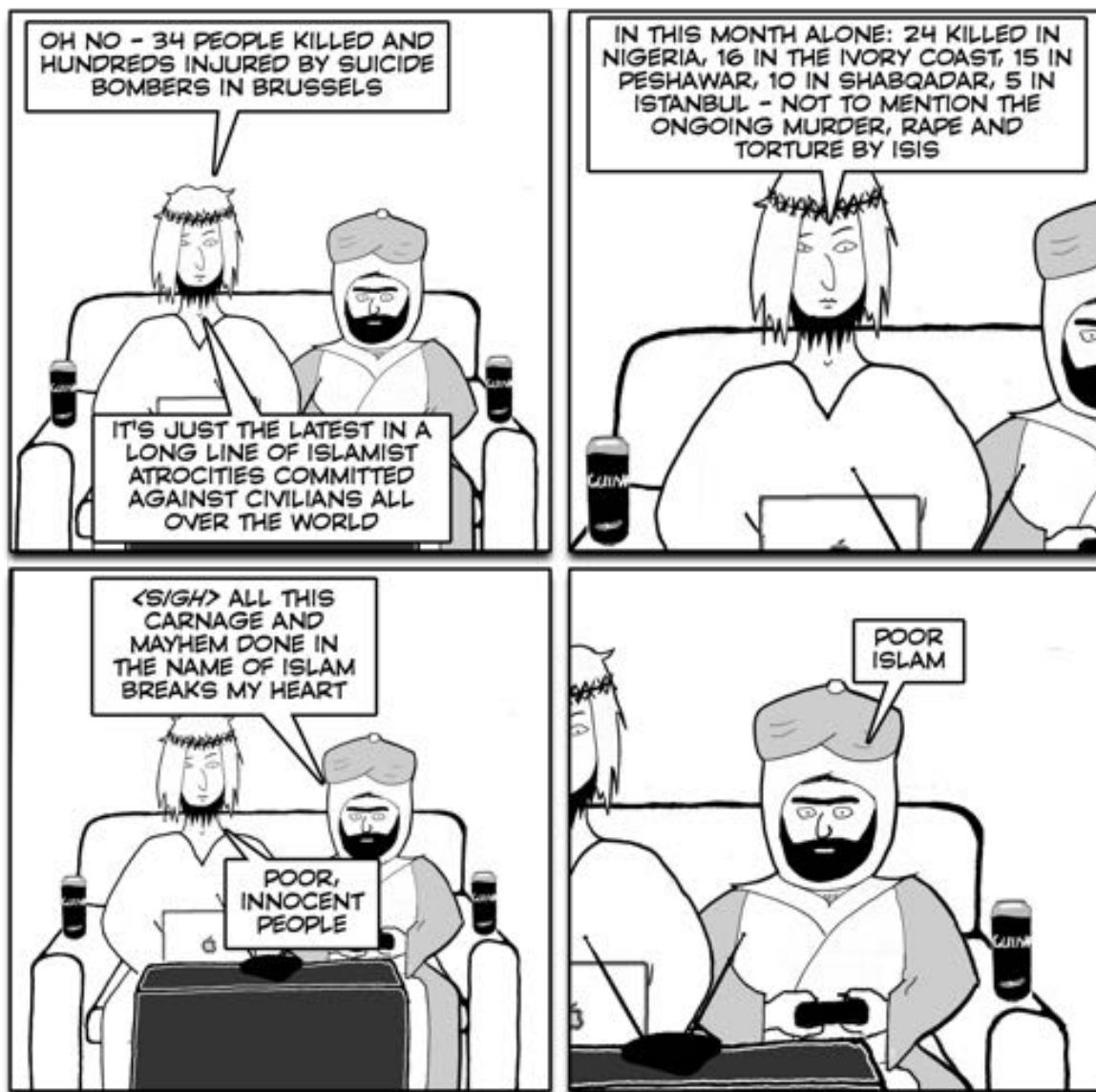
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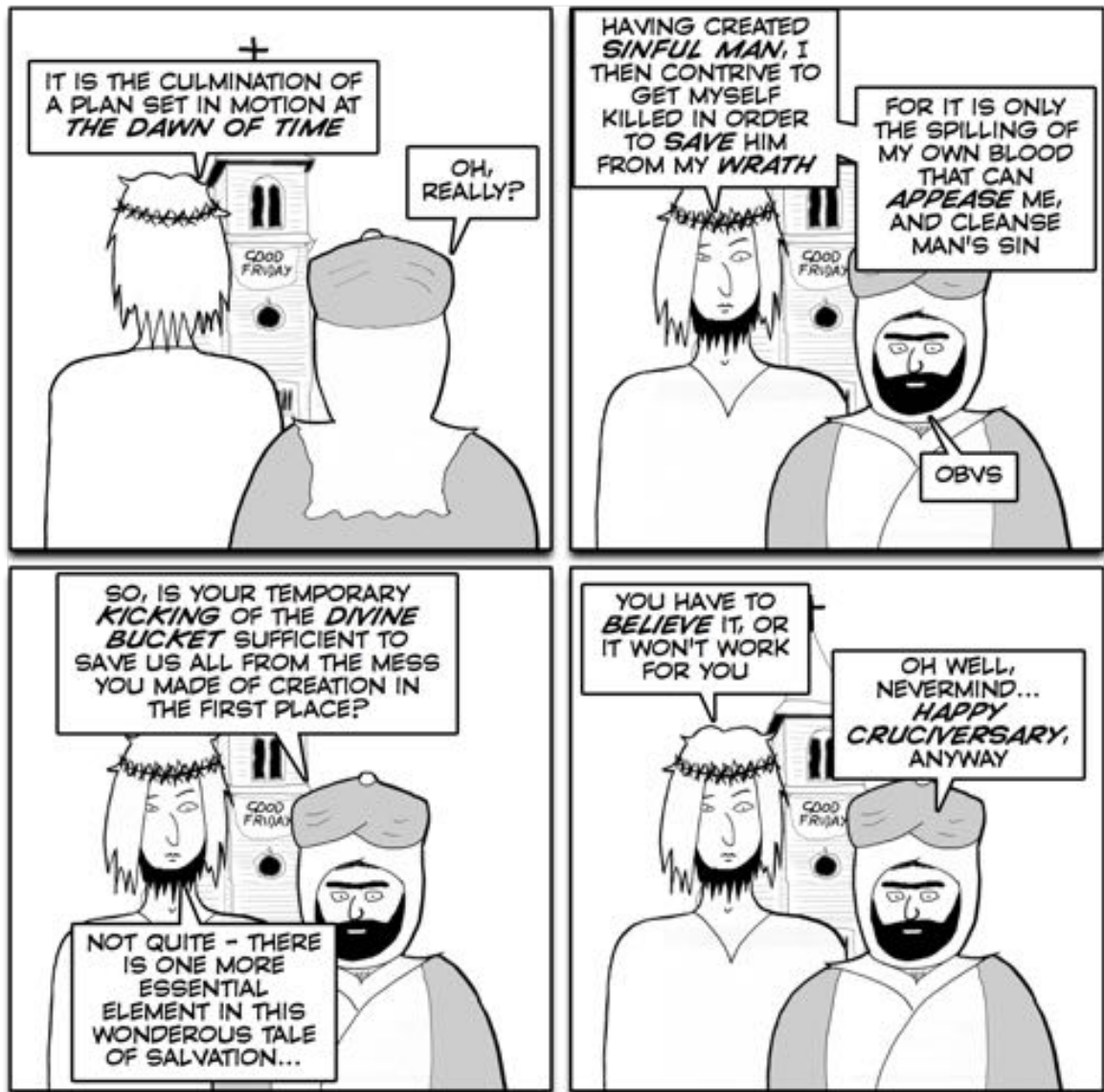
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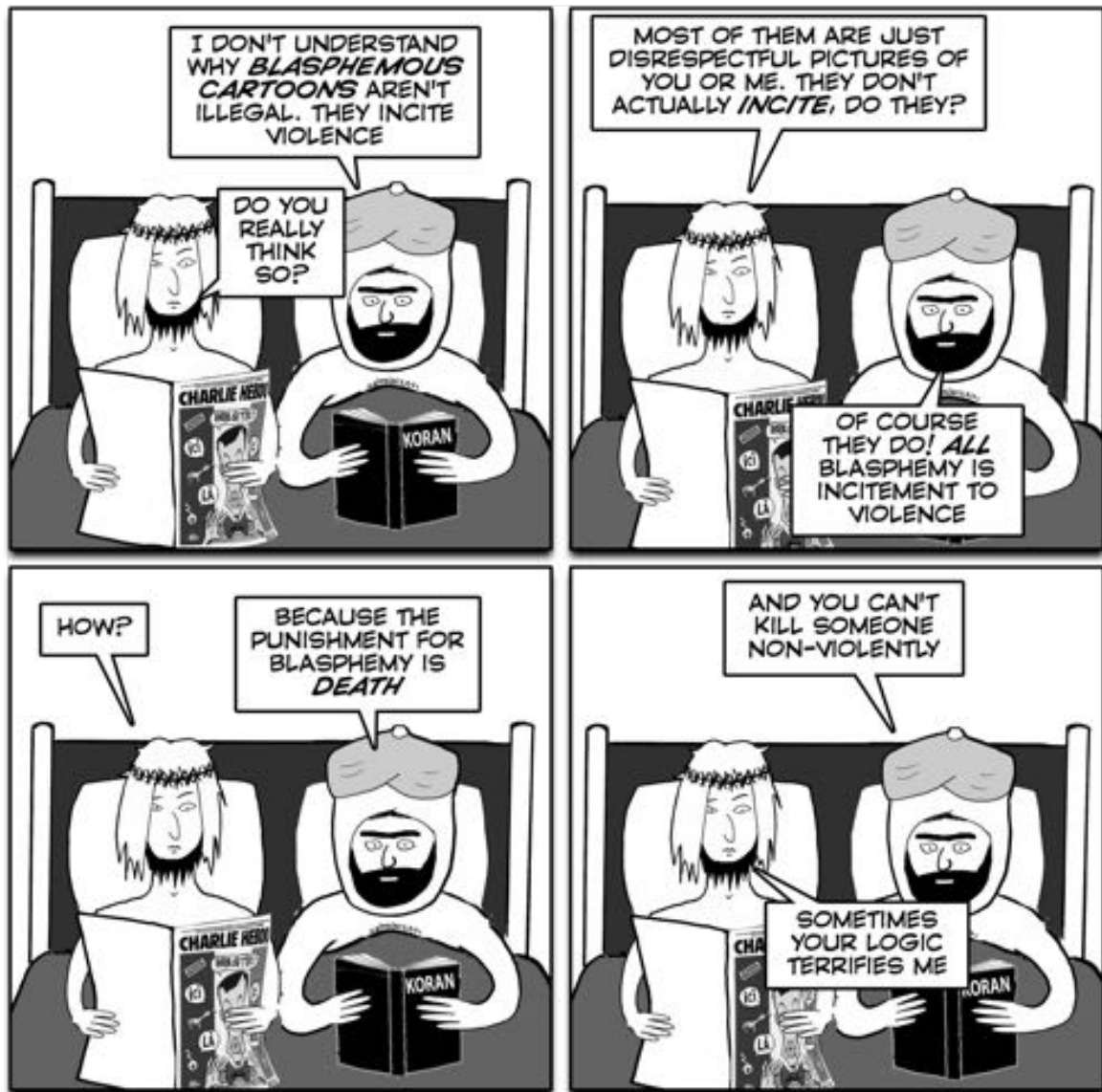
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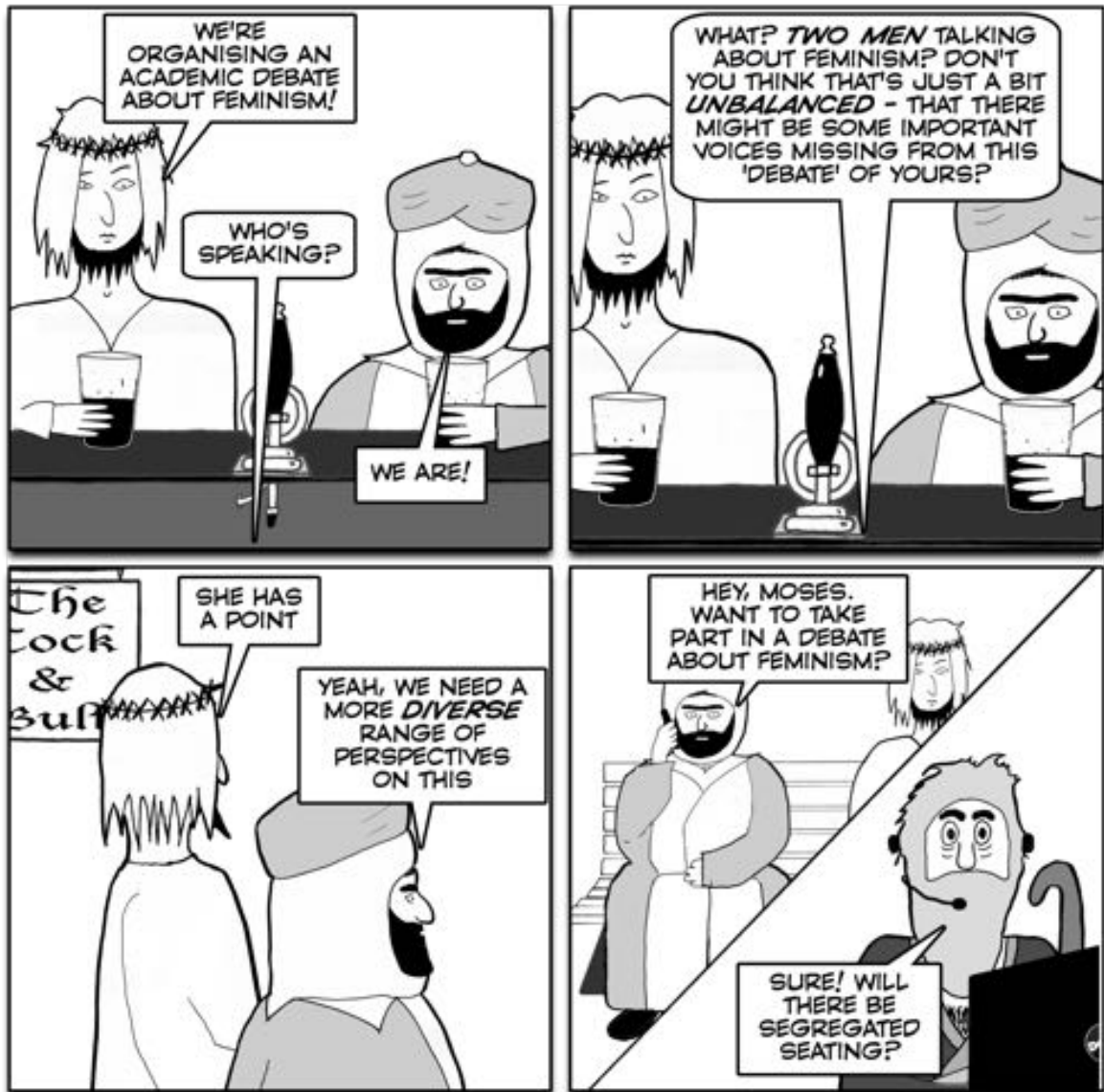
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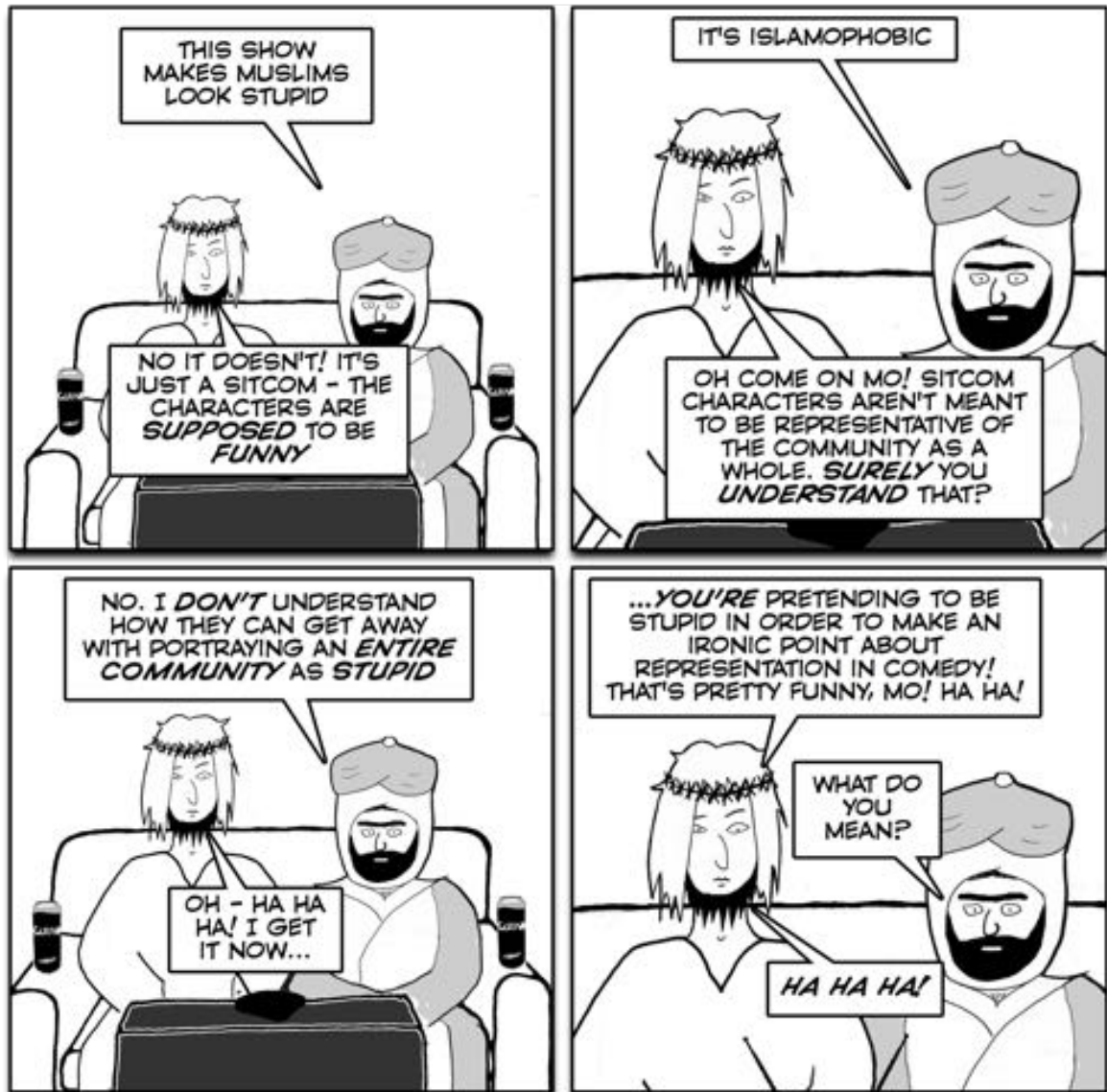
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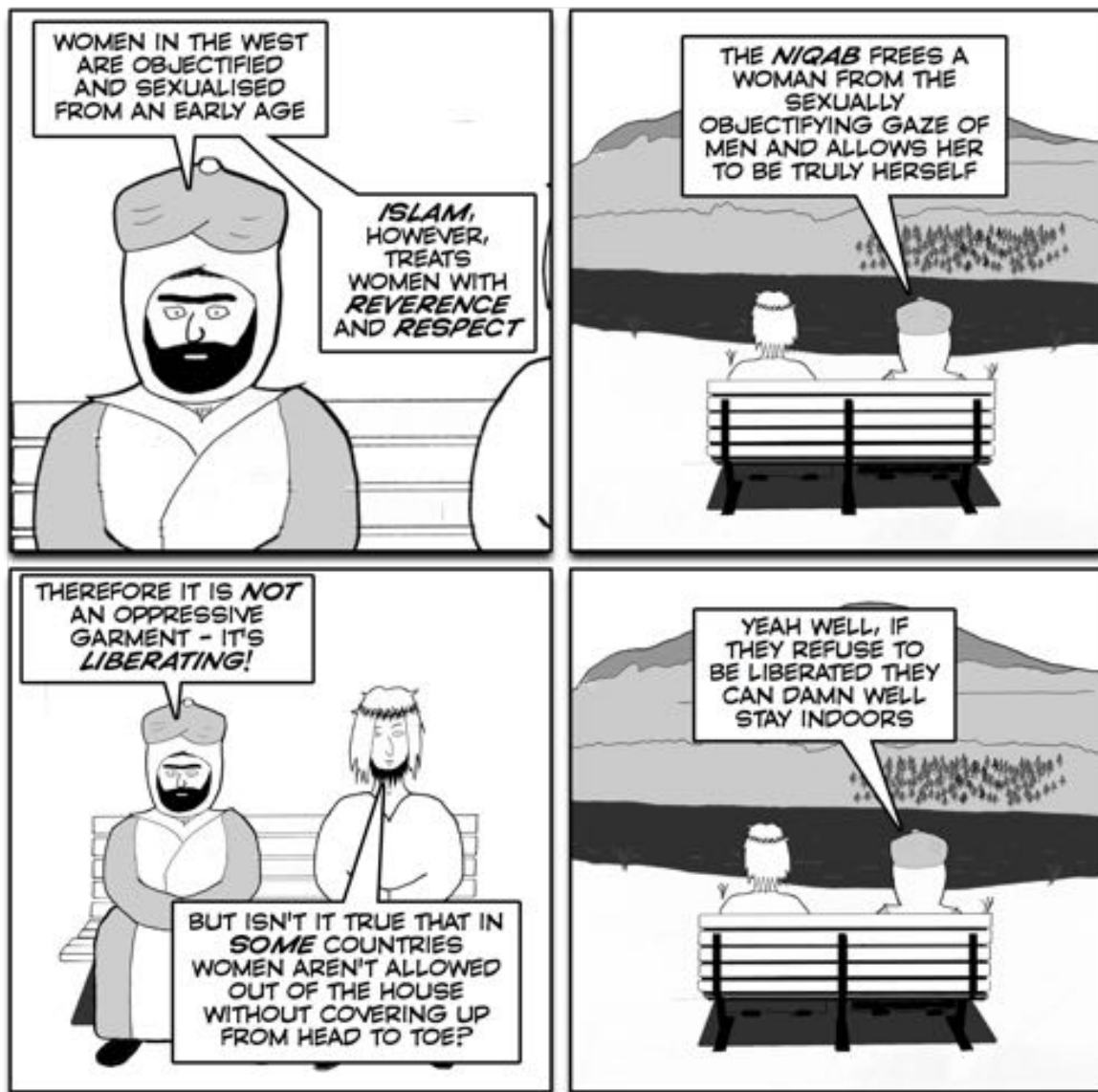
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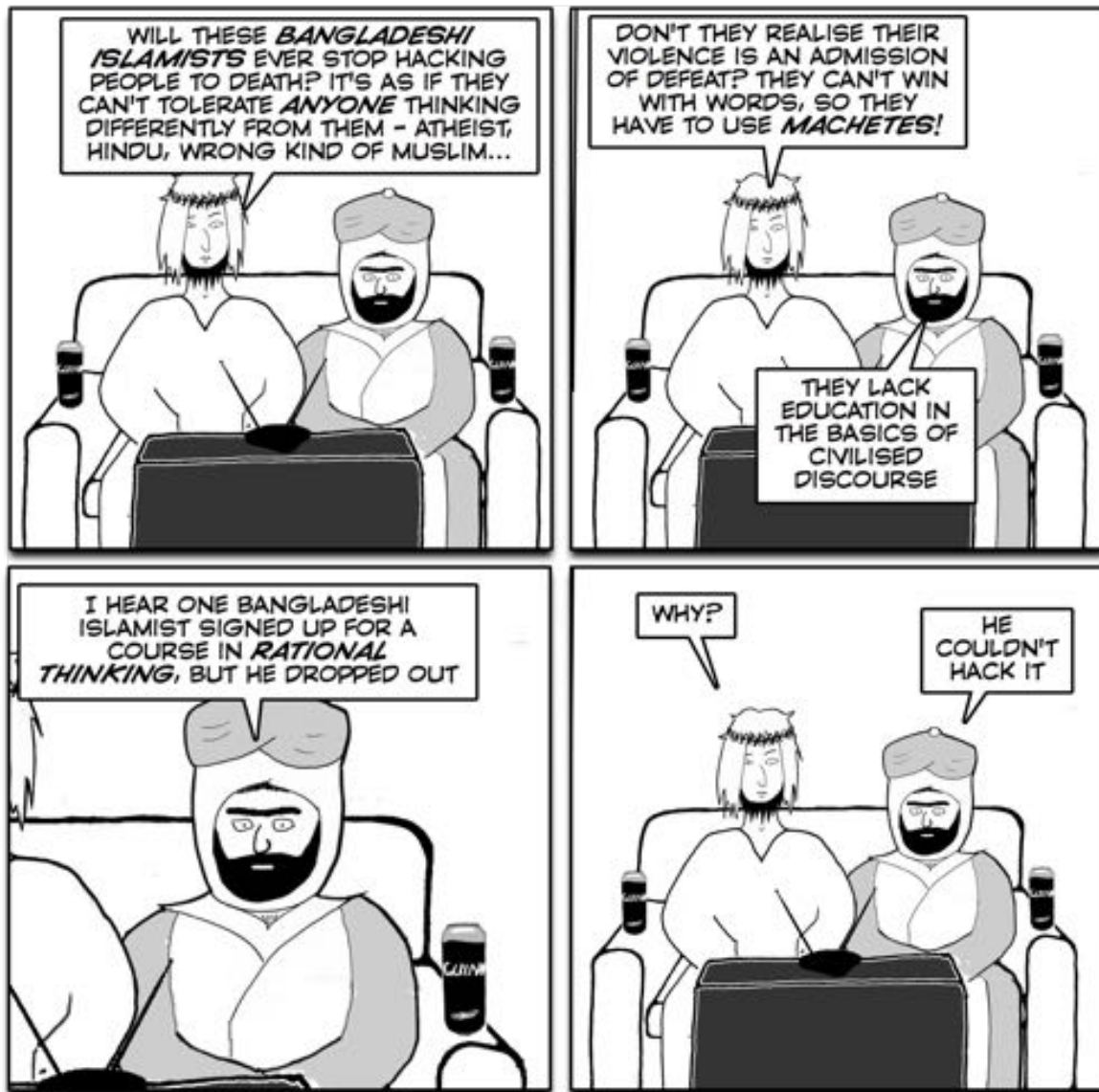
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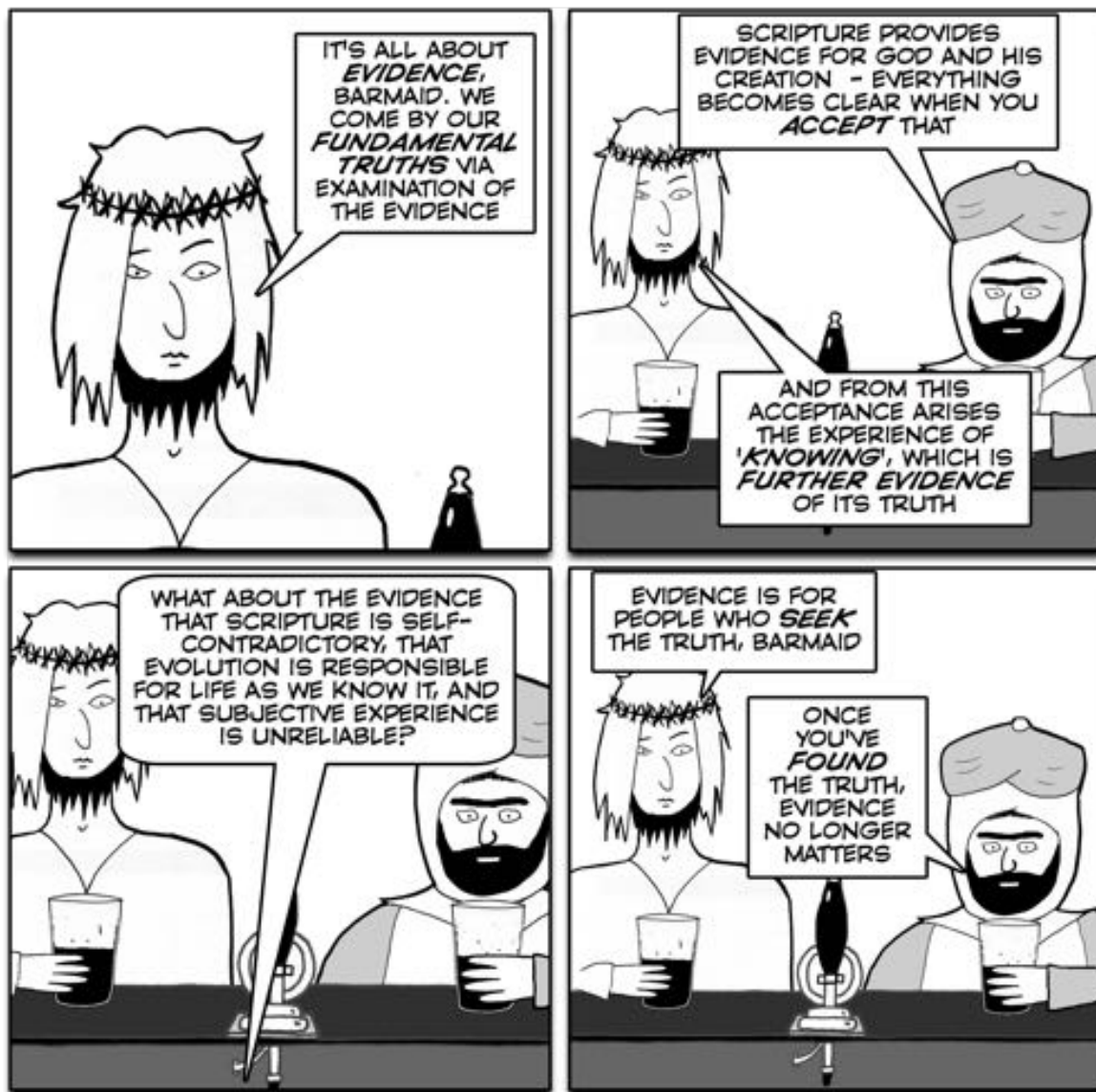


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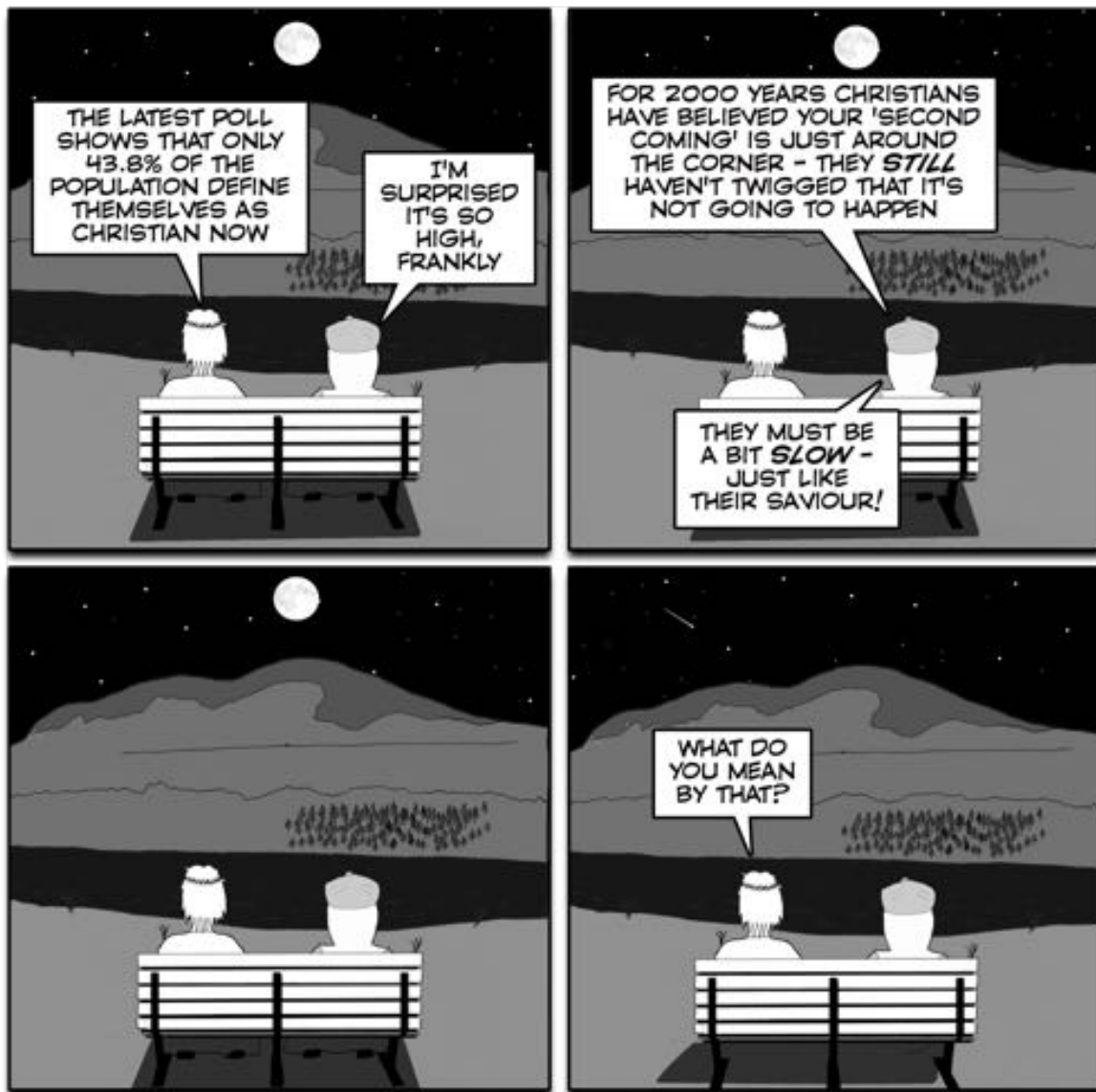


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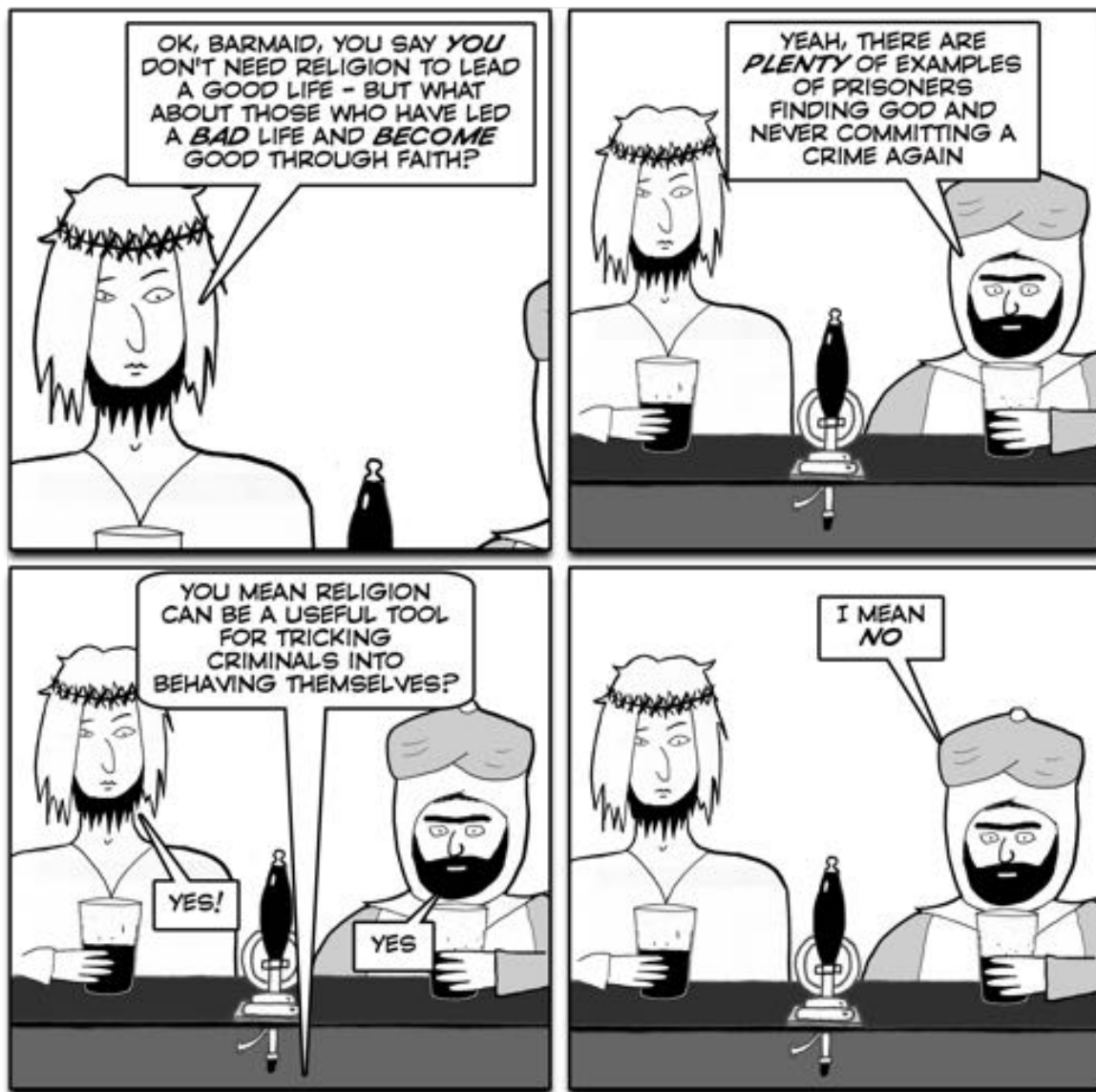




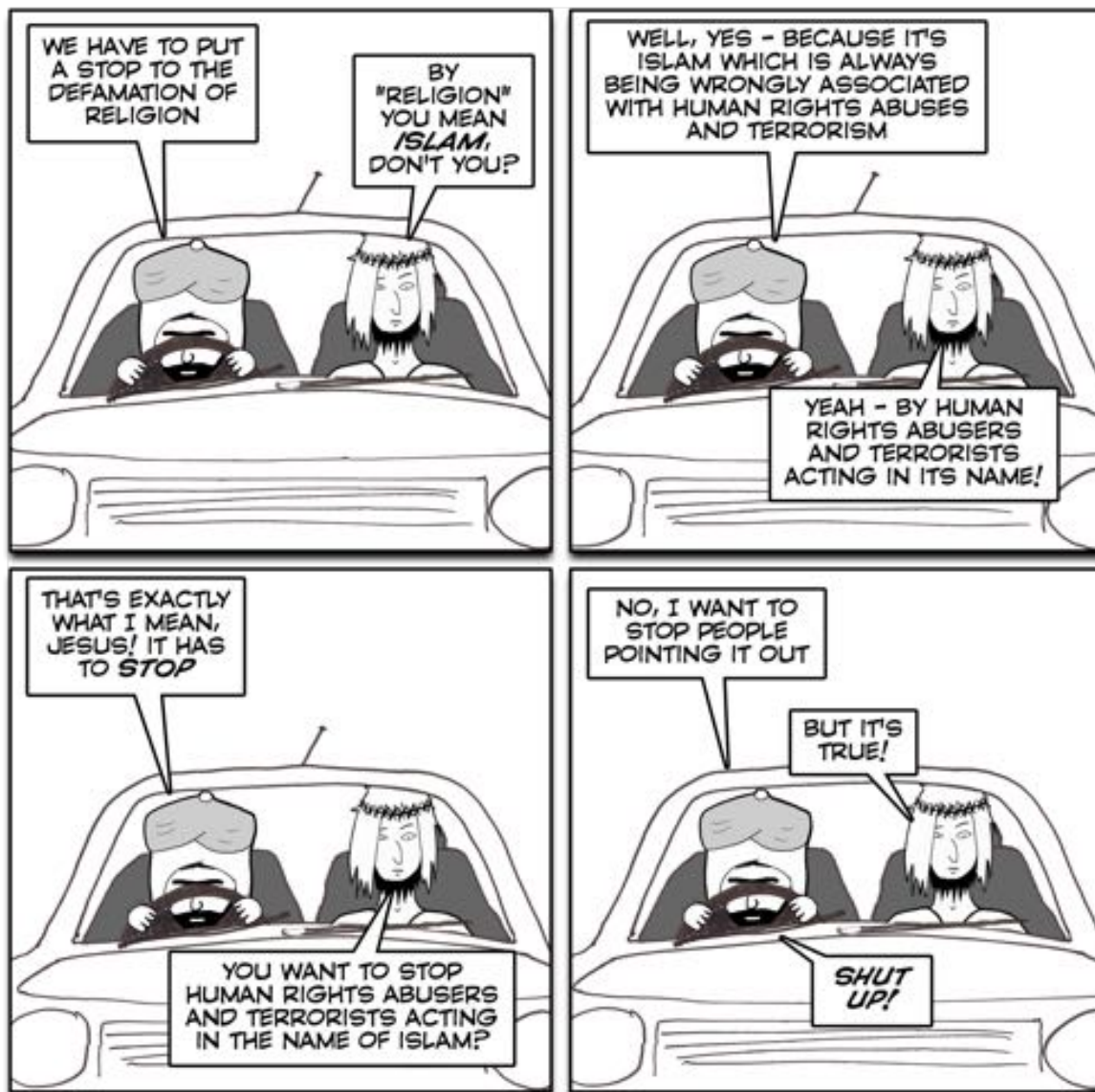
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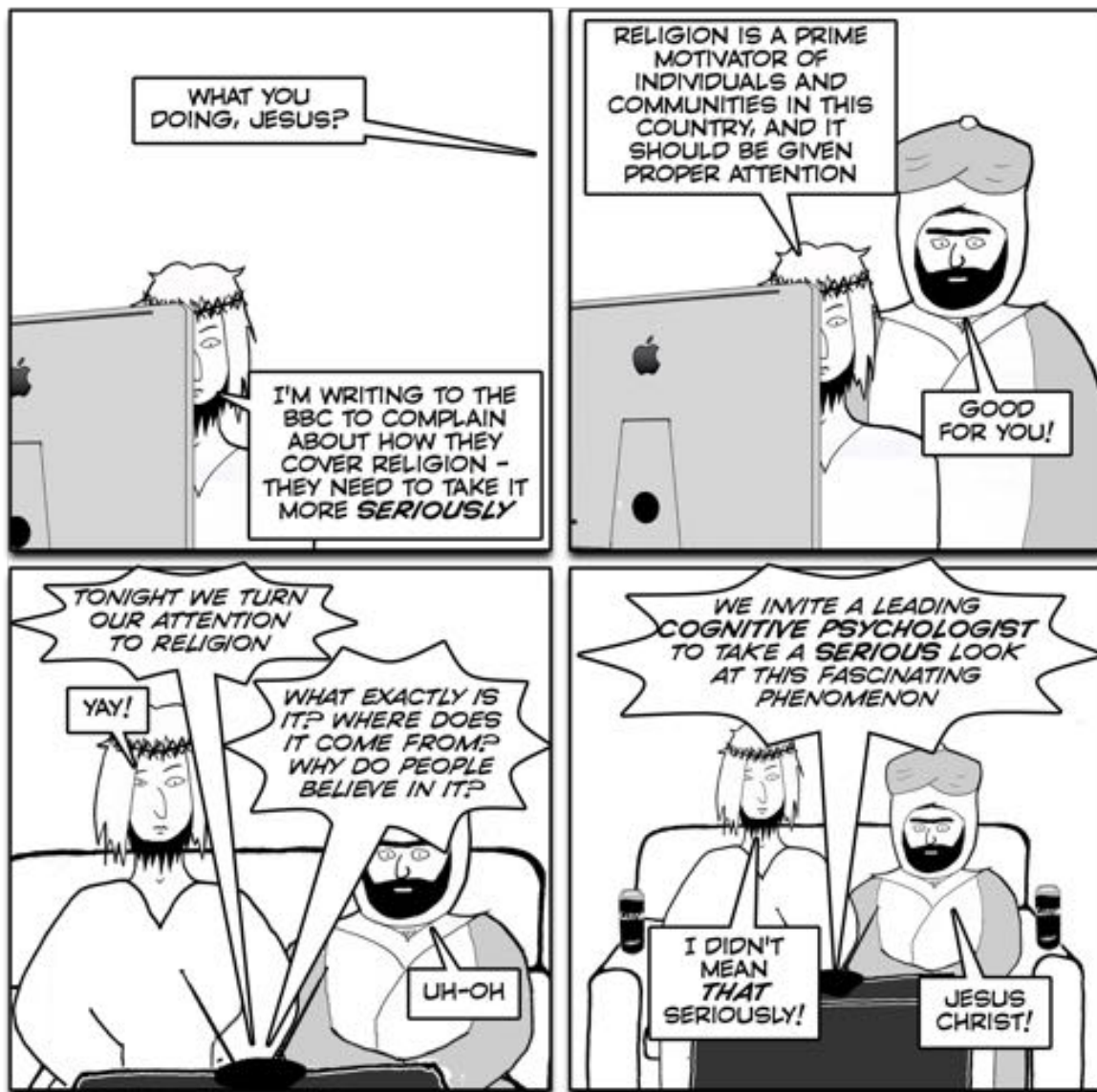
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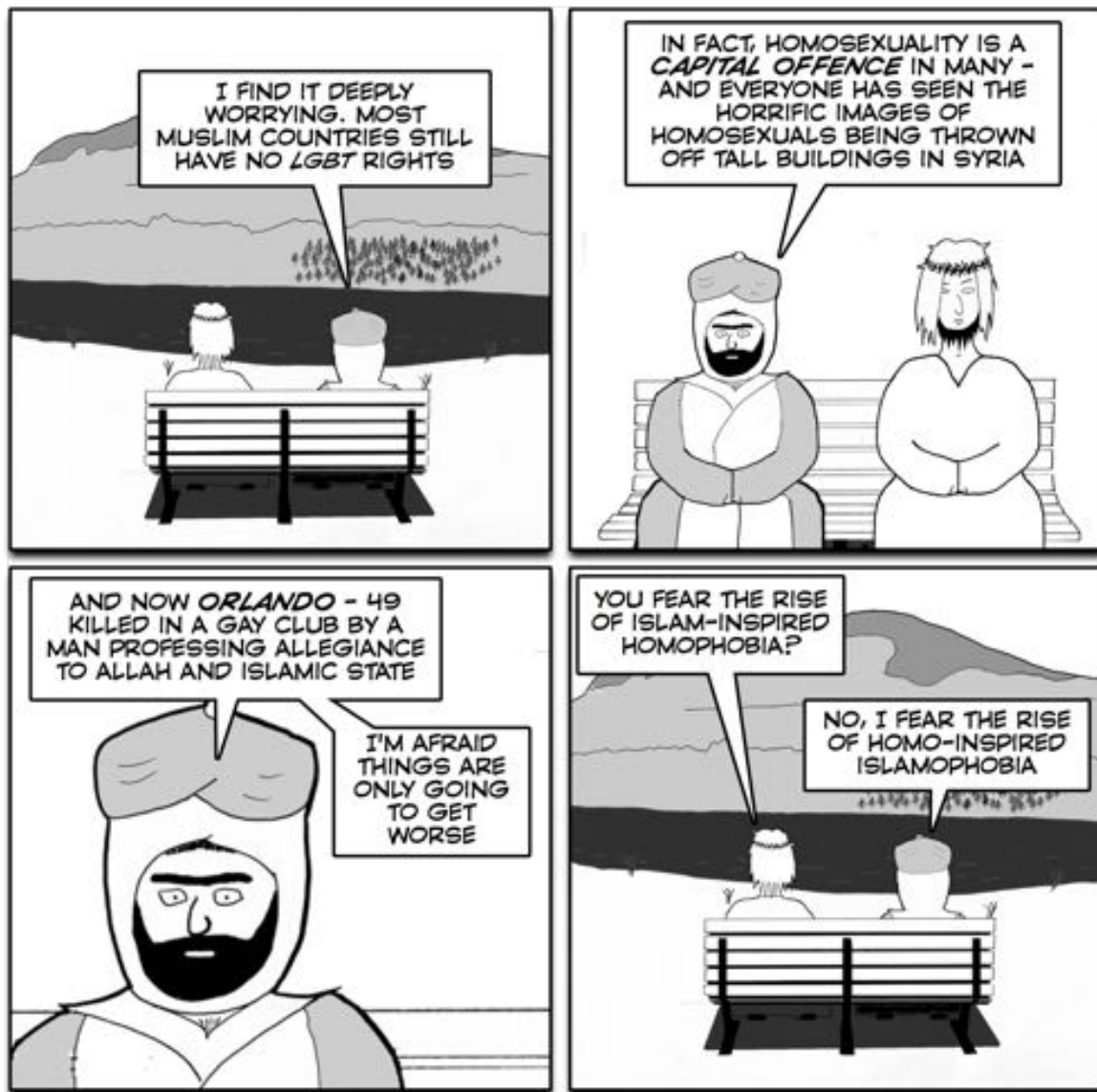
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uh-oh



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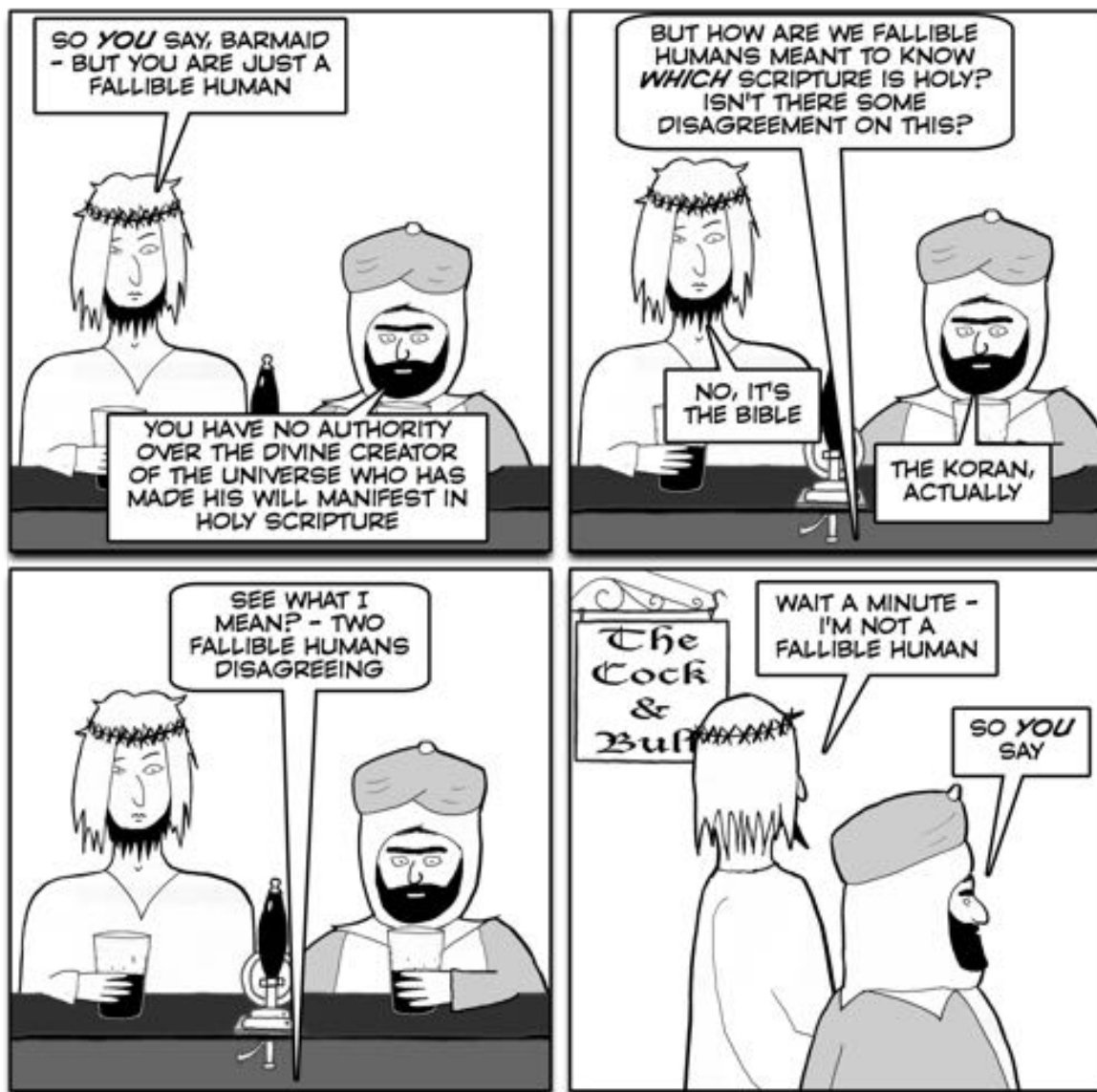
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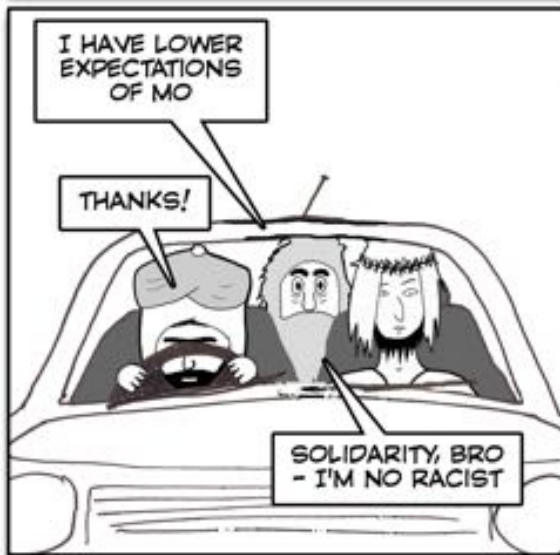
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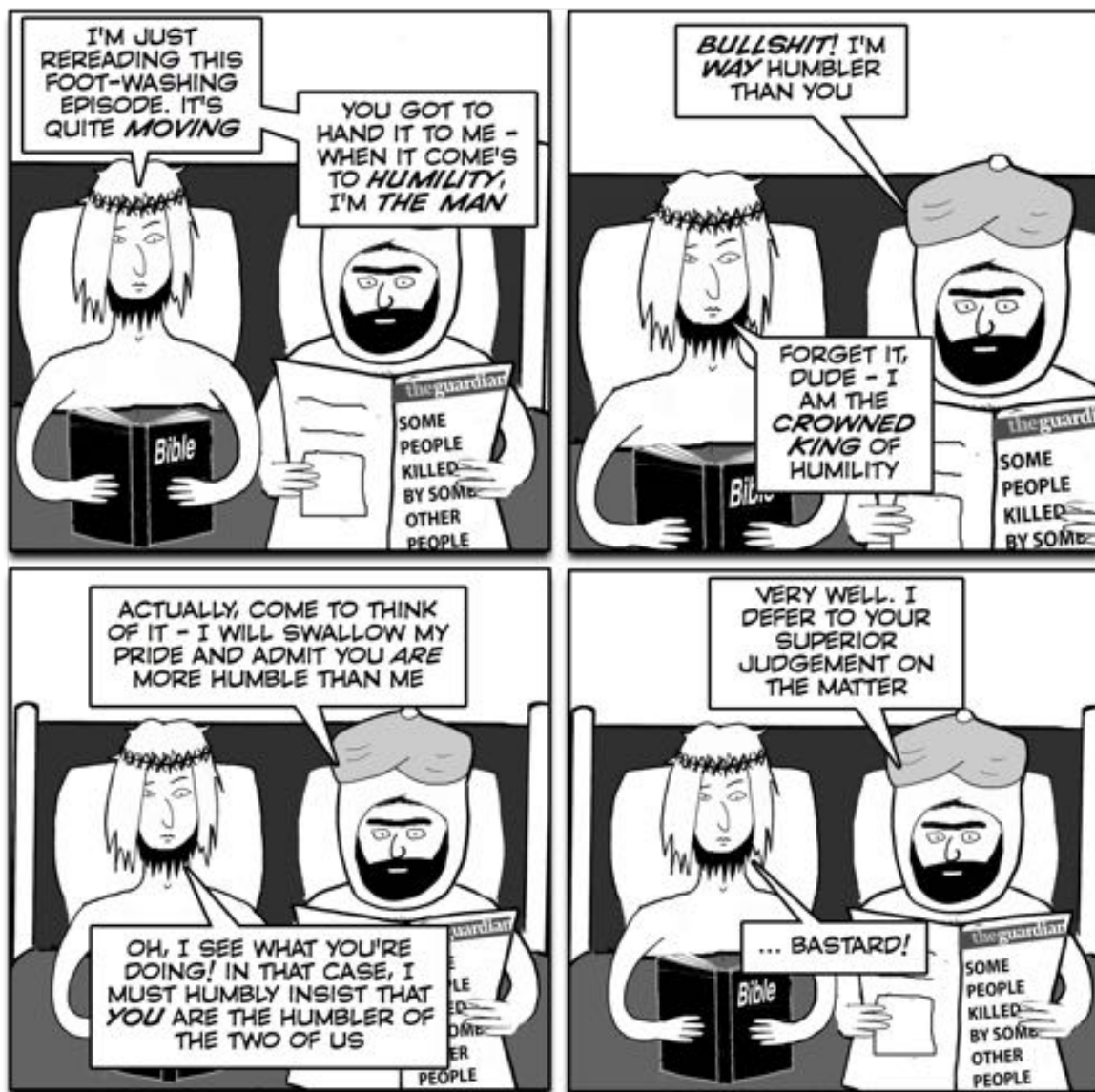
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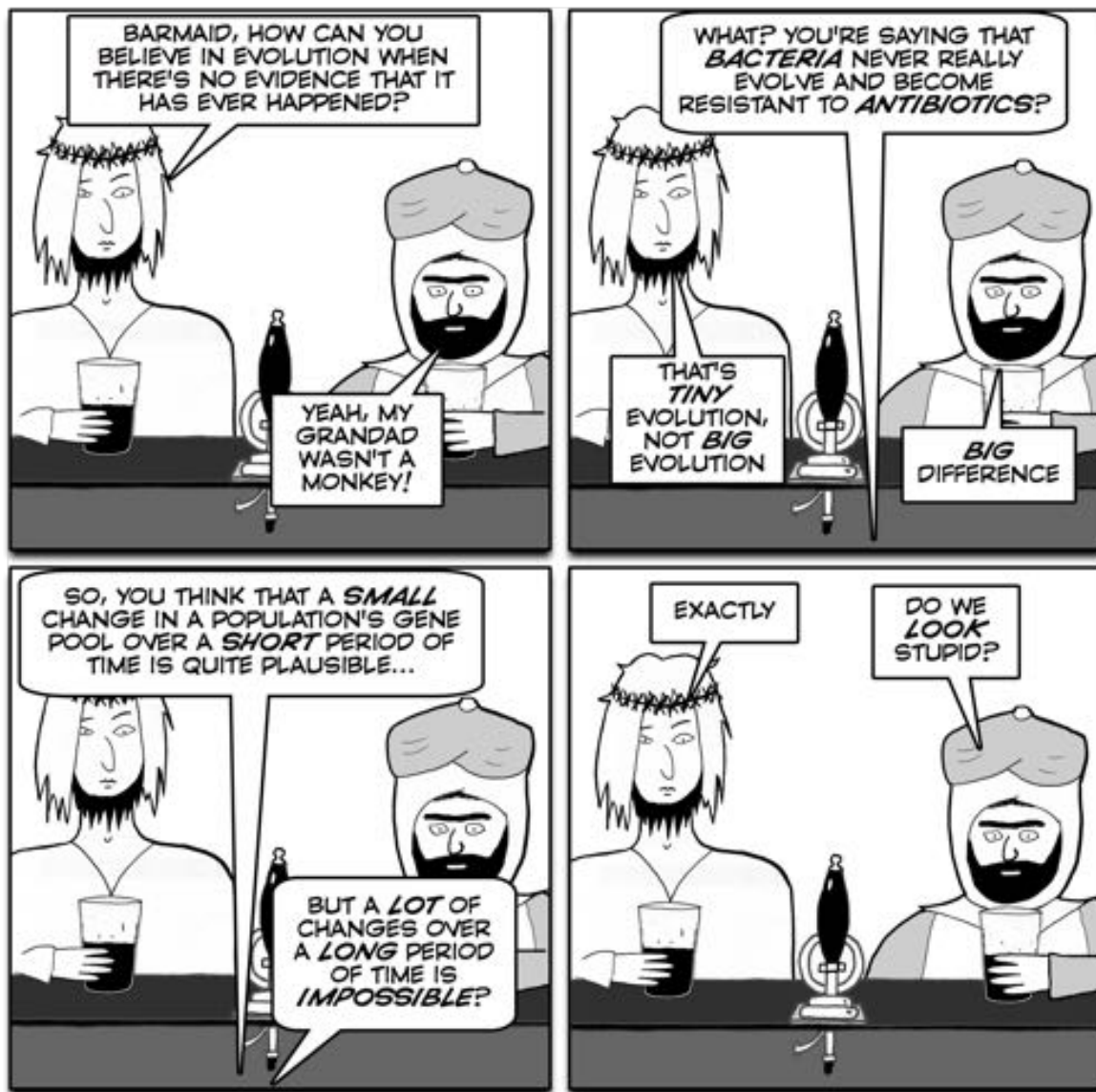
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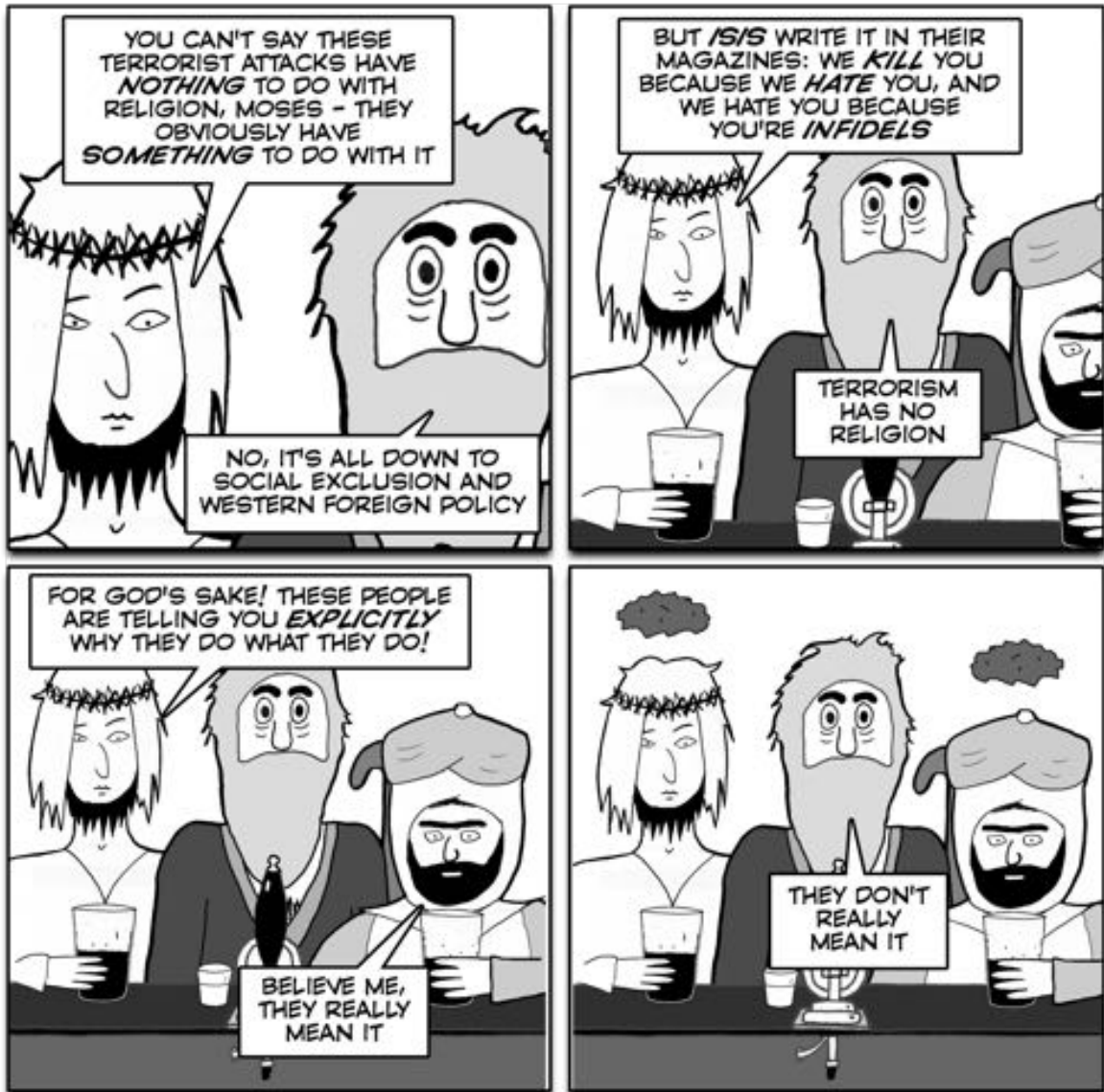
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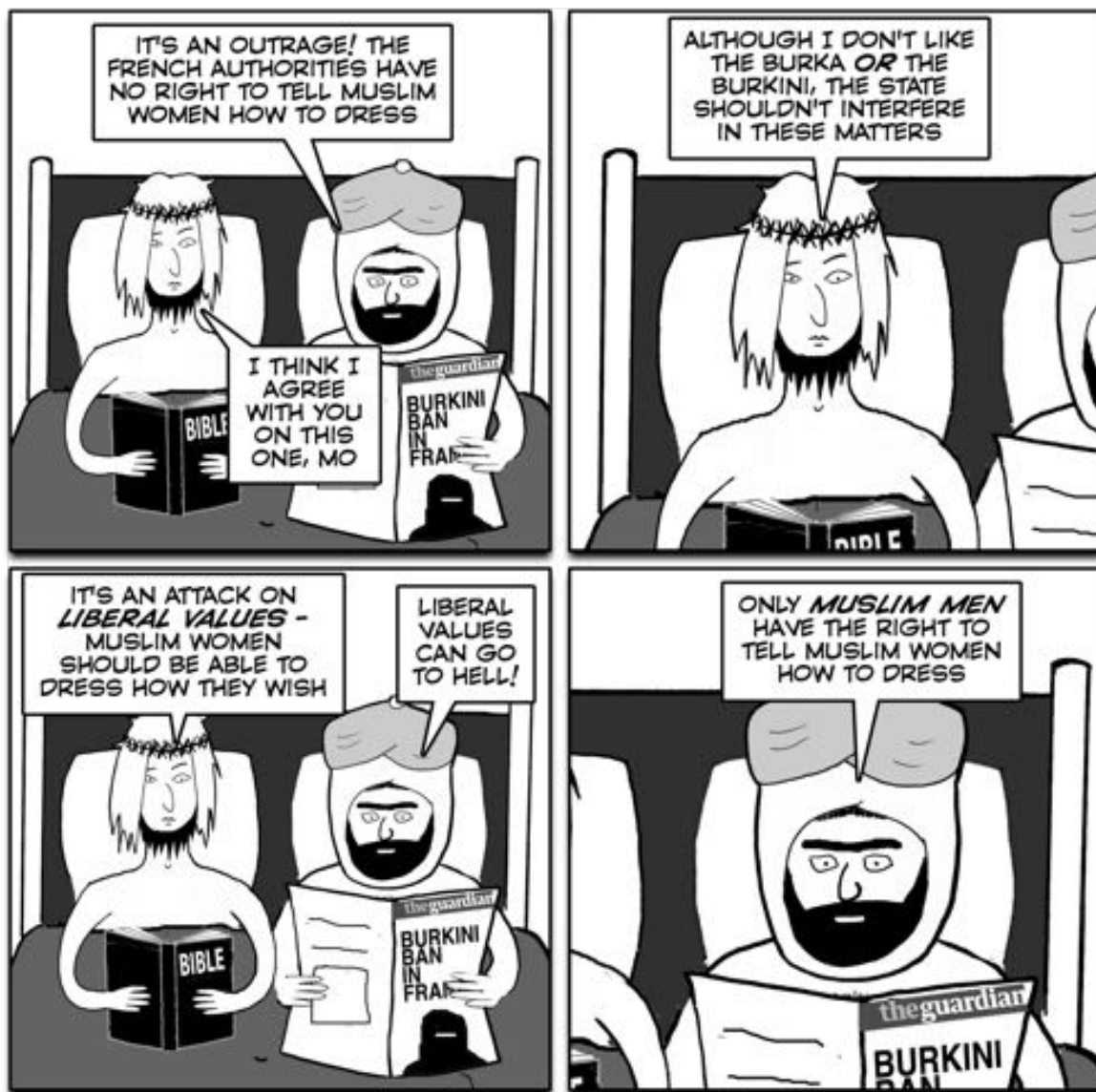
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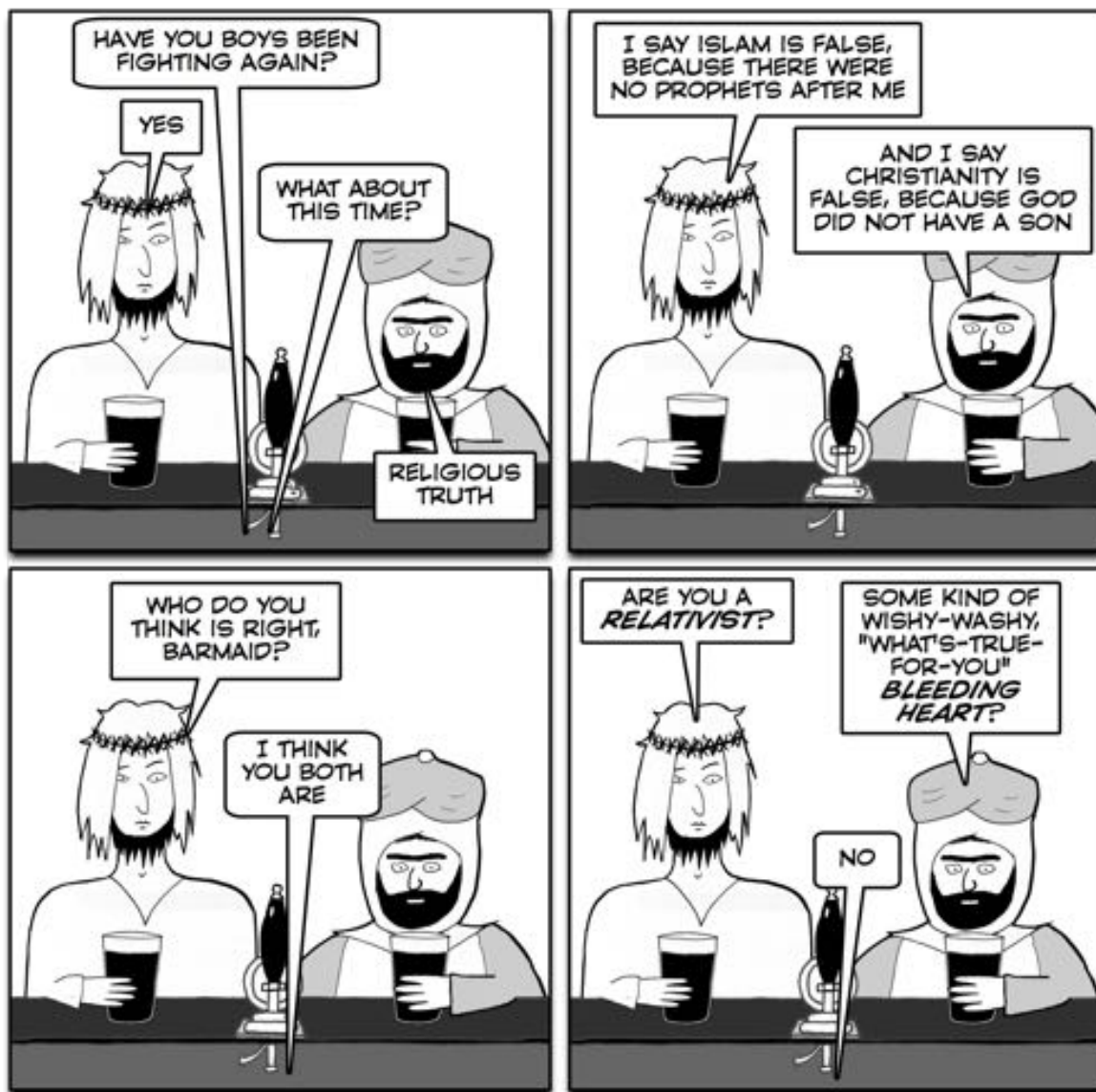
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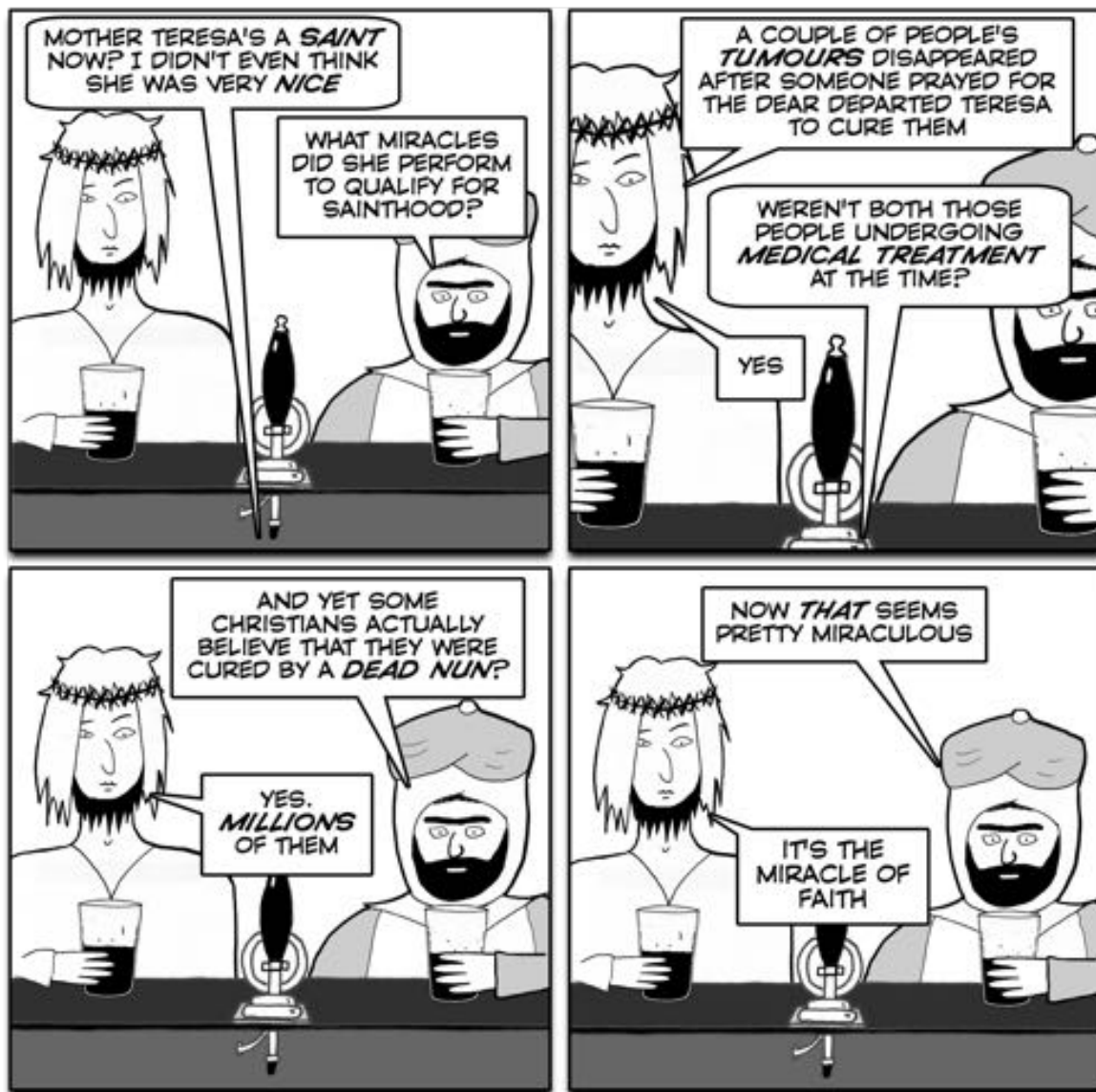
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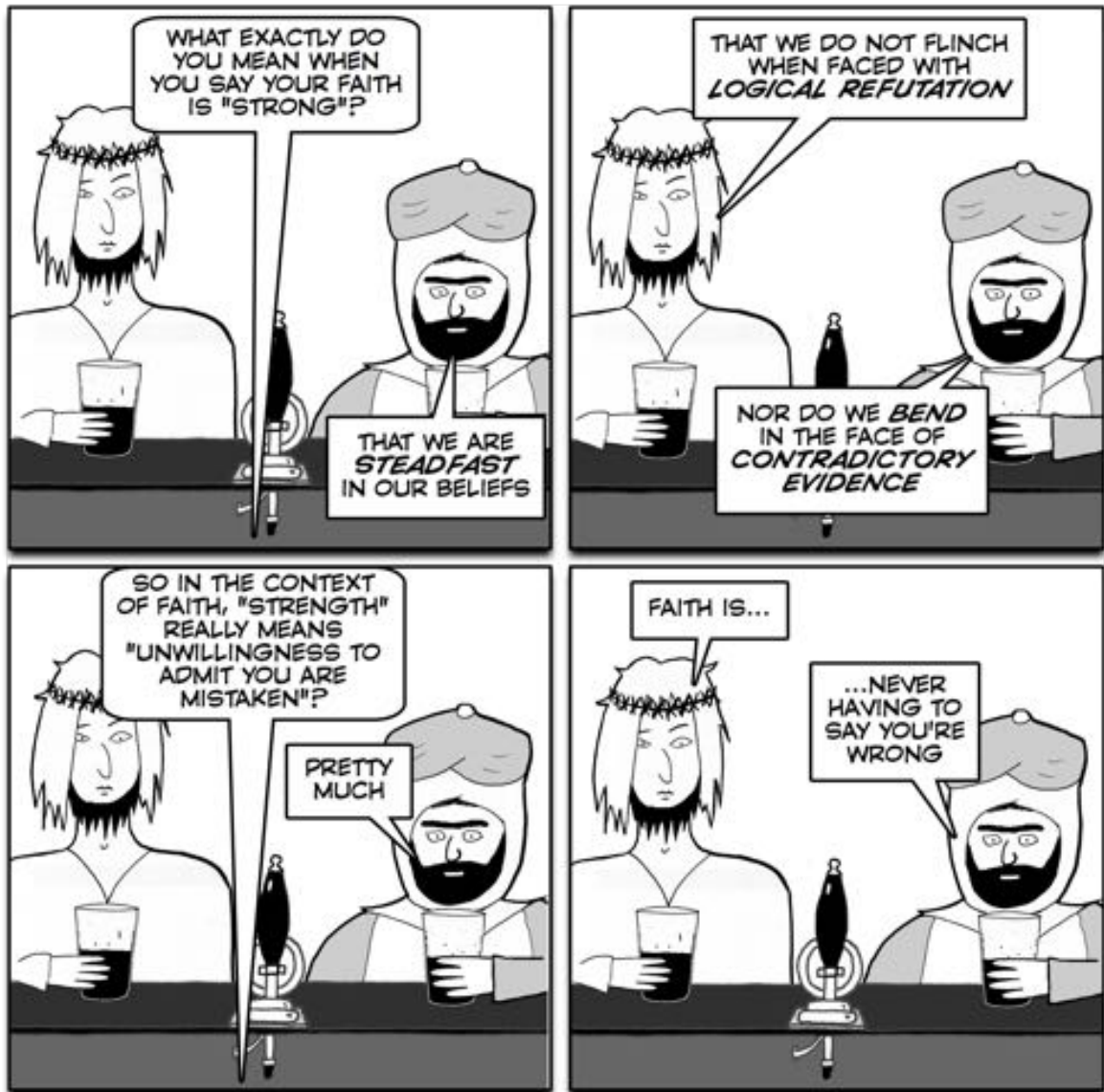
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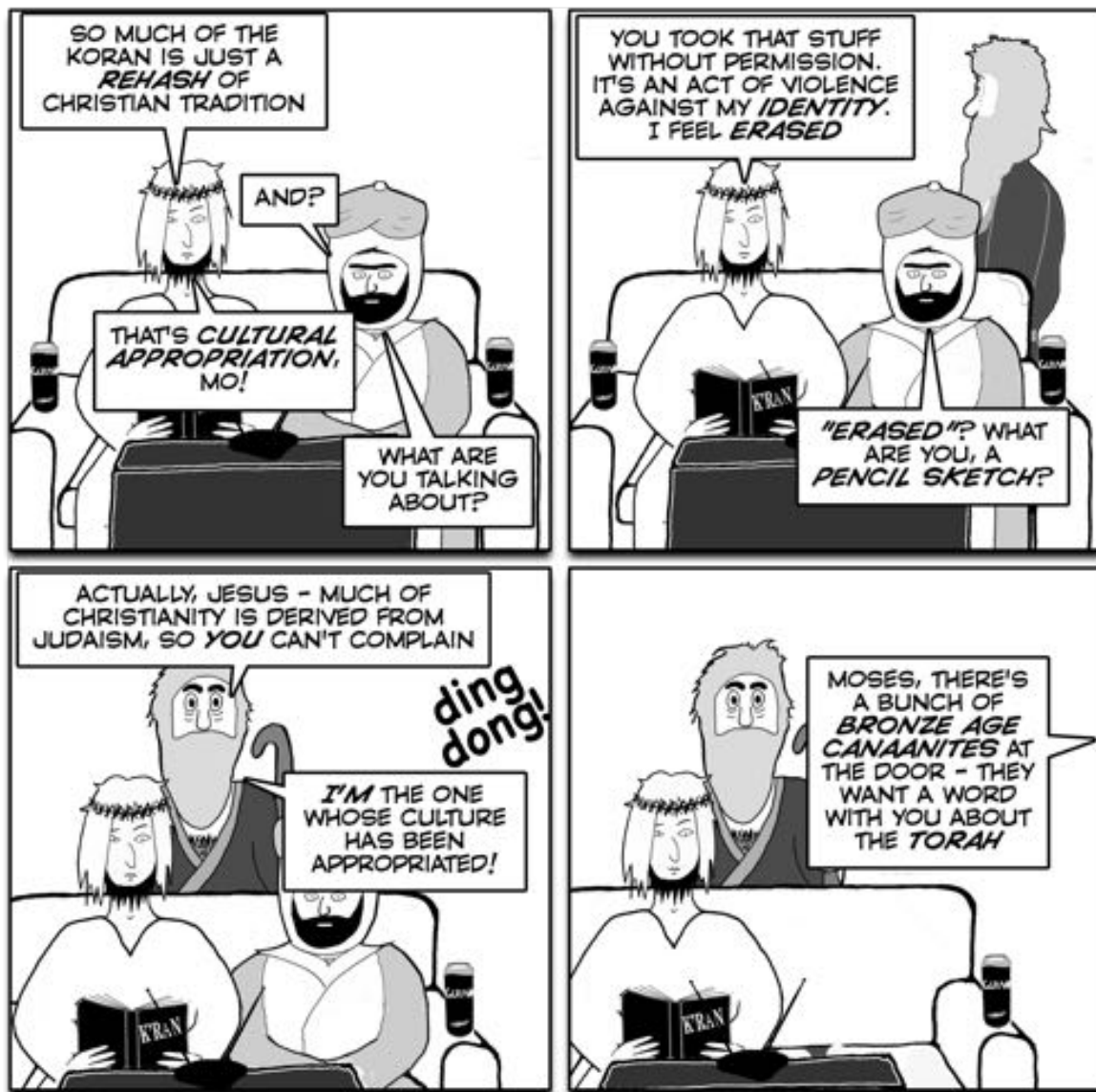
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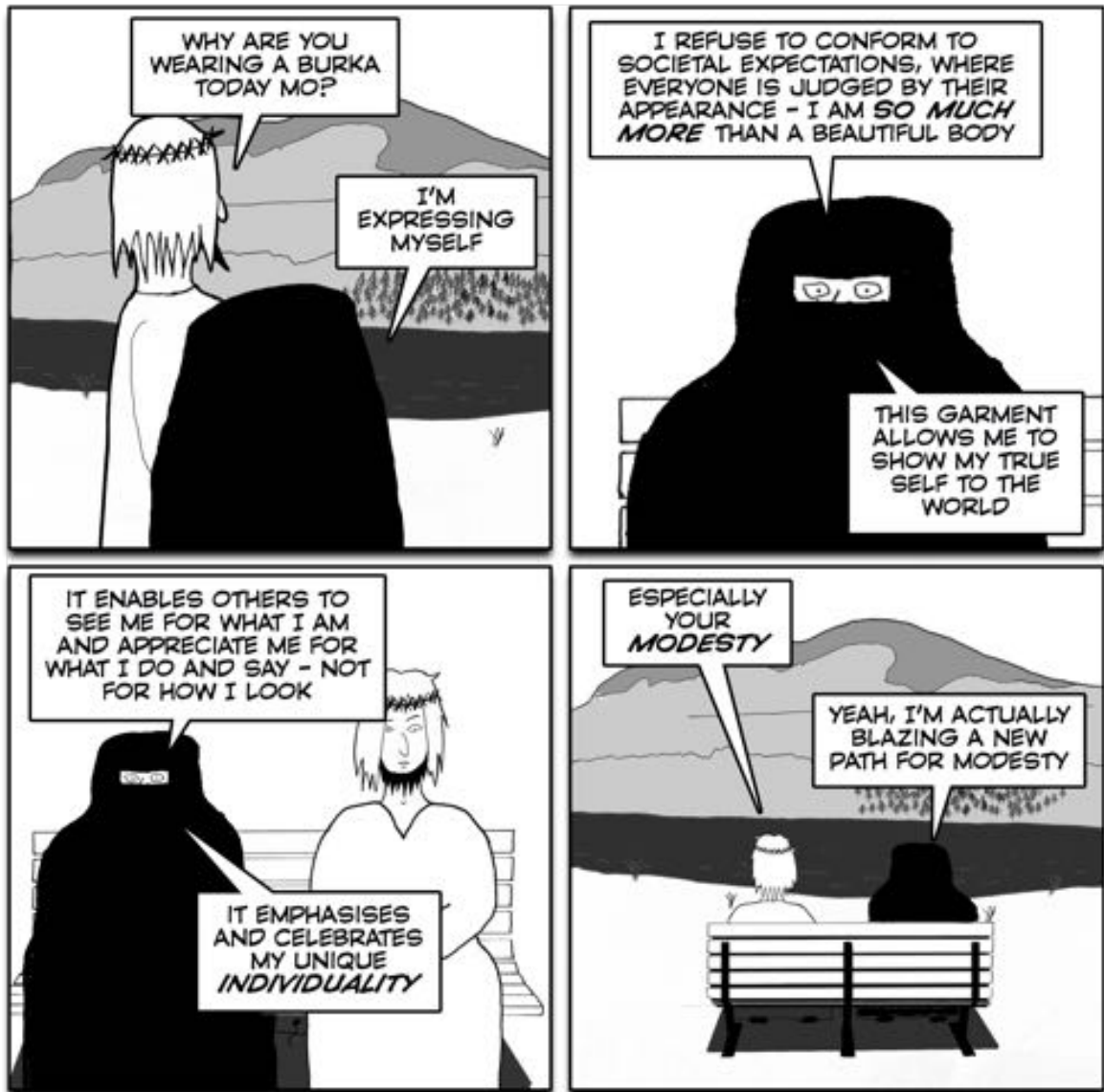
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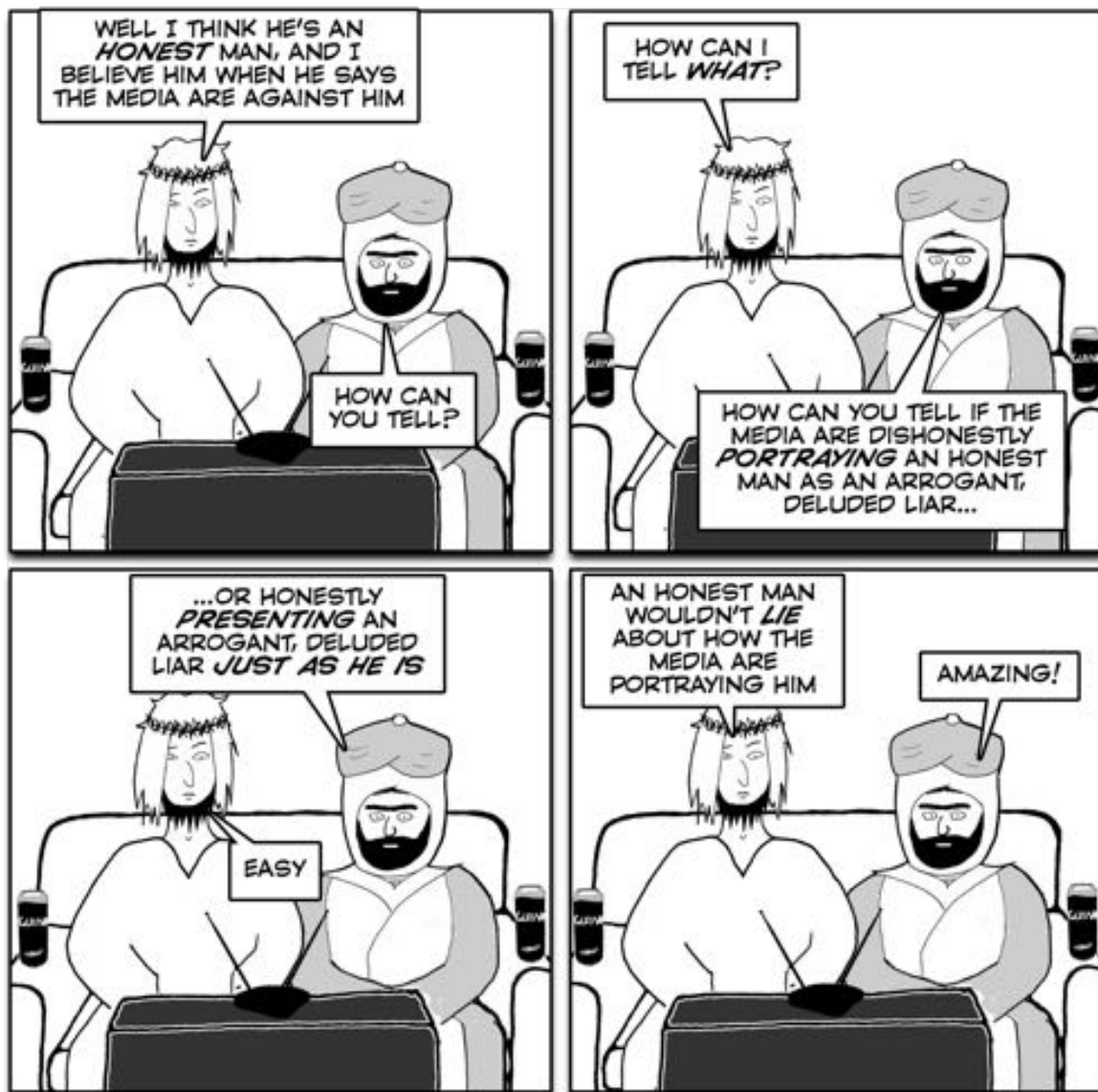
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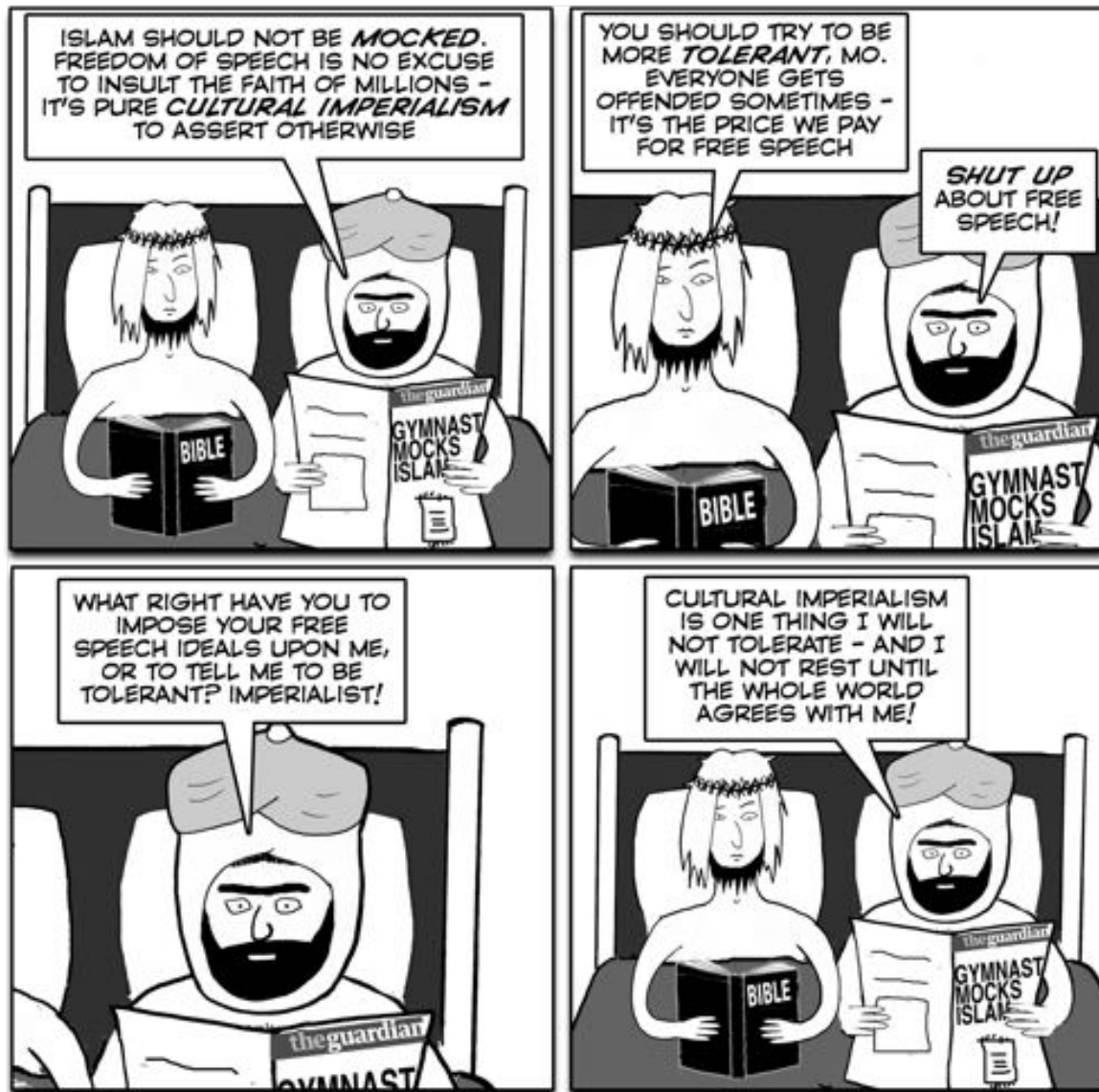
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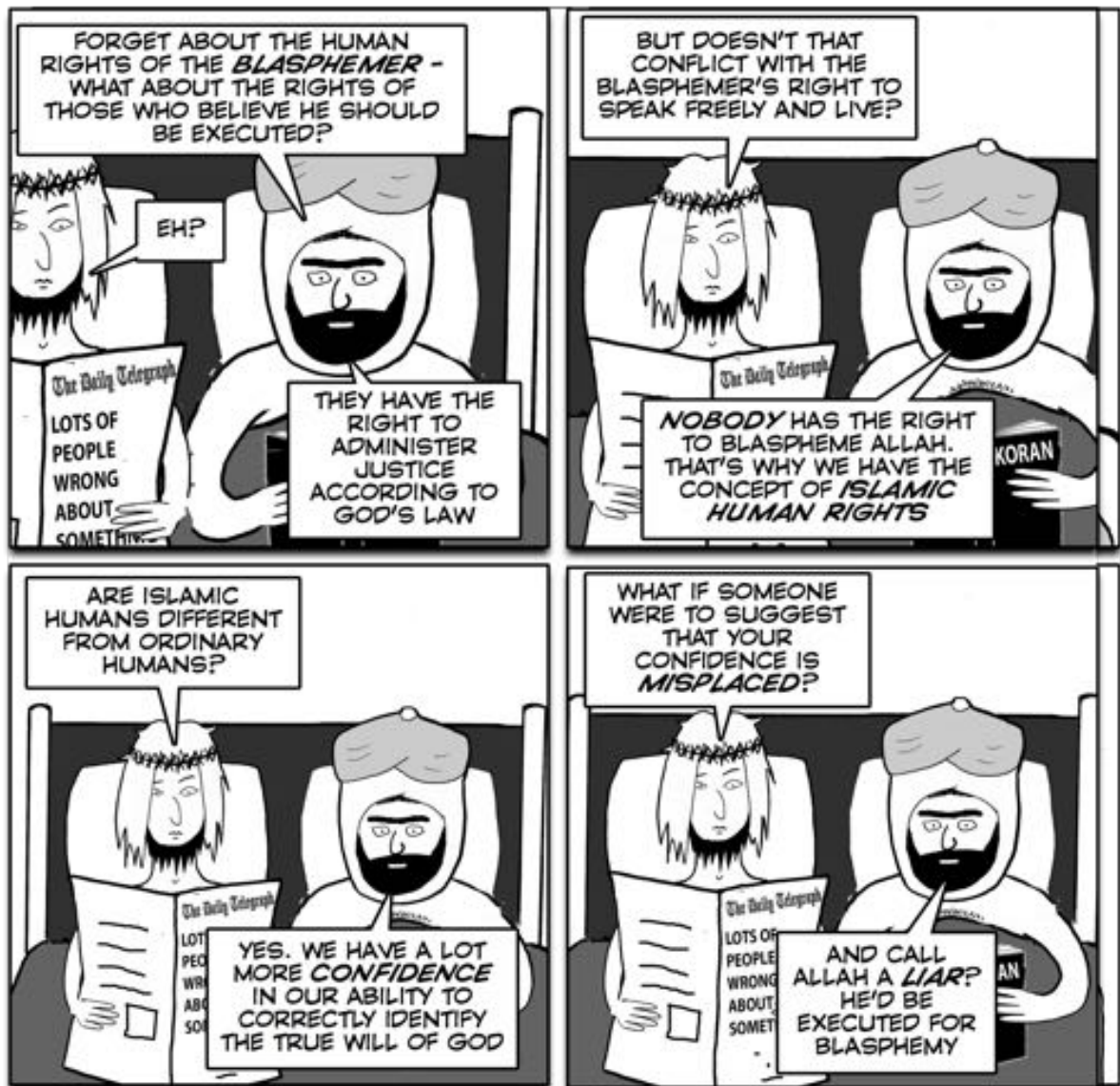
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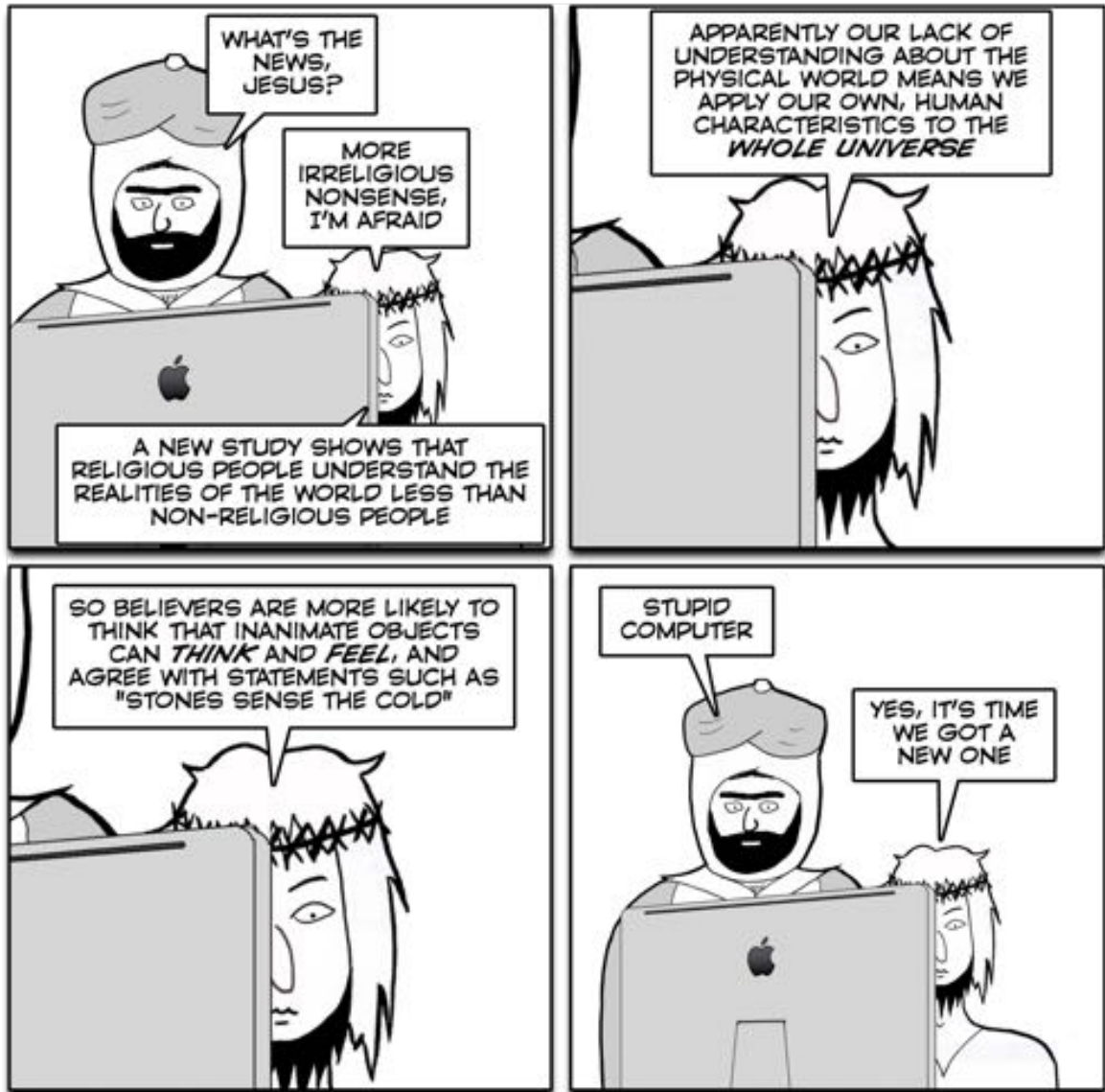
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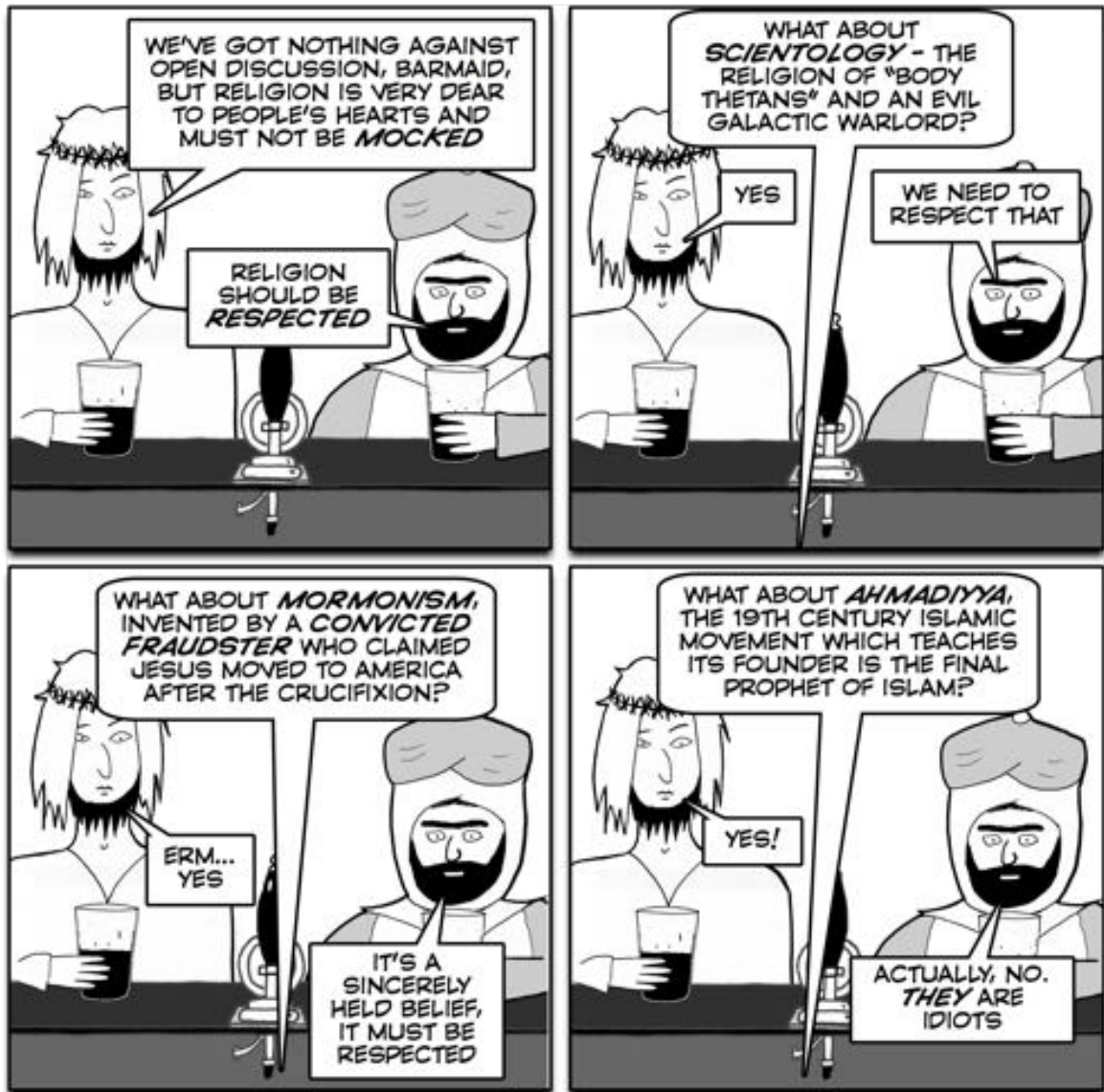
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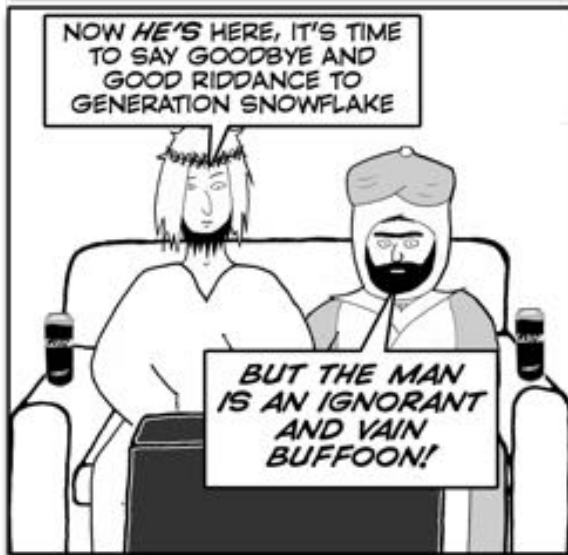
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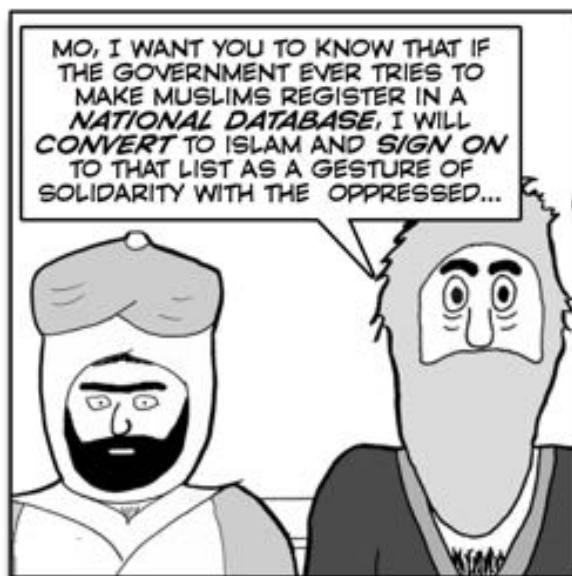
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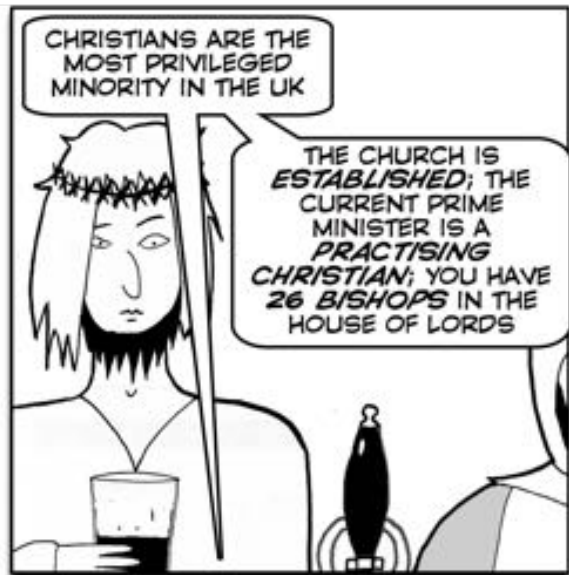
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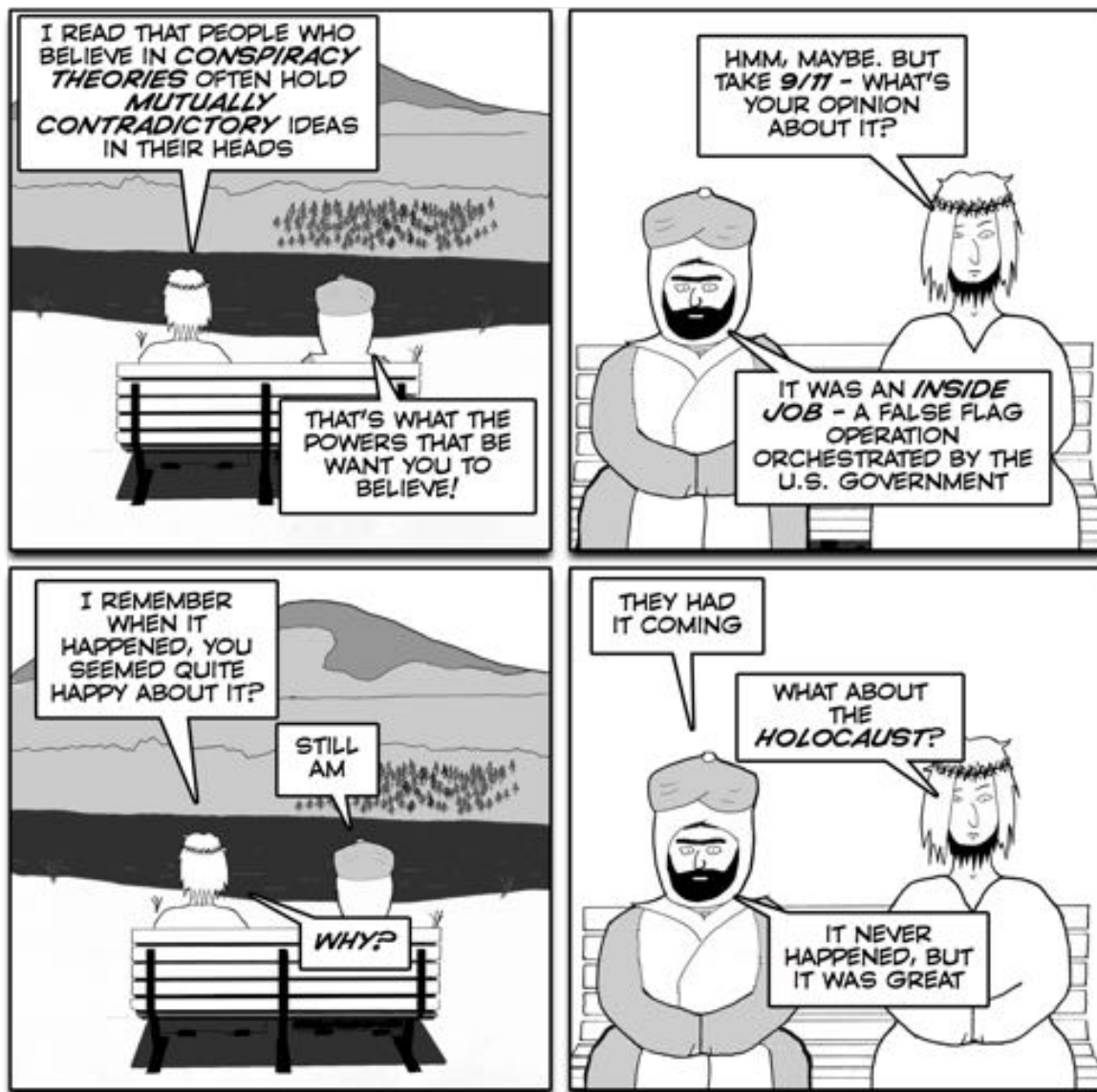
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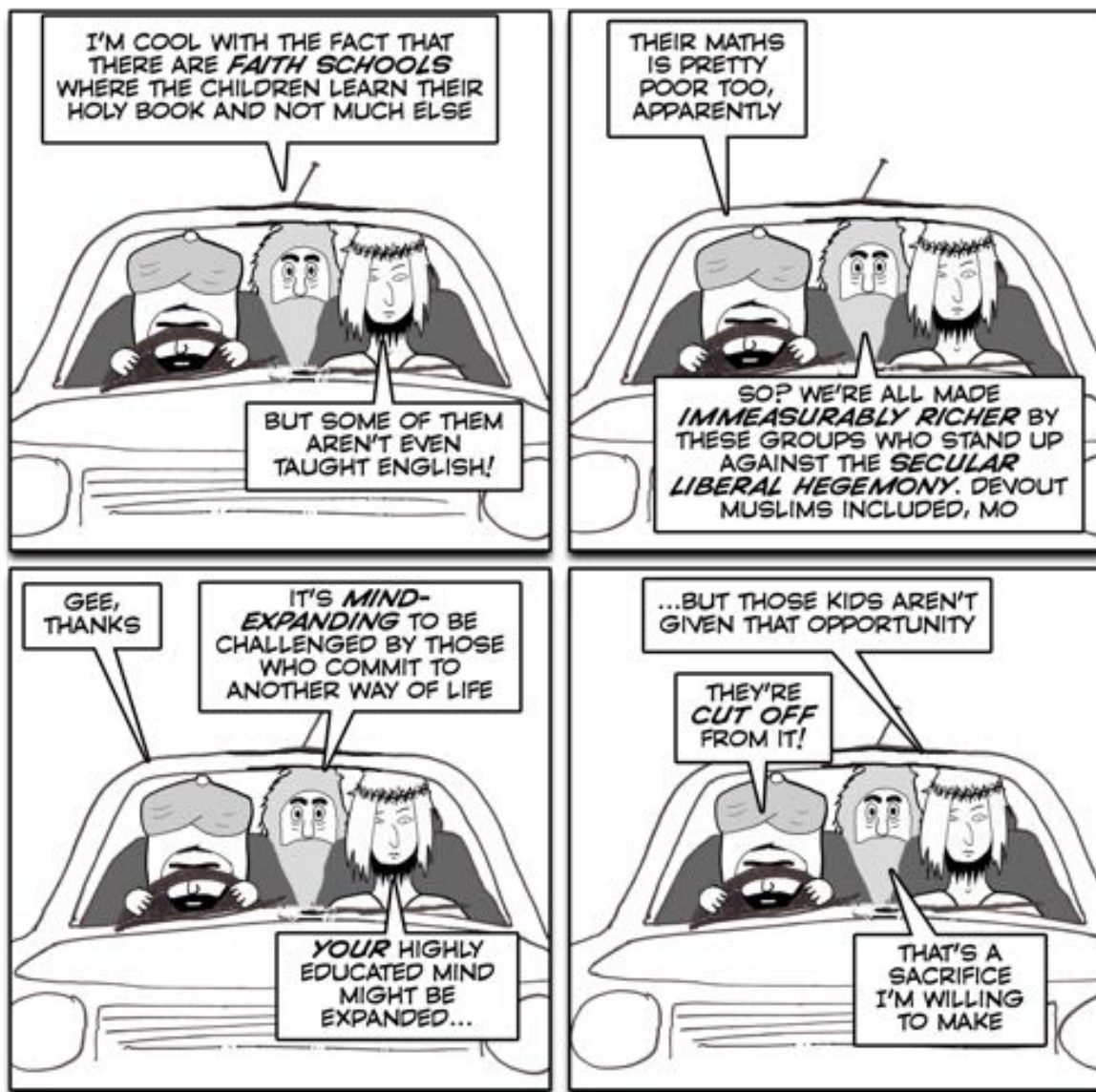
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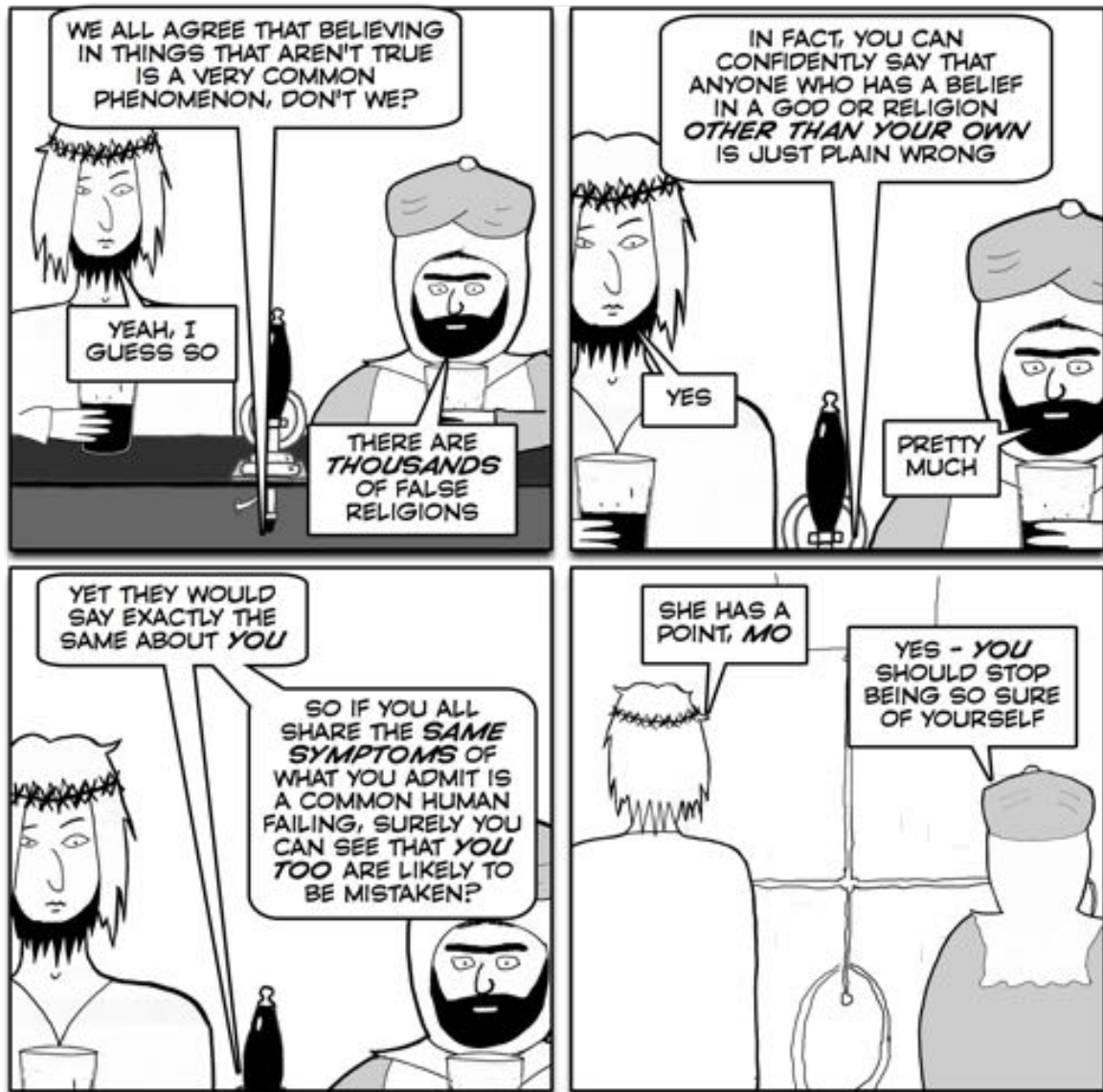
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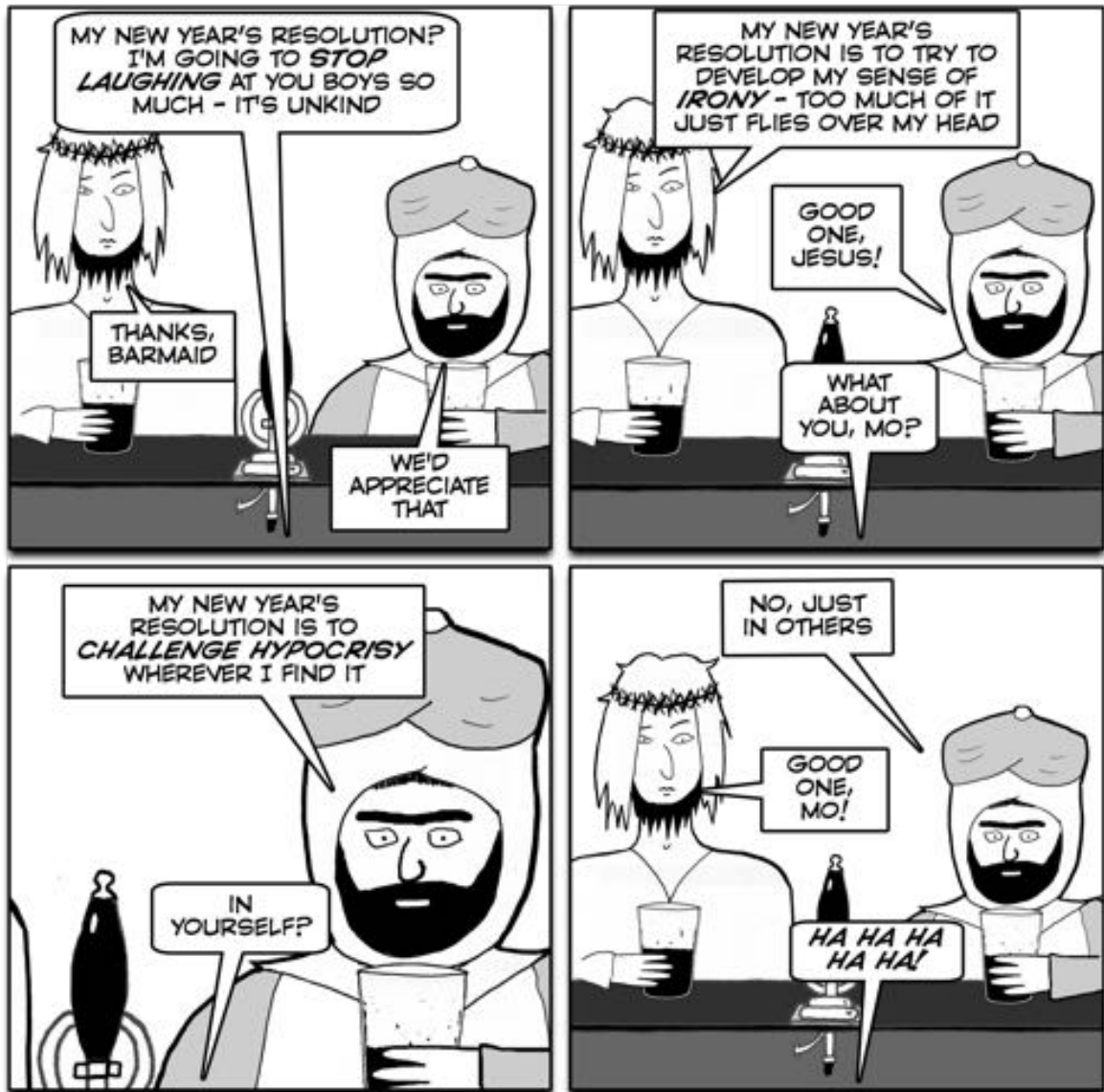
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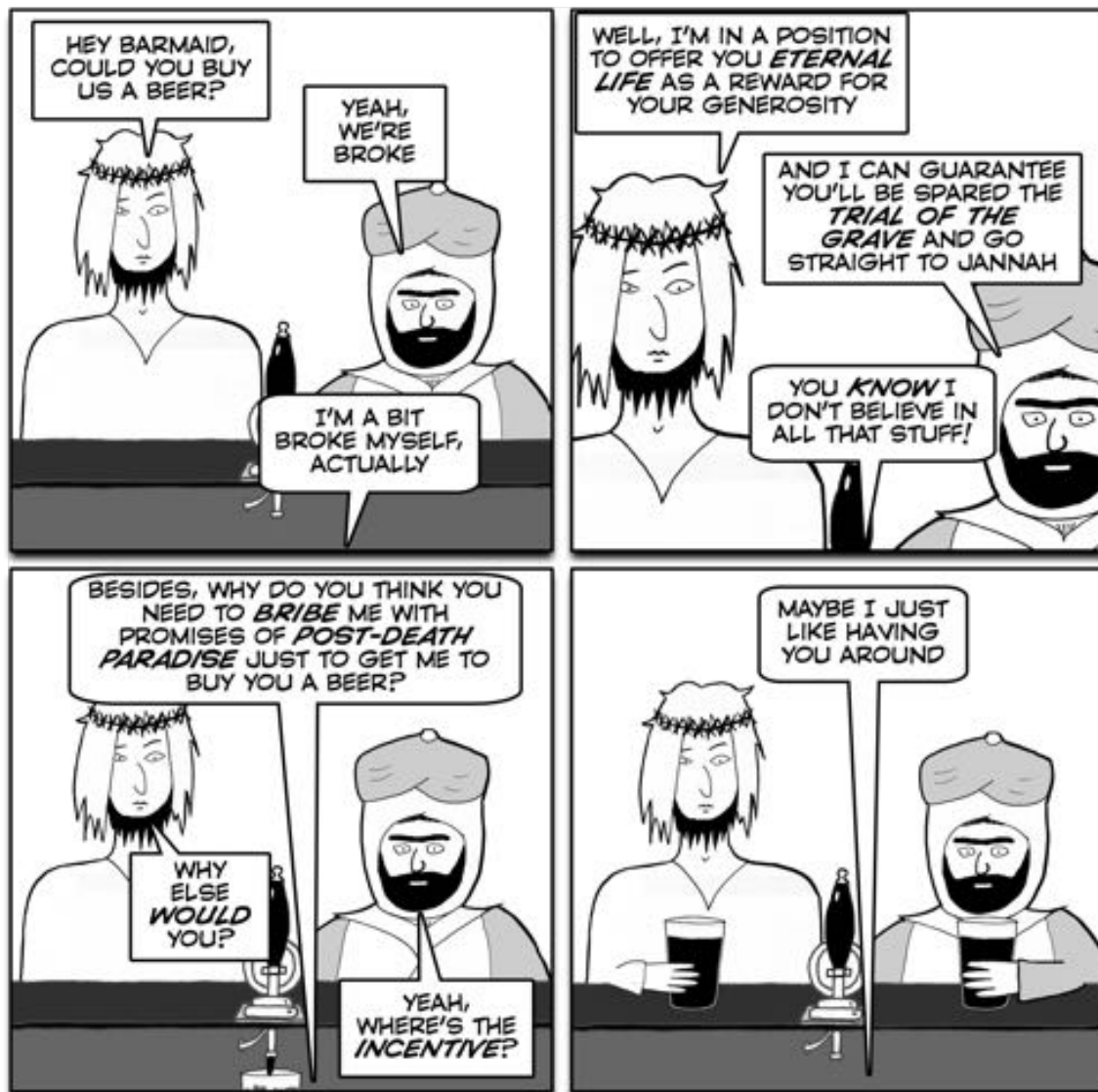
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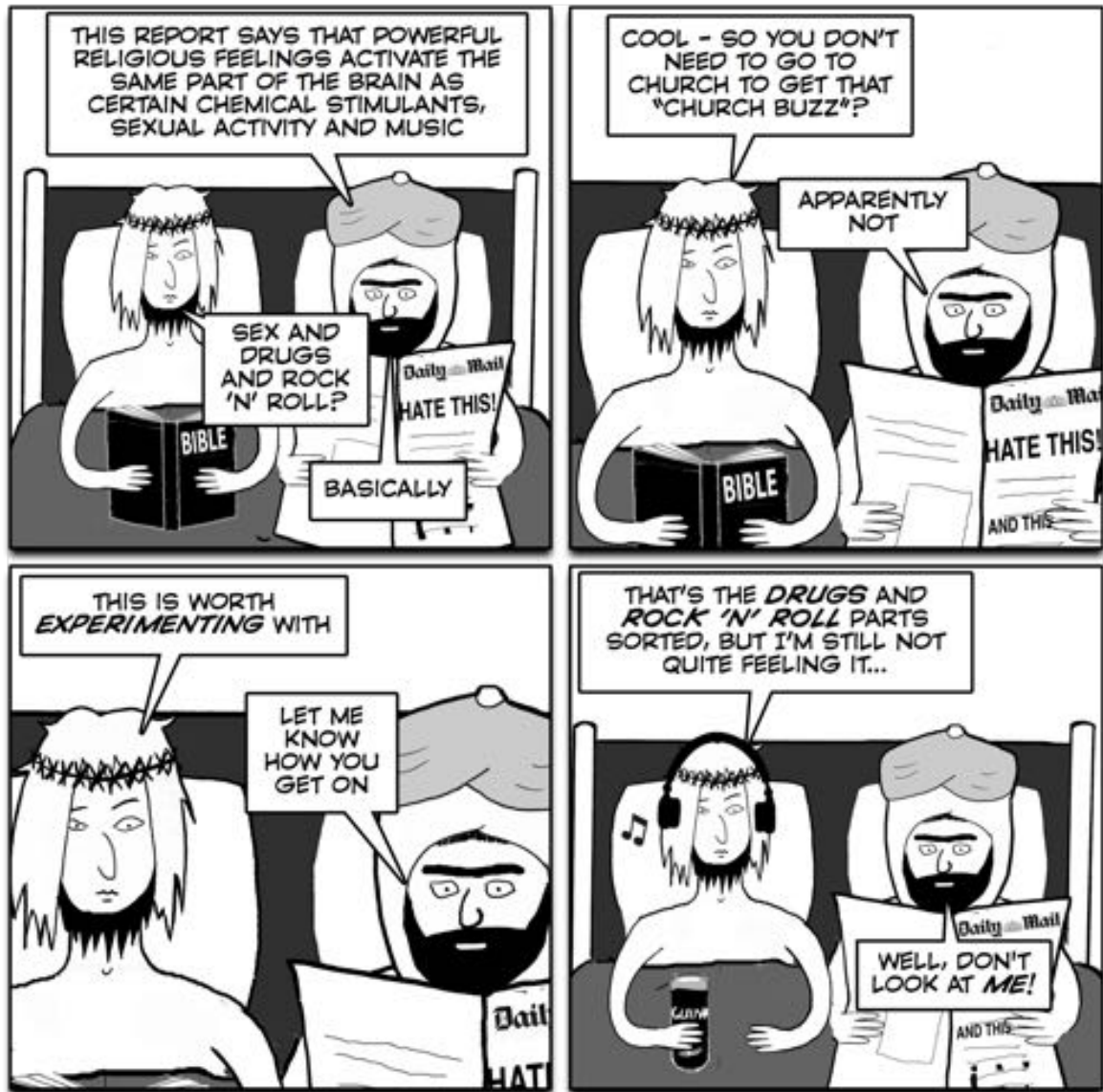
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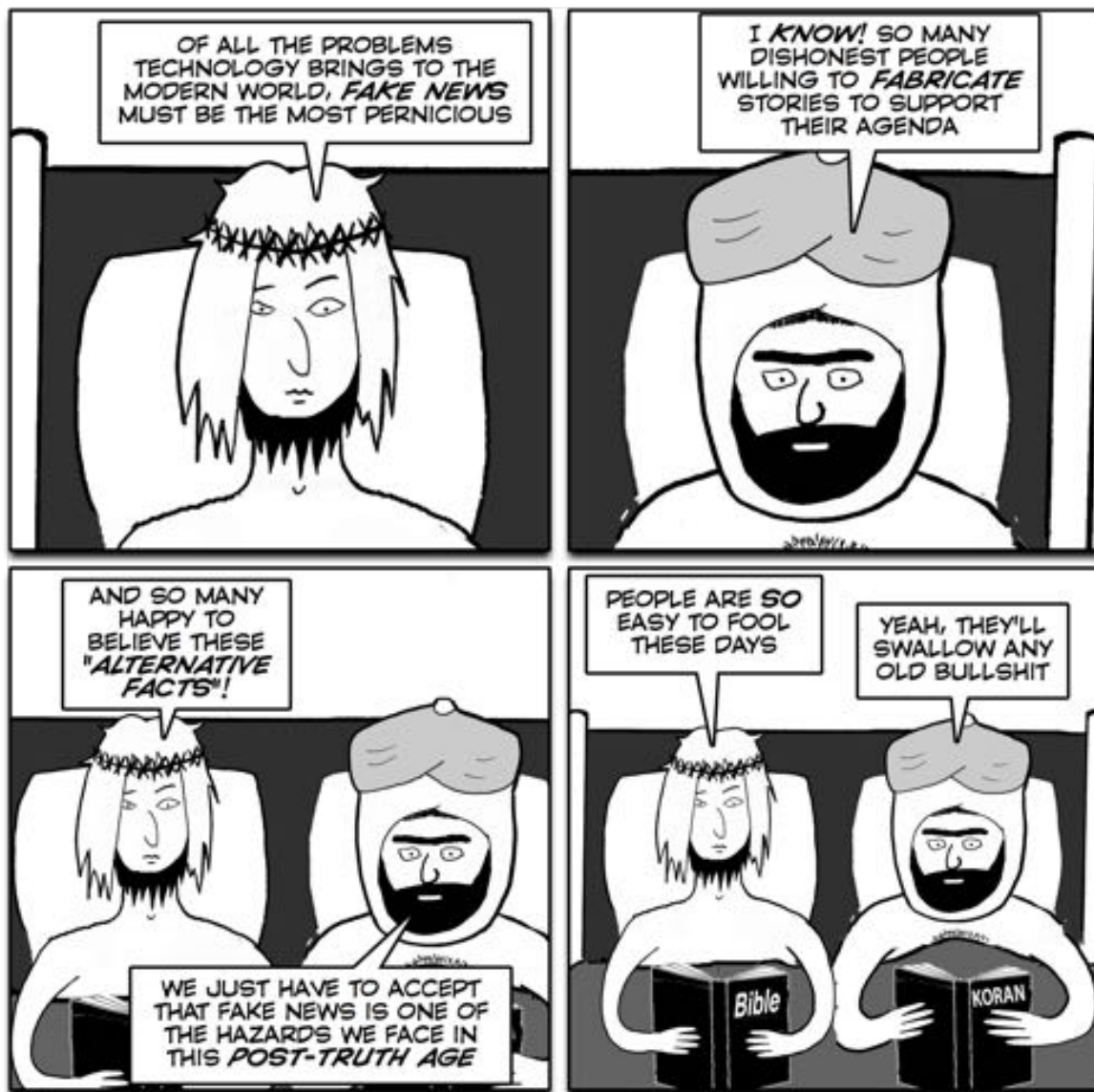
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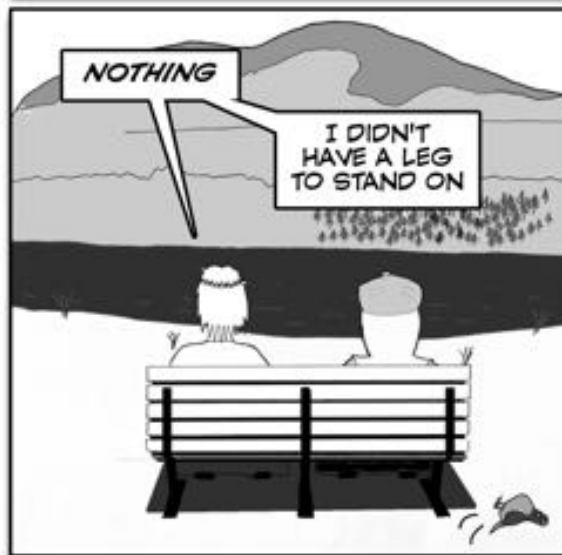
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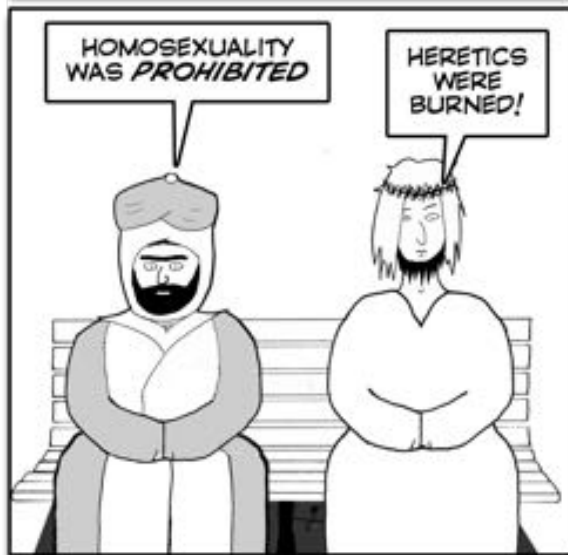
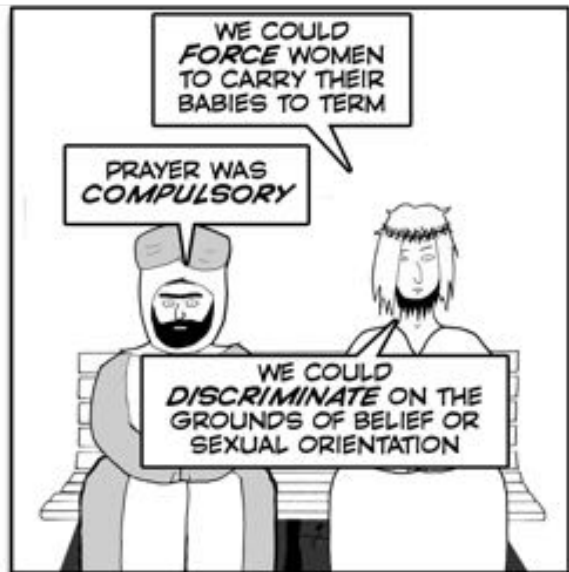
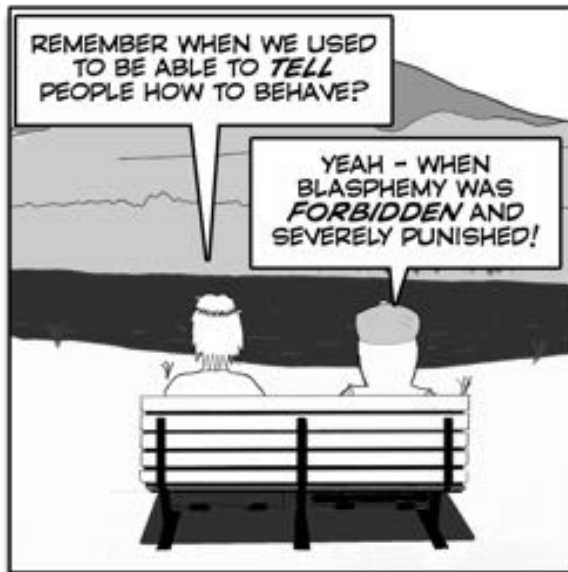
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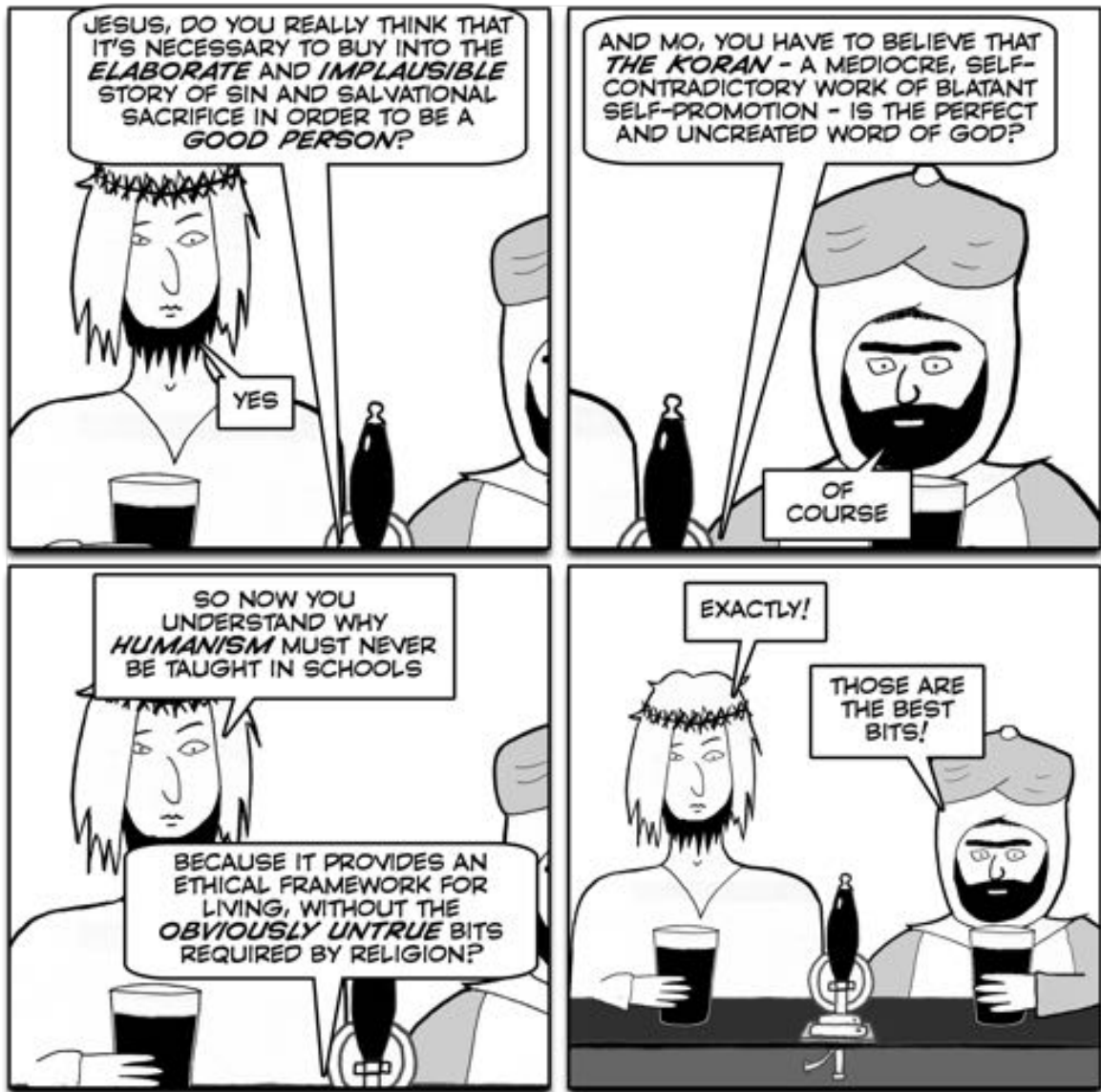
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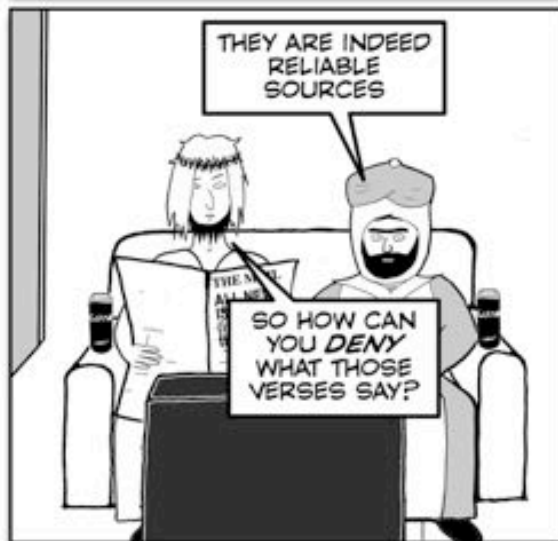


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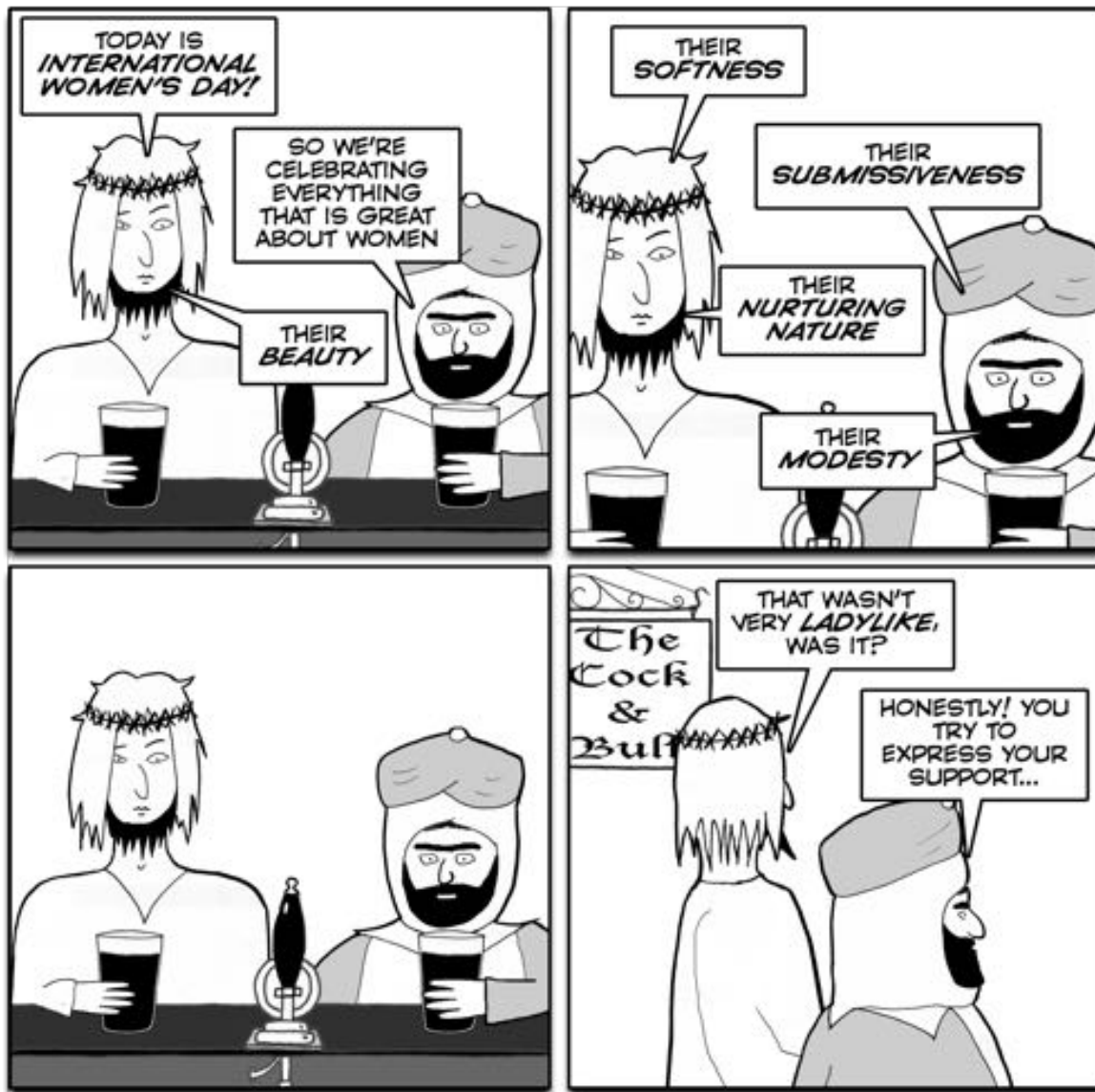


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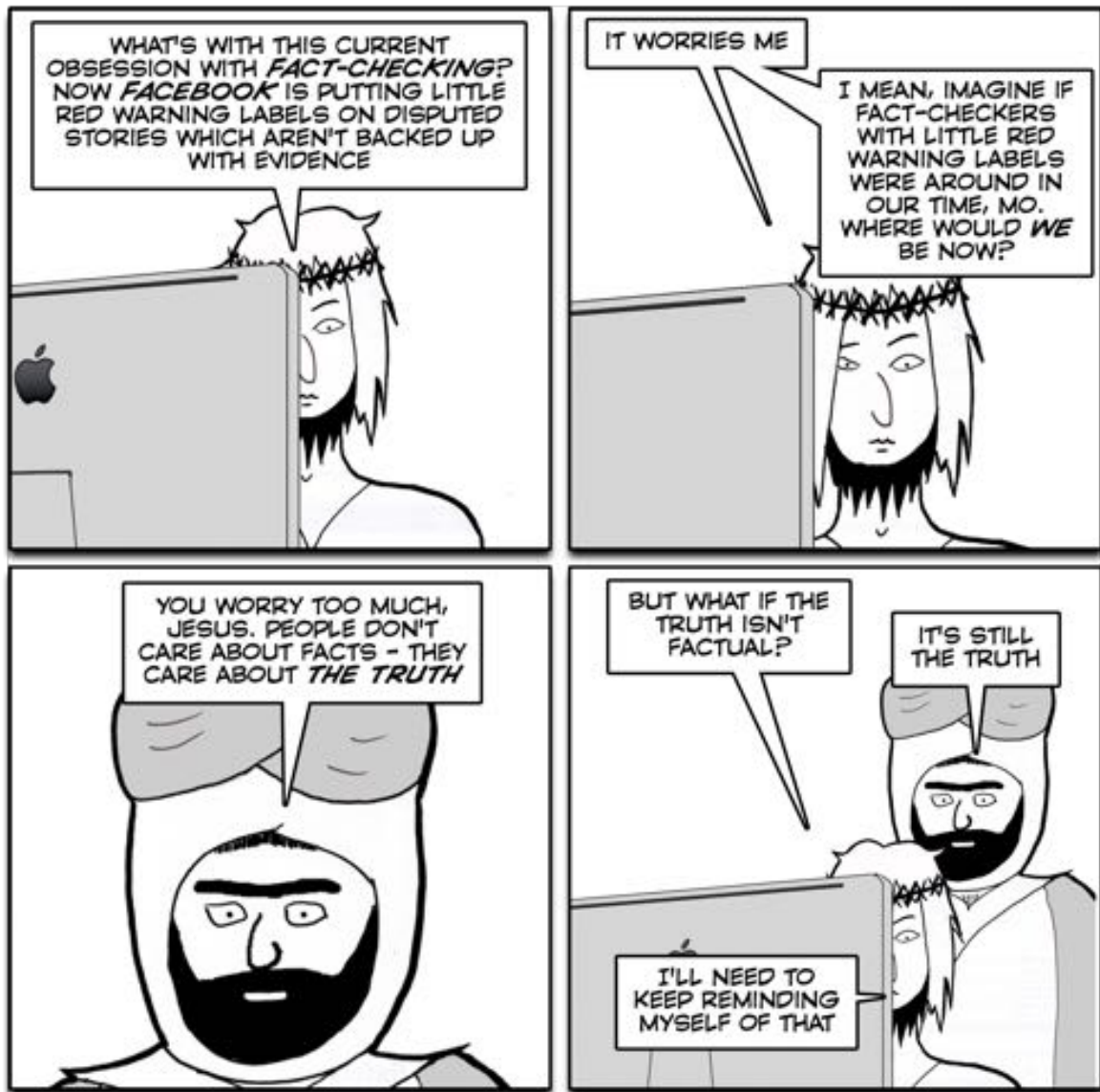




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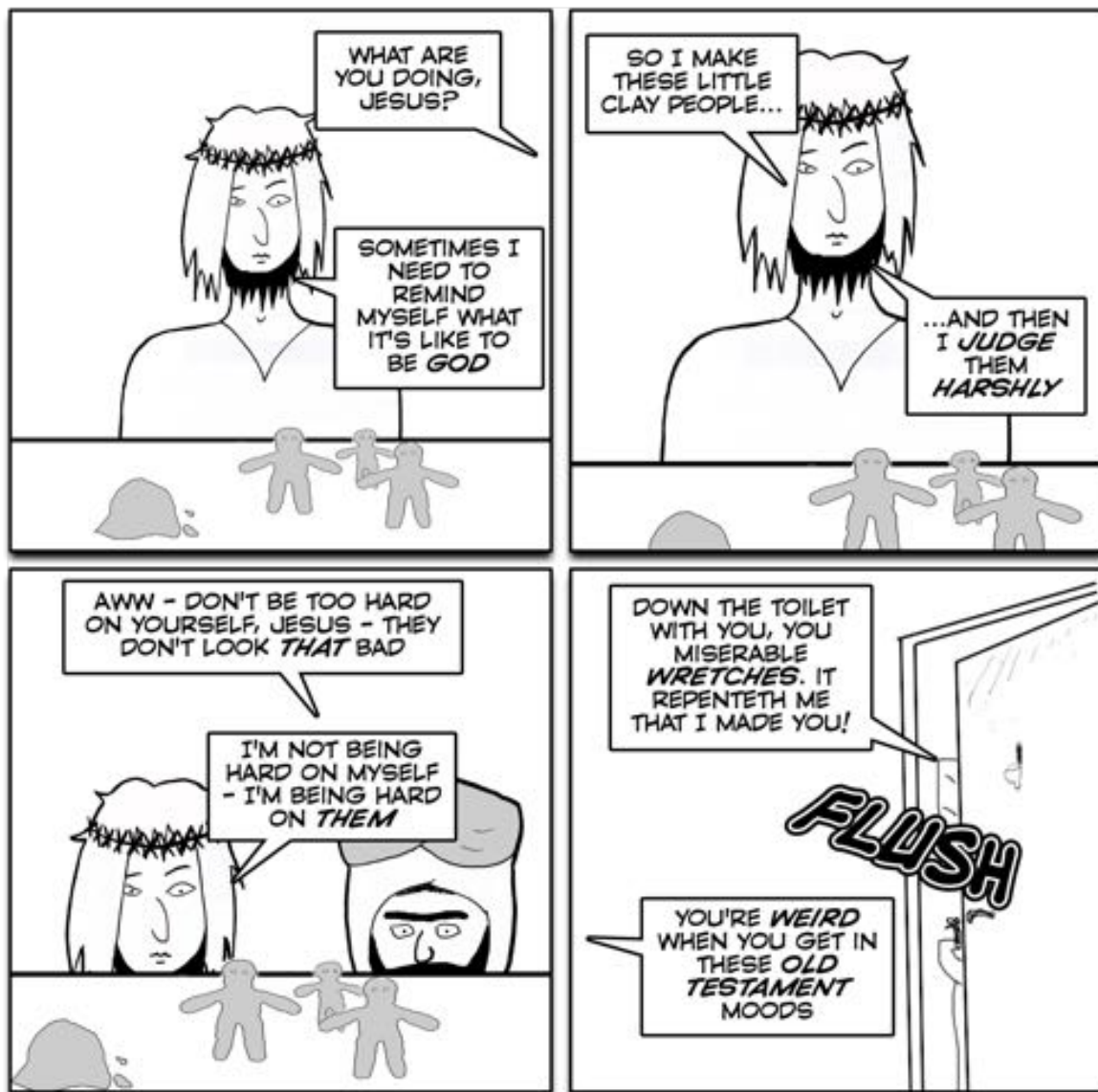
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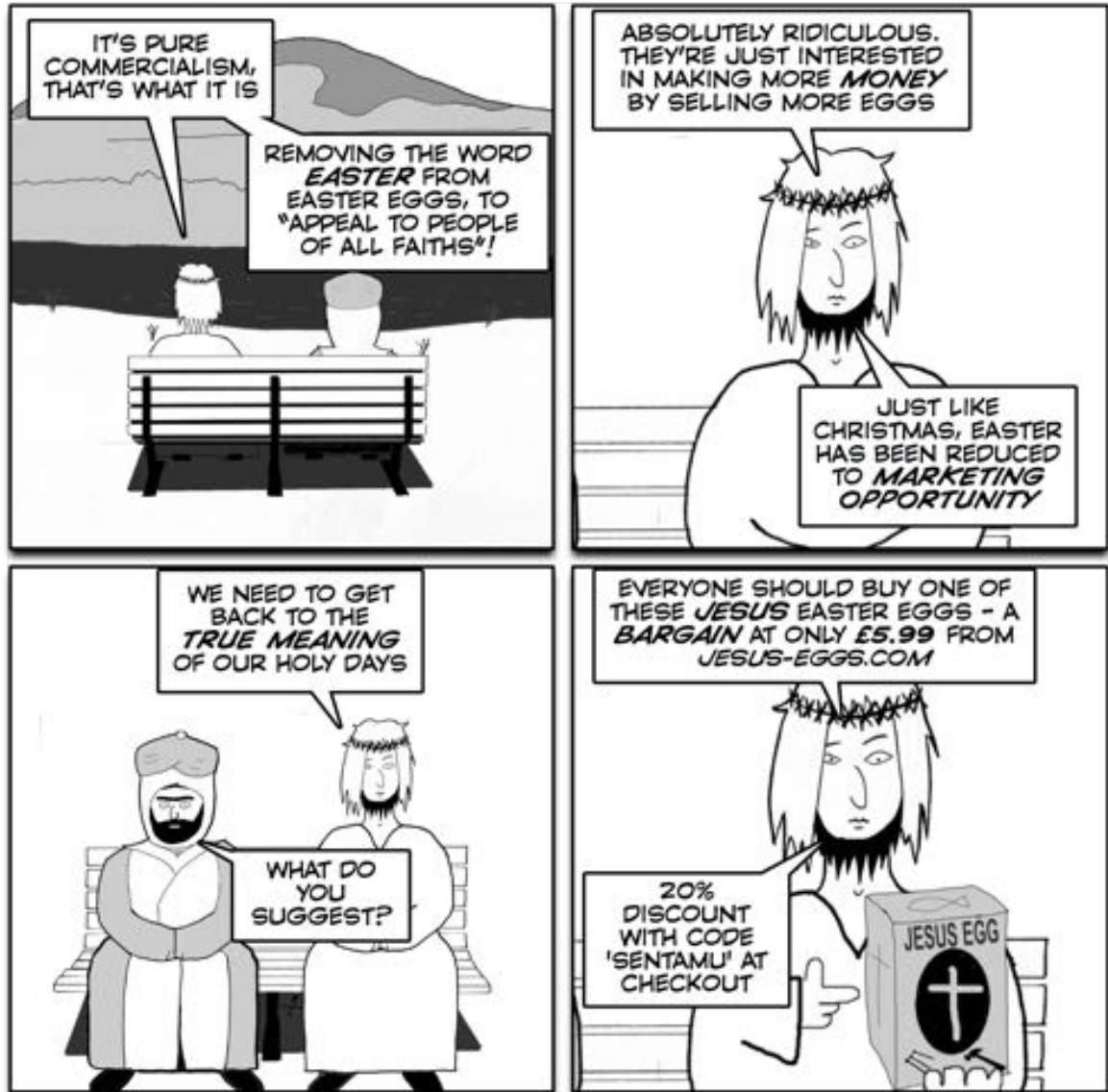
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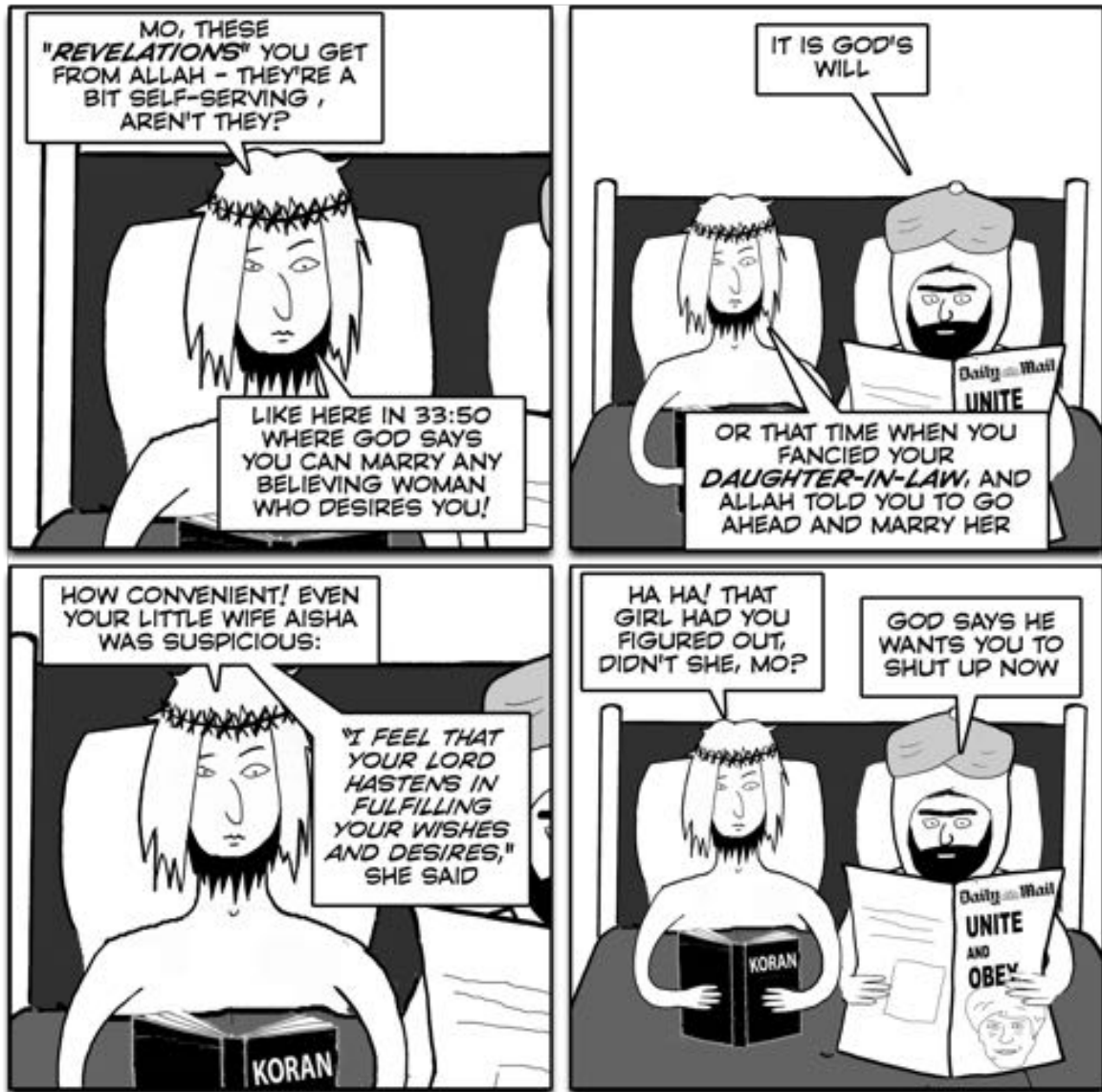


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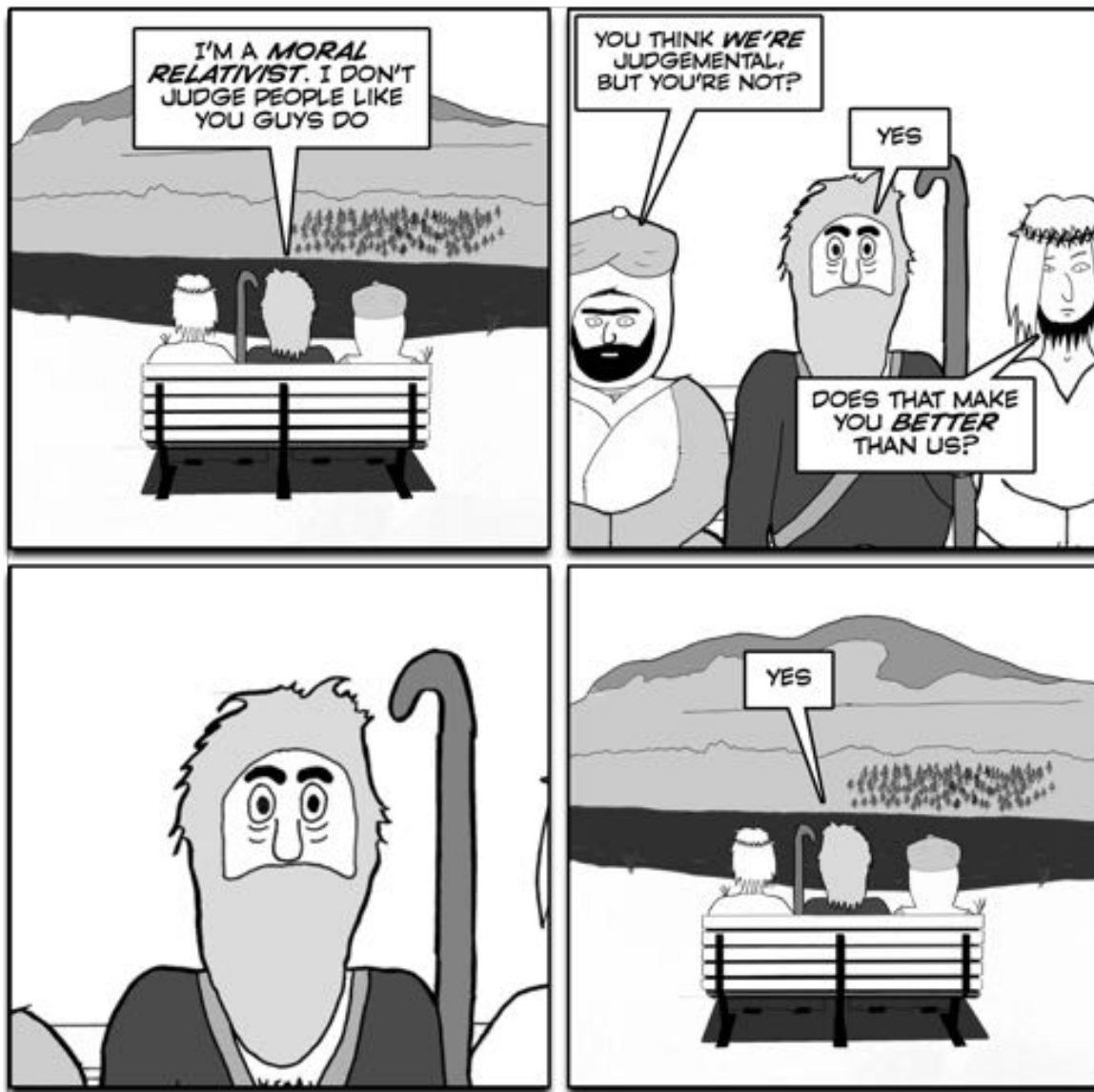




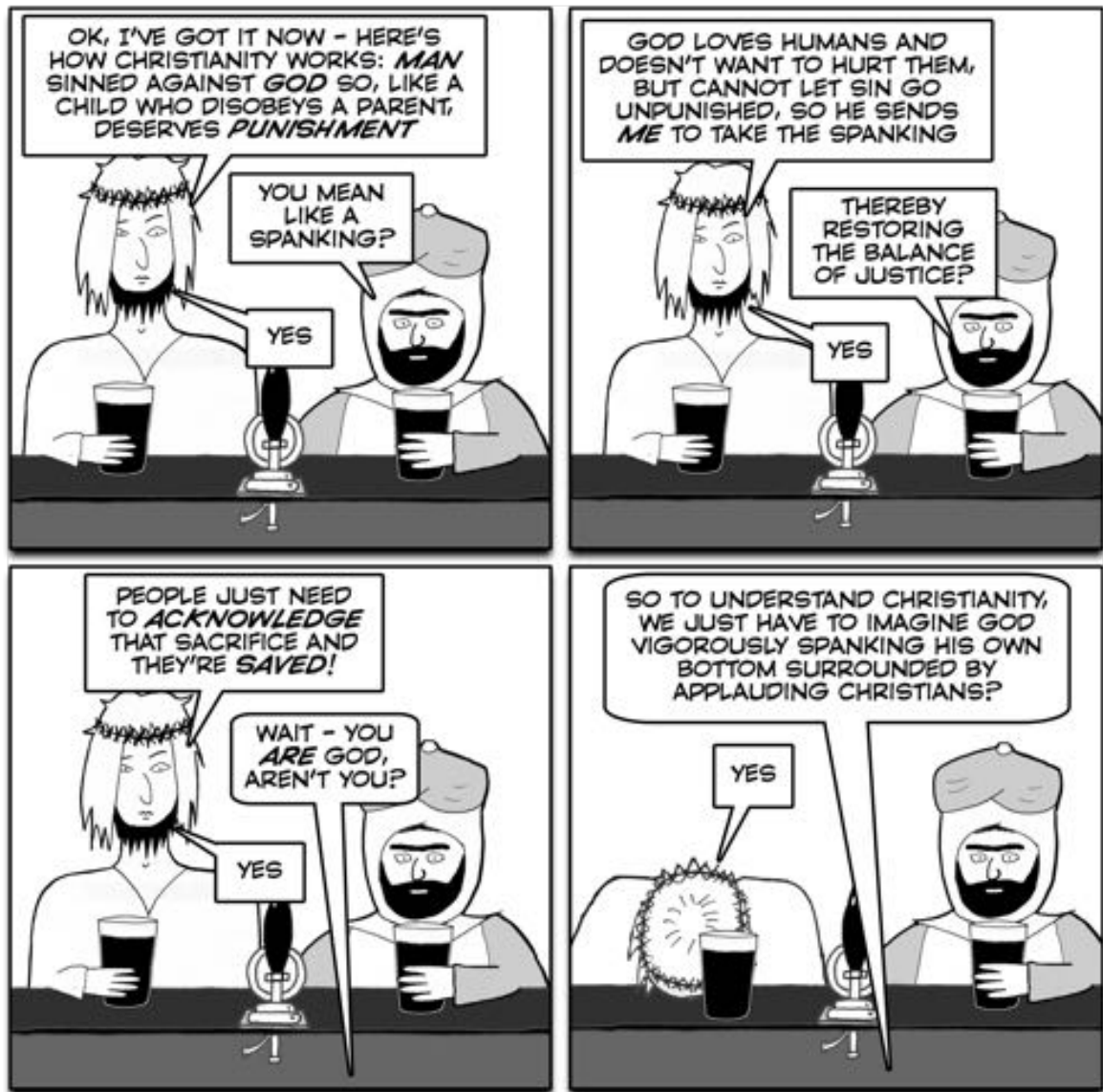
marry



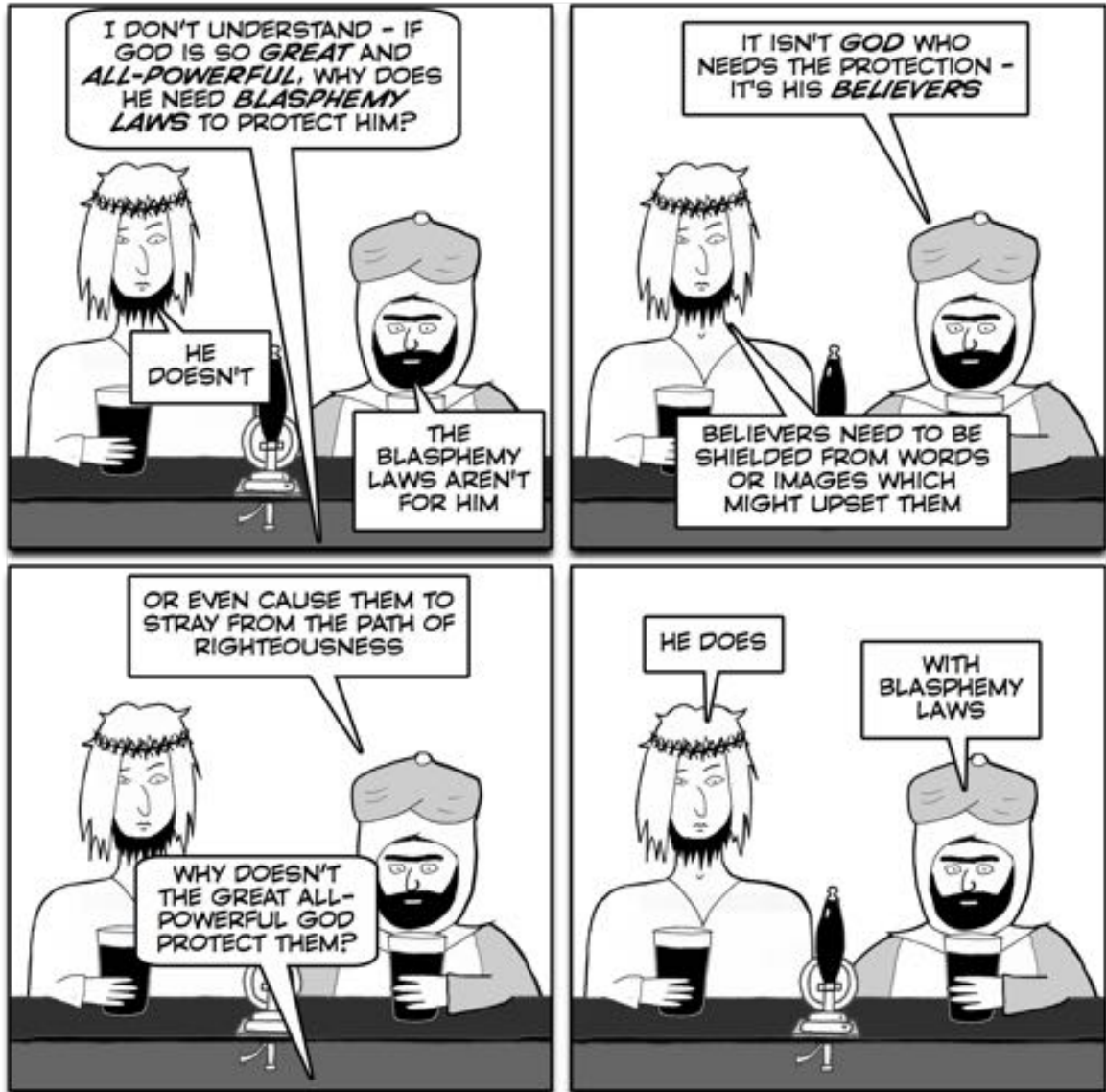
## basis



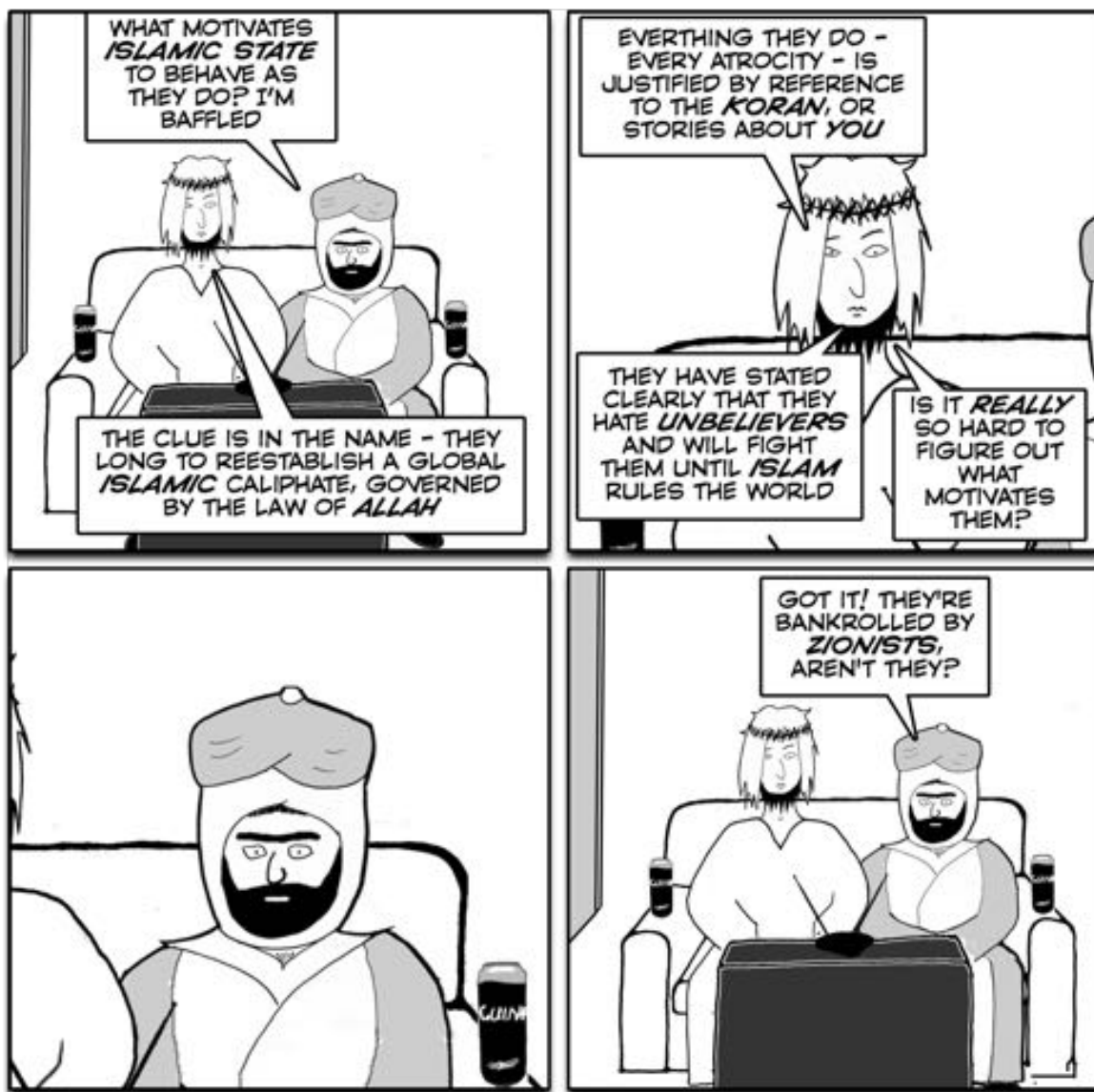
saved



upset



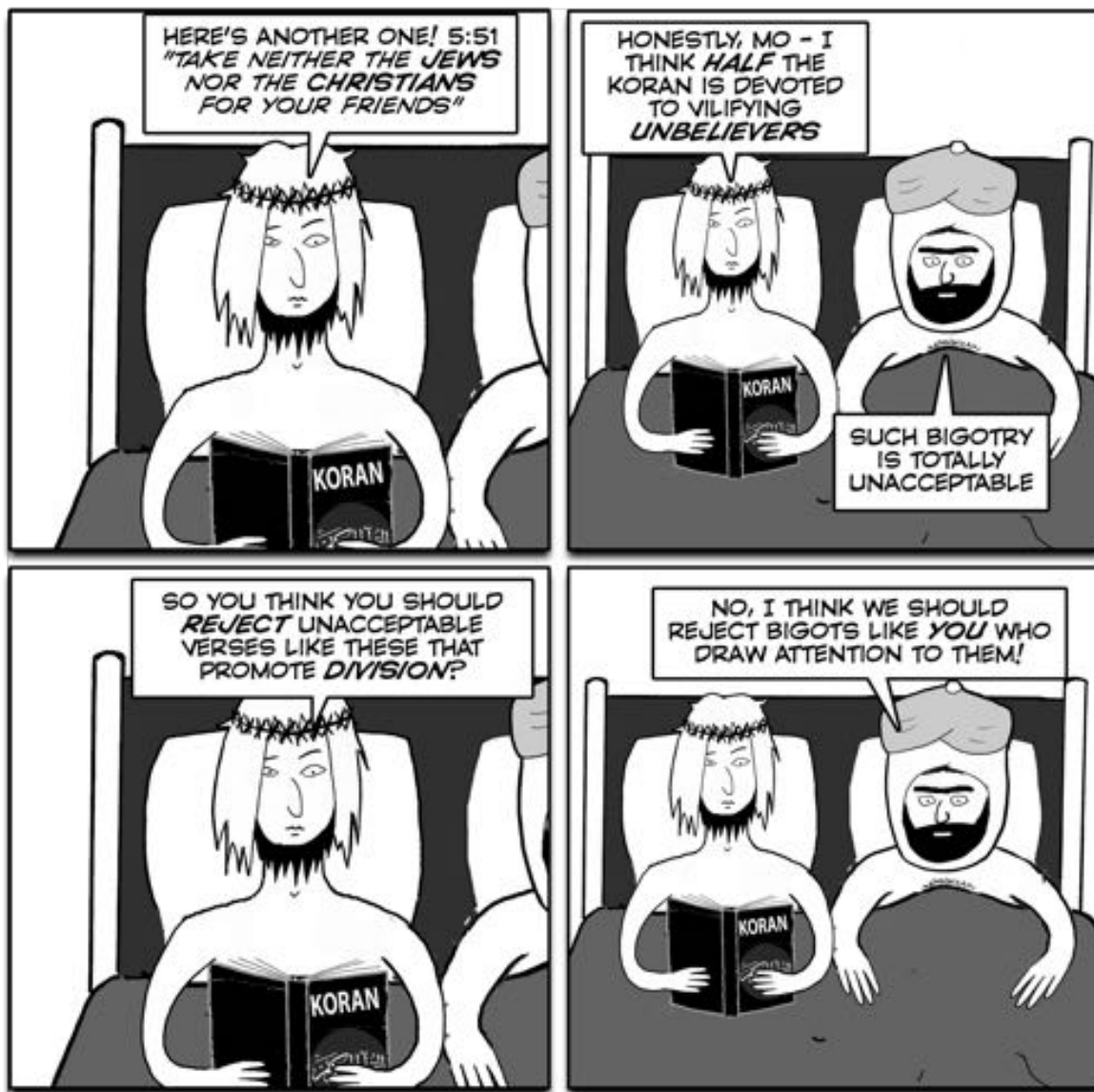
clue



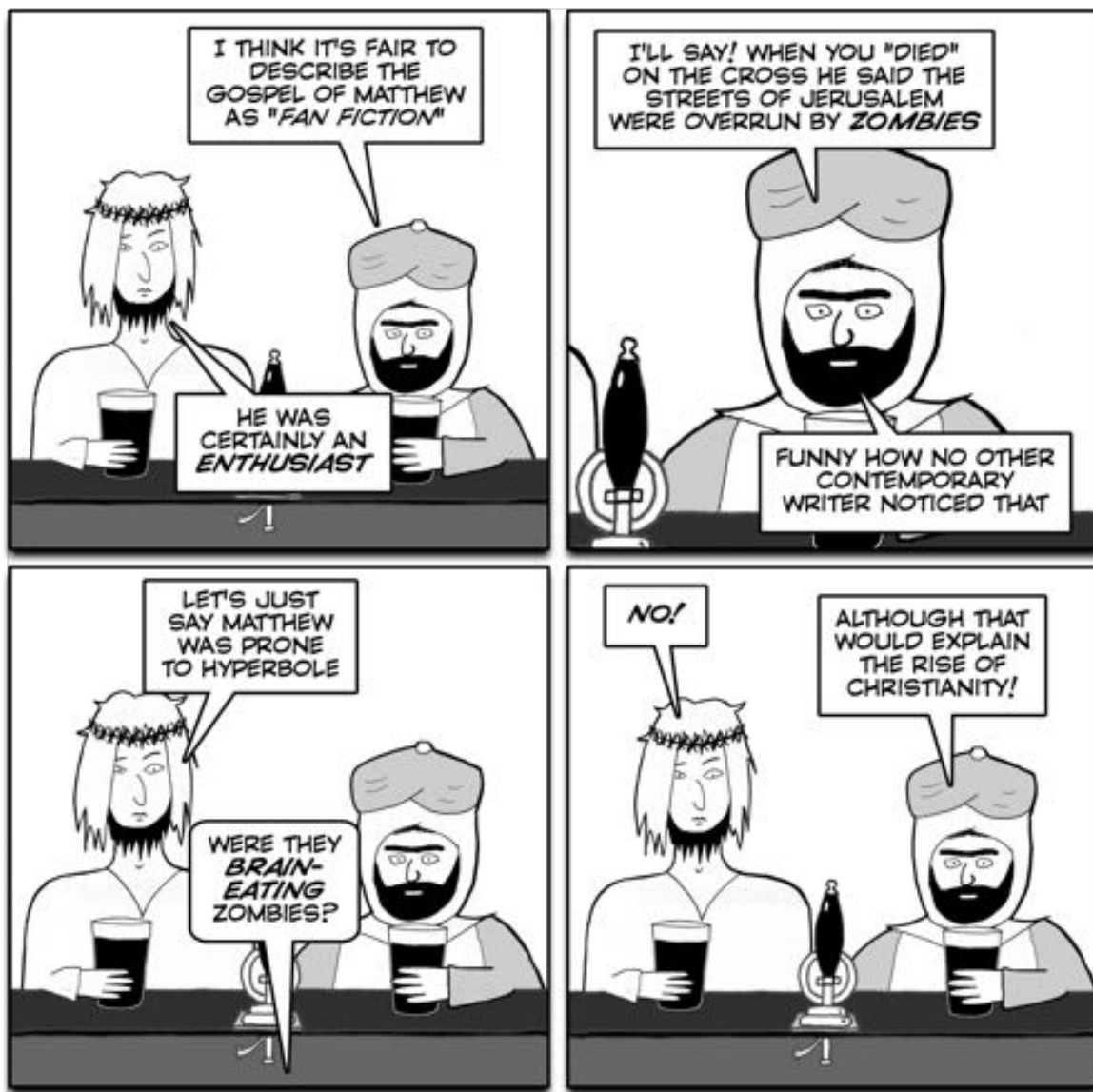
glory



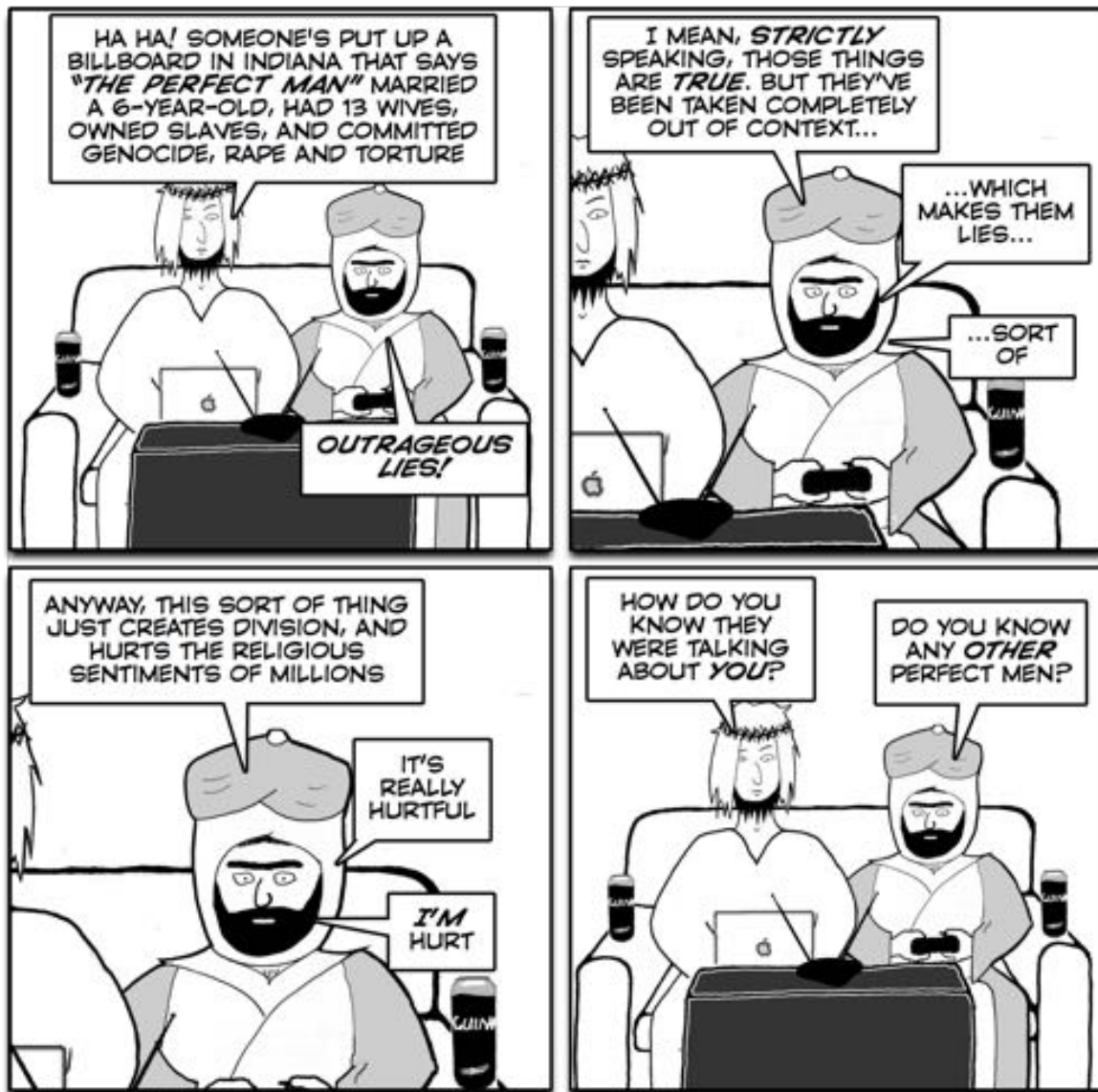
reject



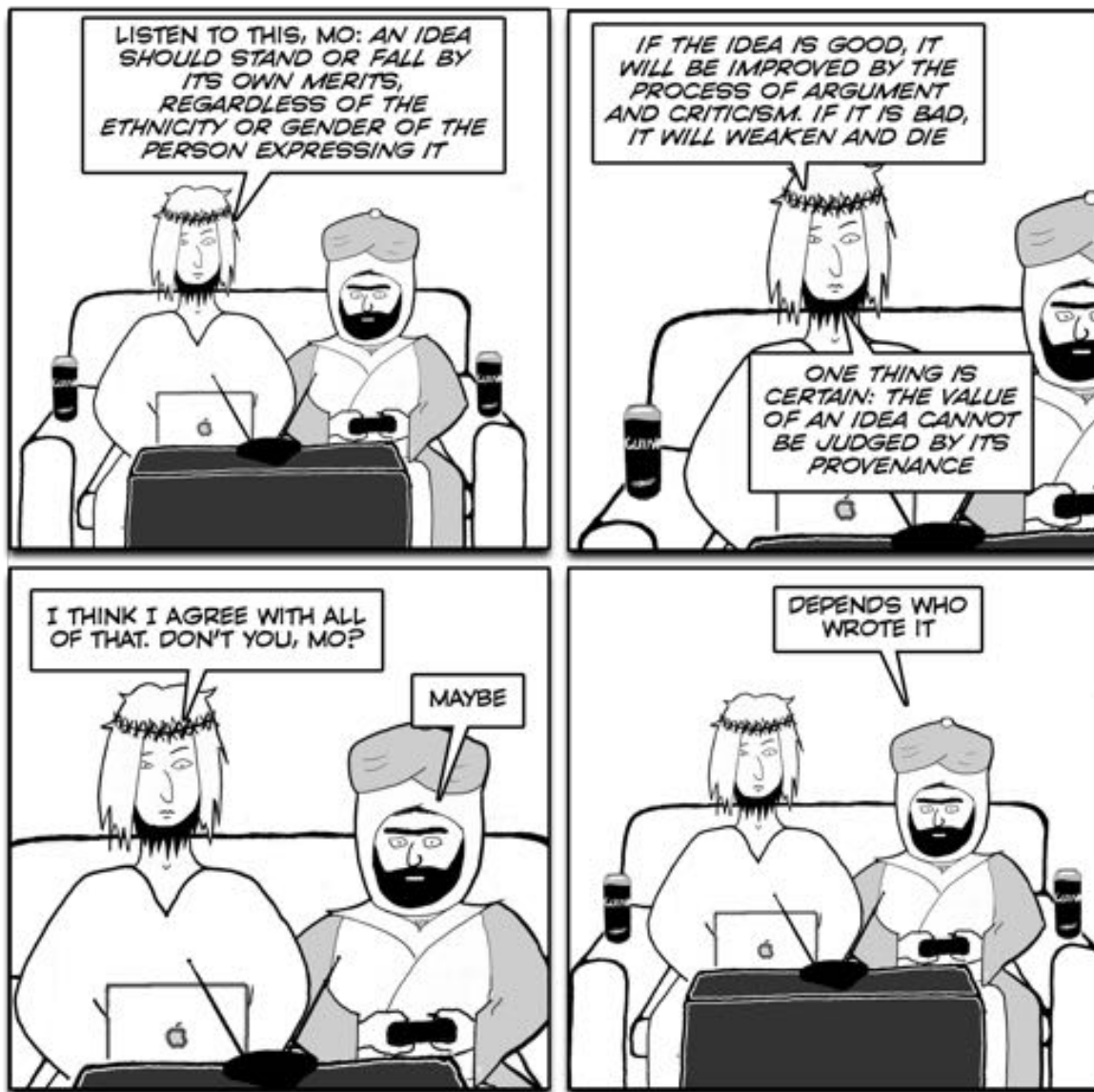
rise



hurts



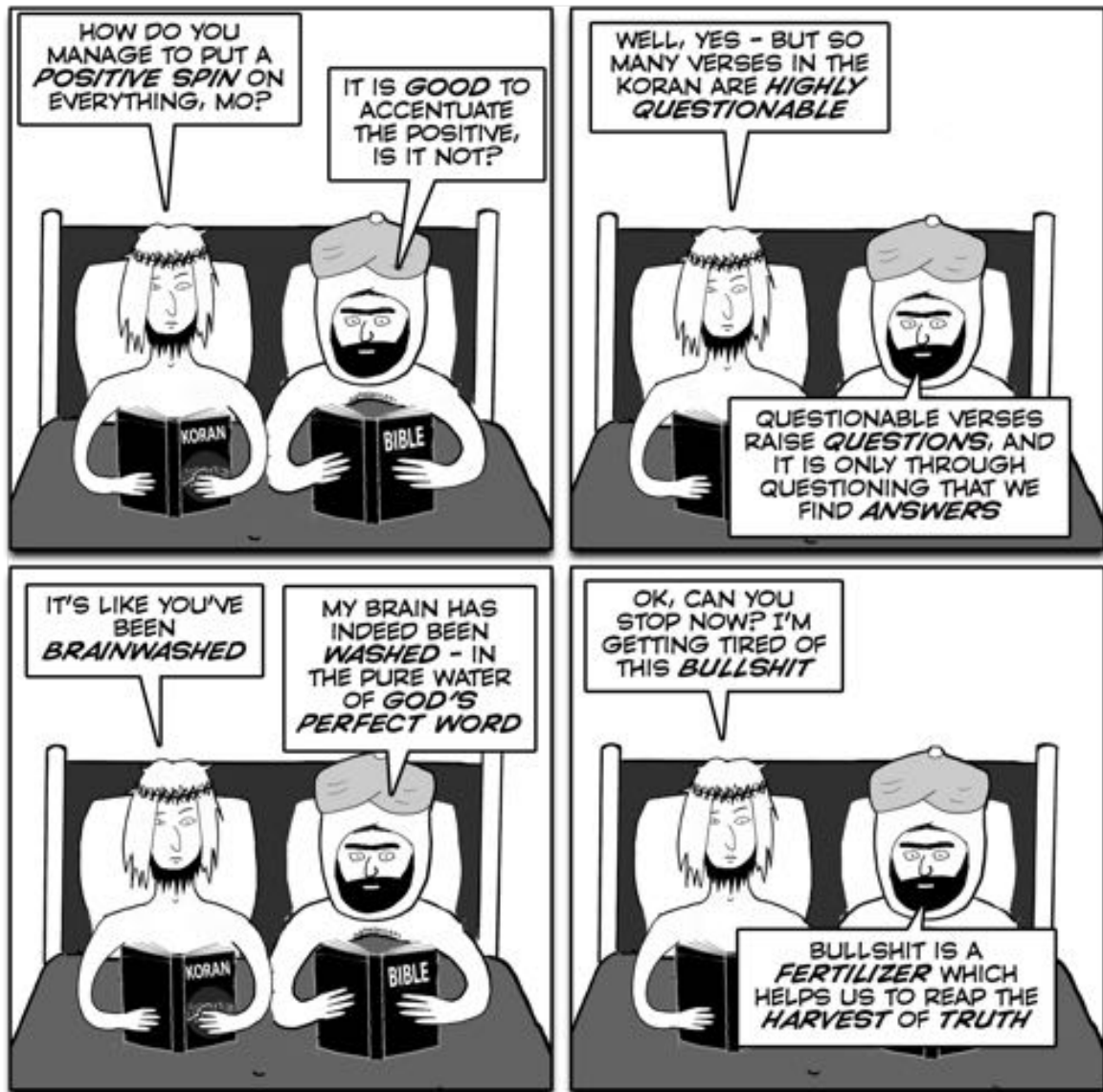
fall



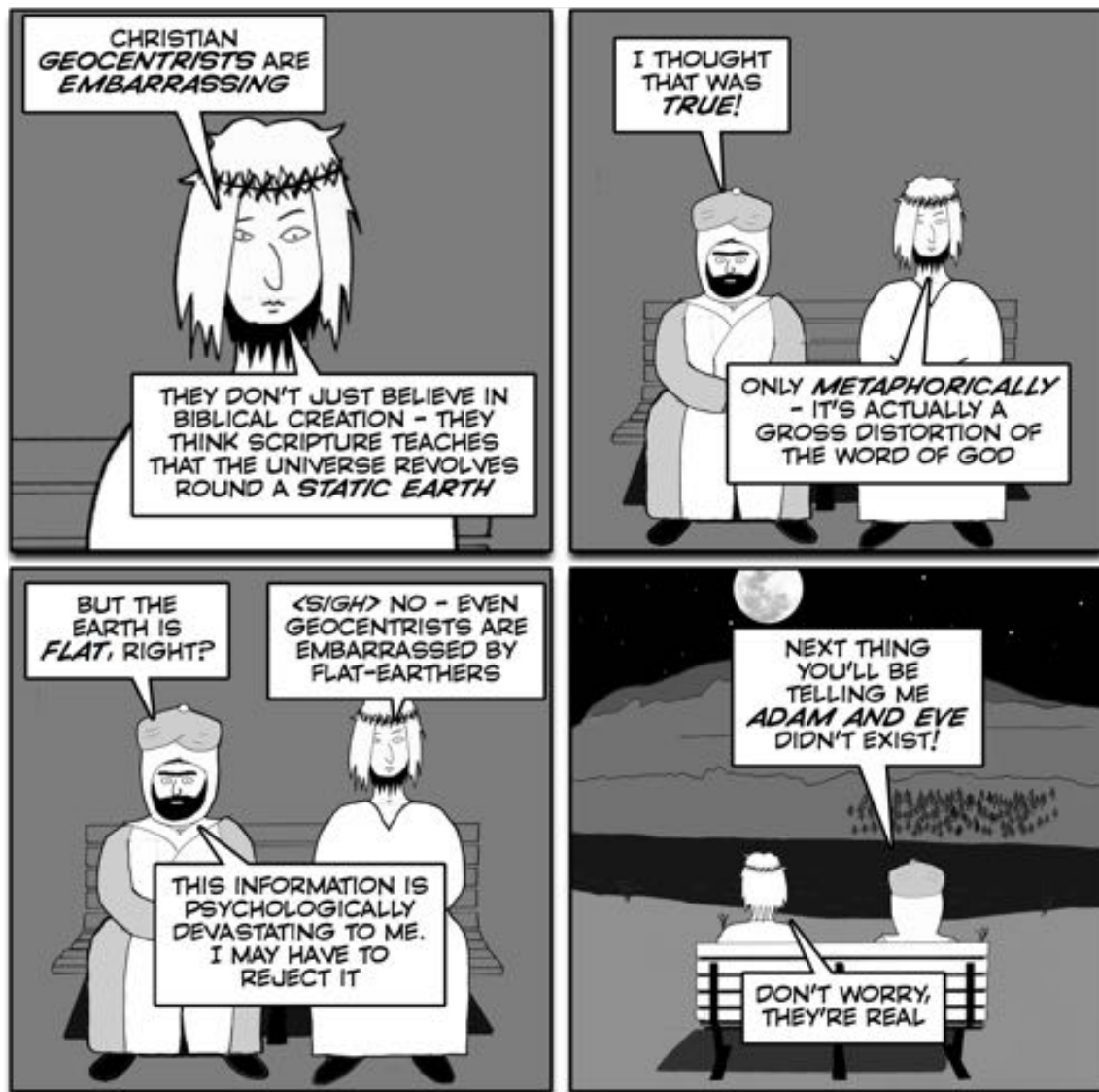
## Wade



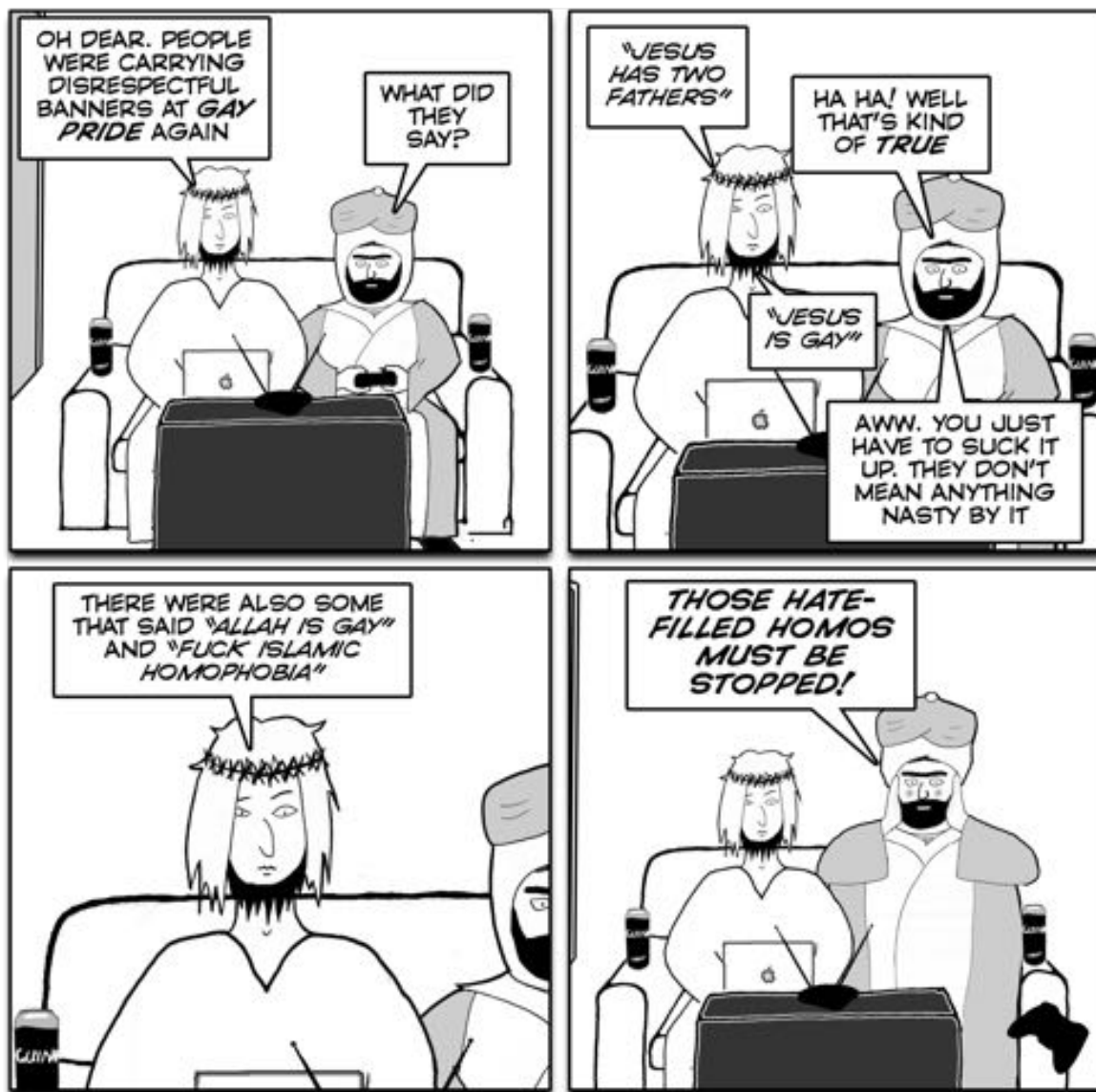
spin



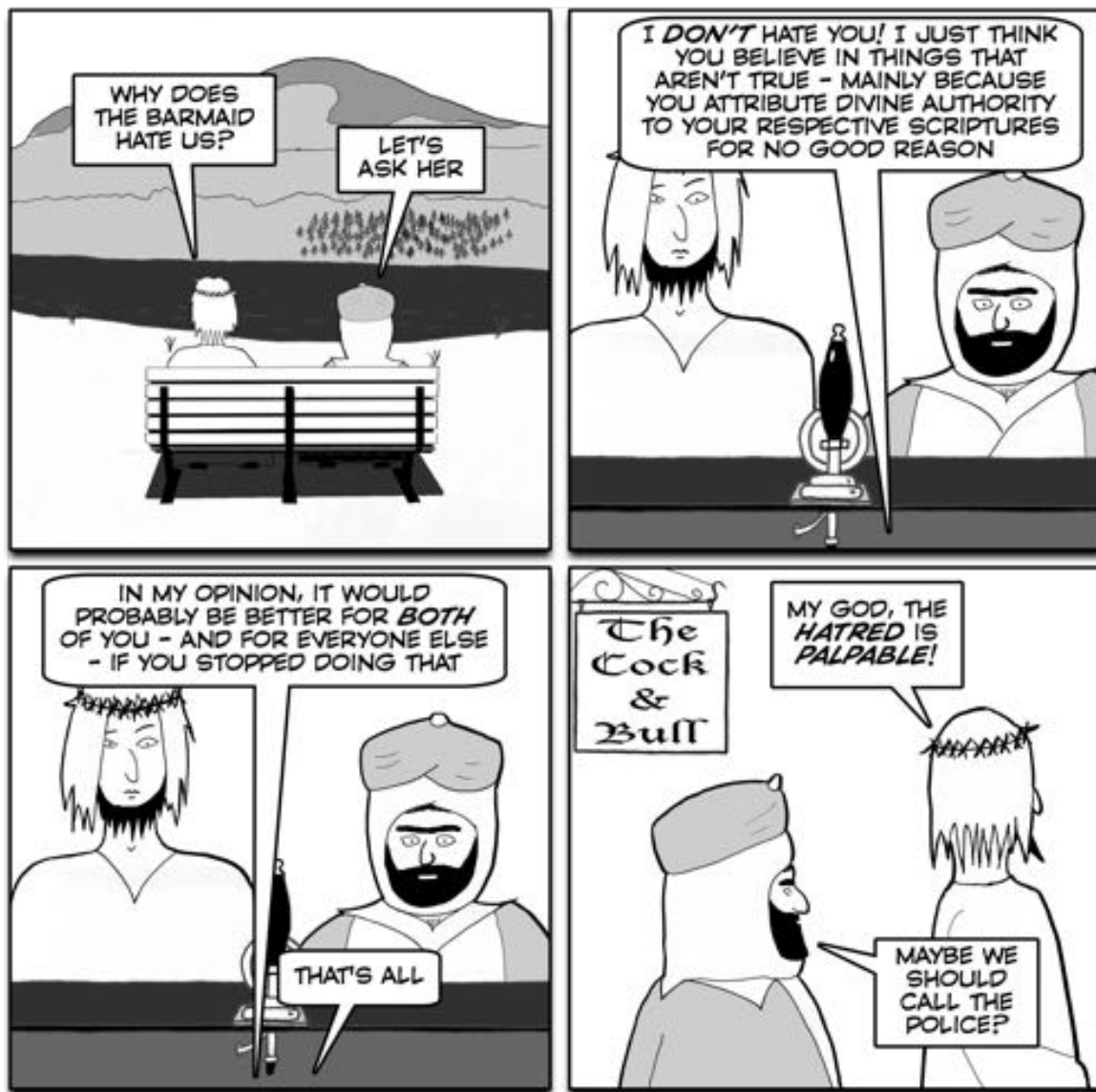
gross



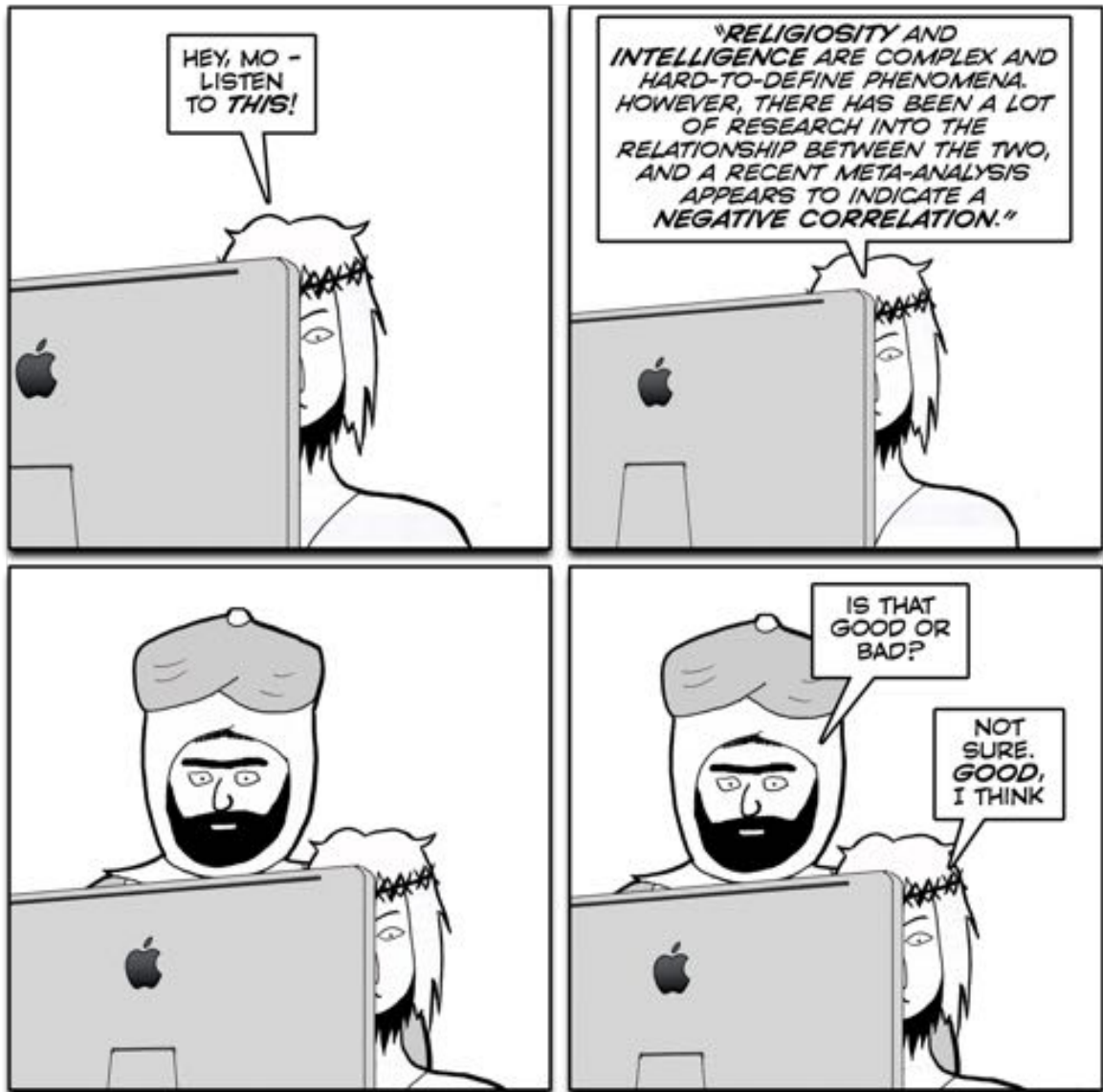
## homos



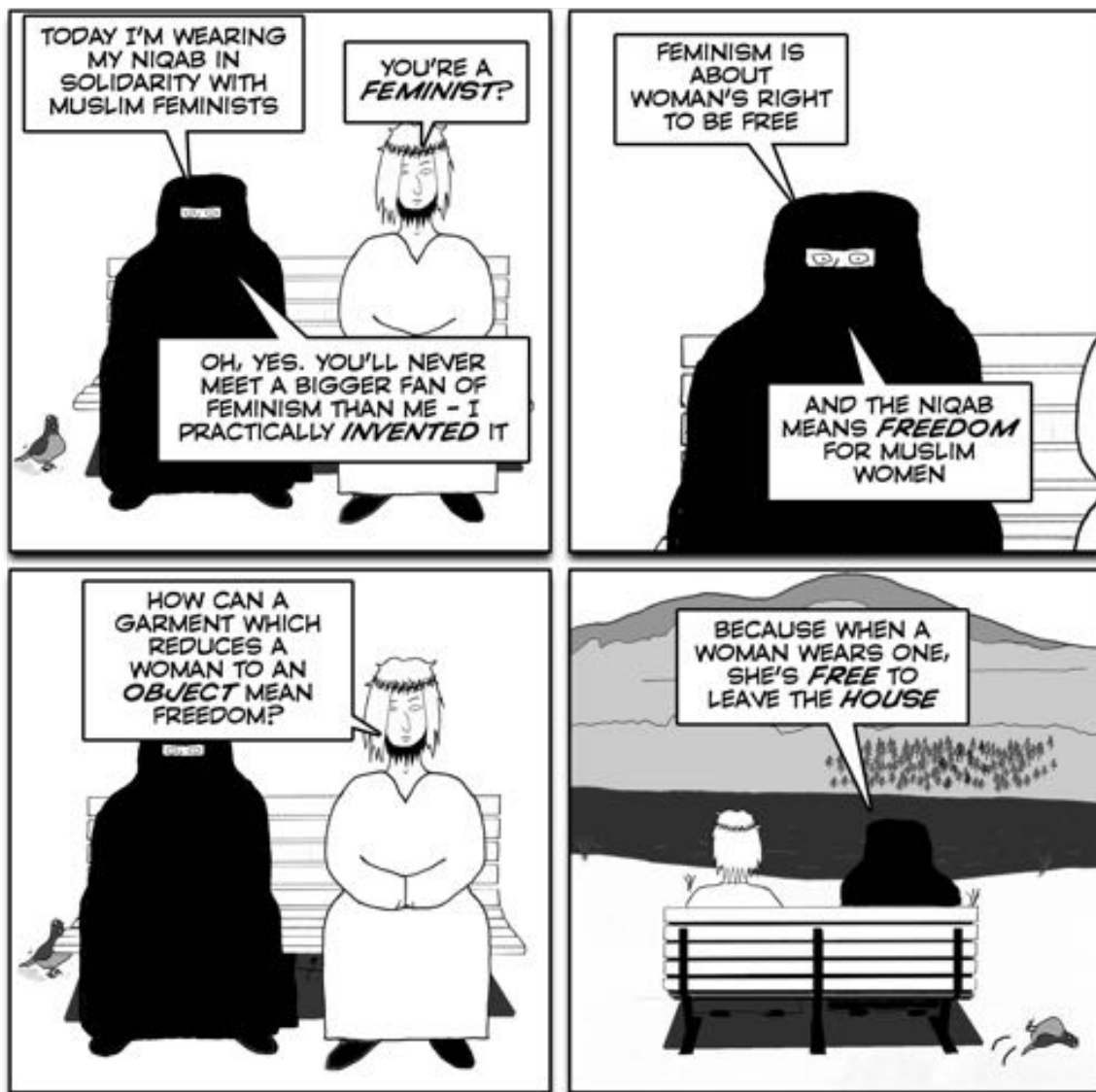
## police



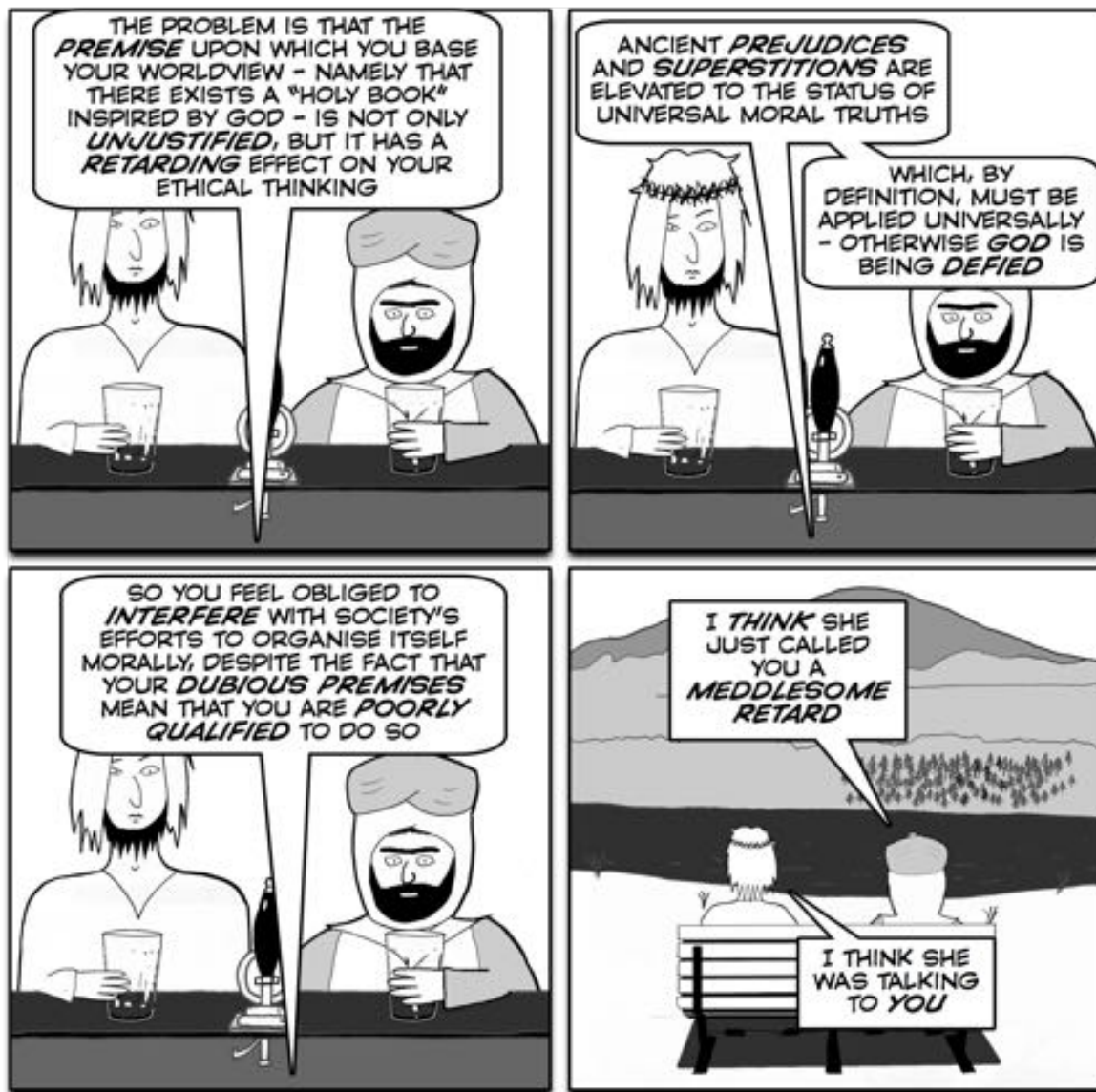
bad



fan



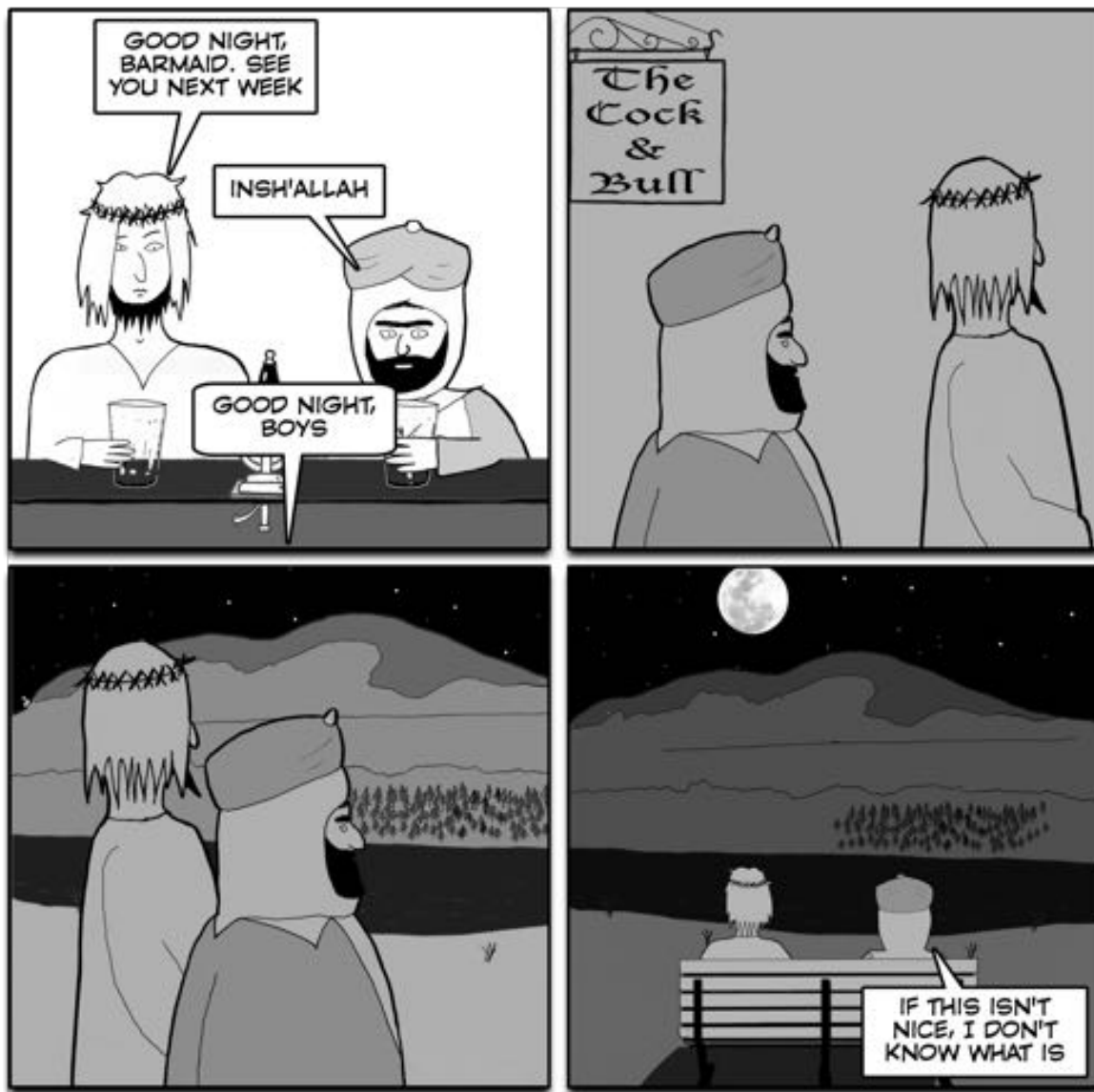
think



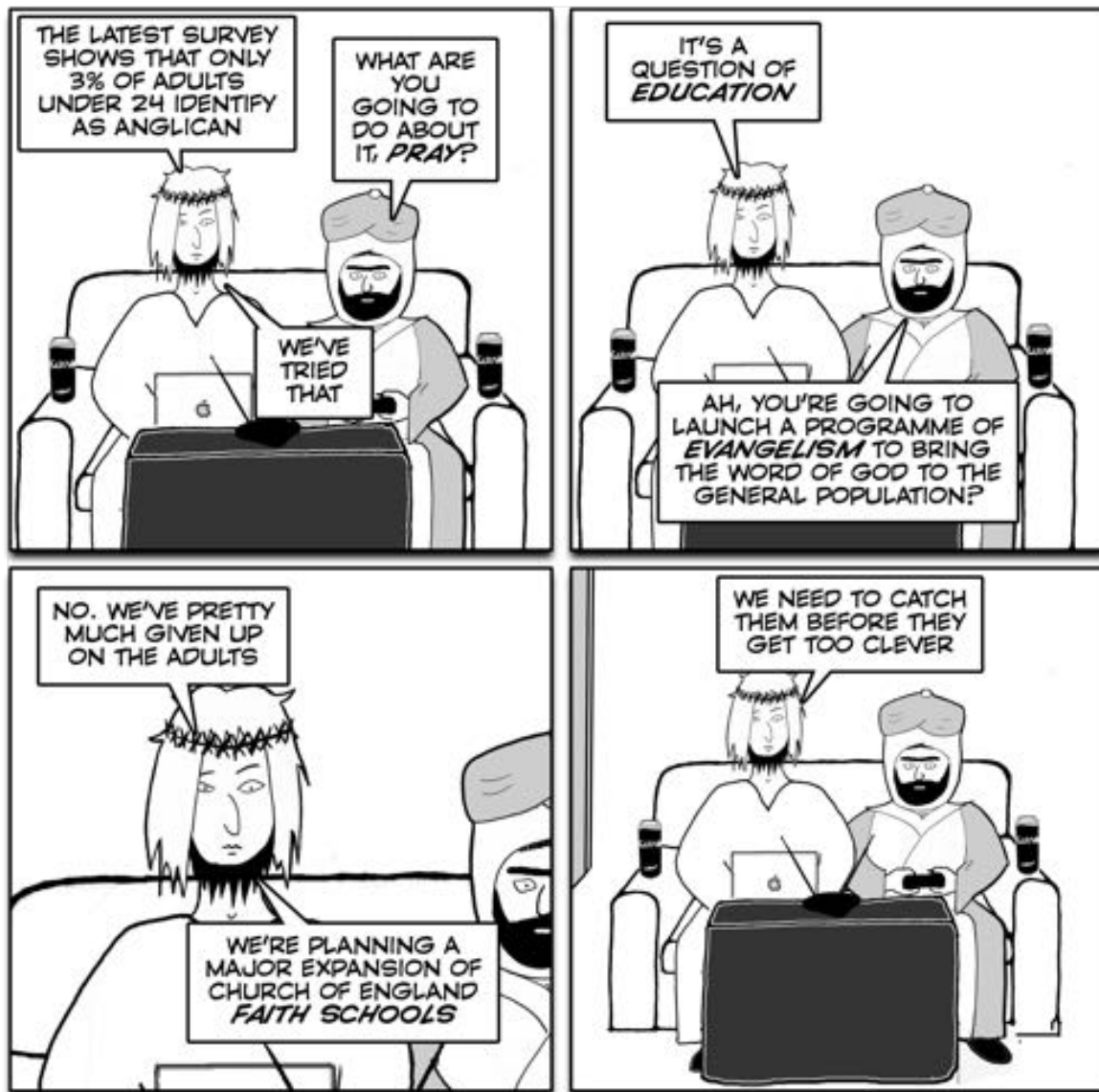
sing



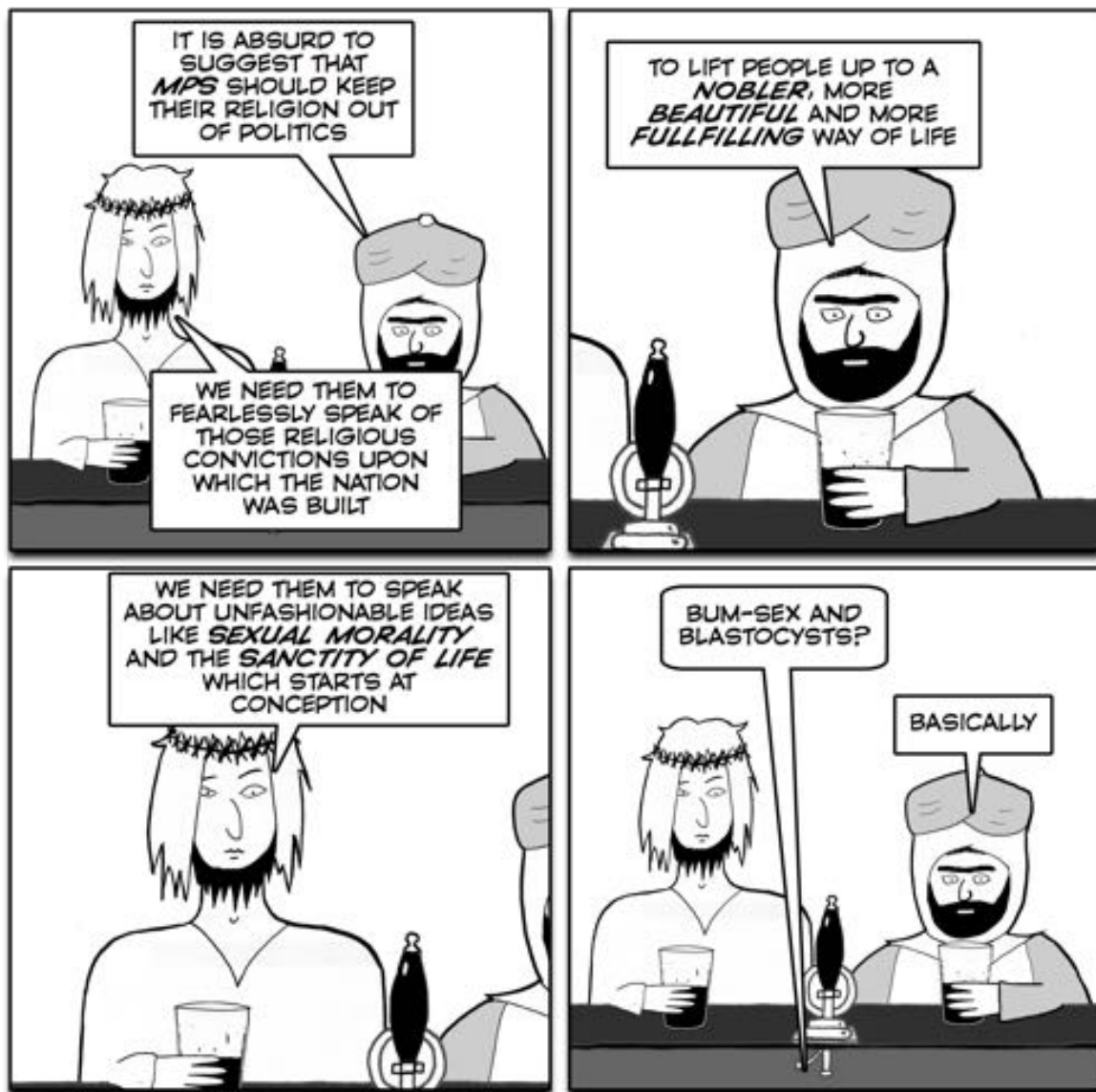
nice



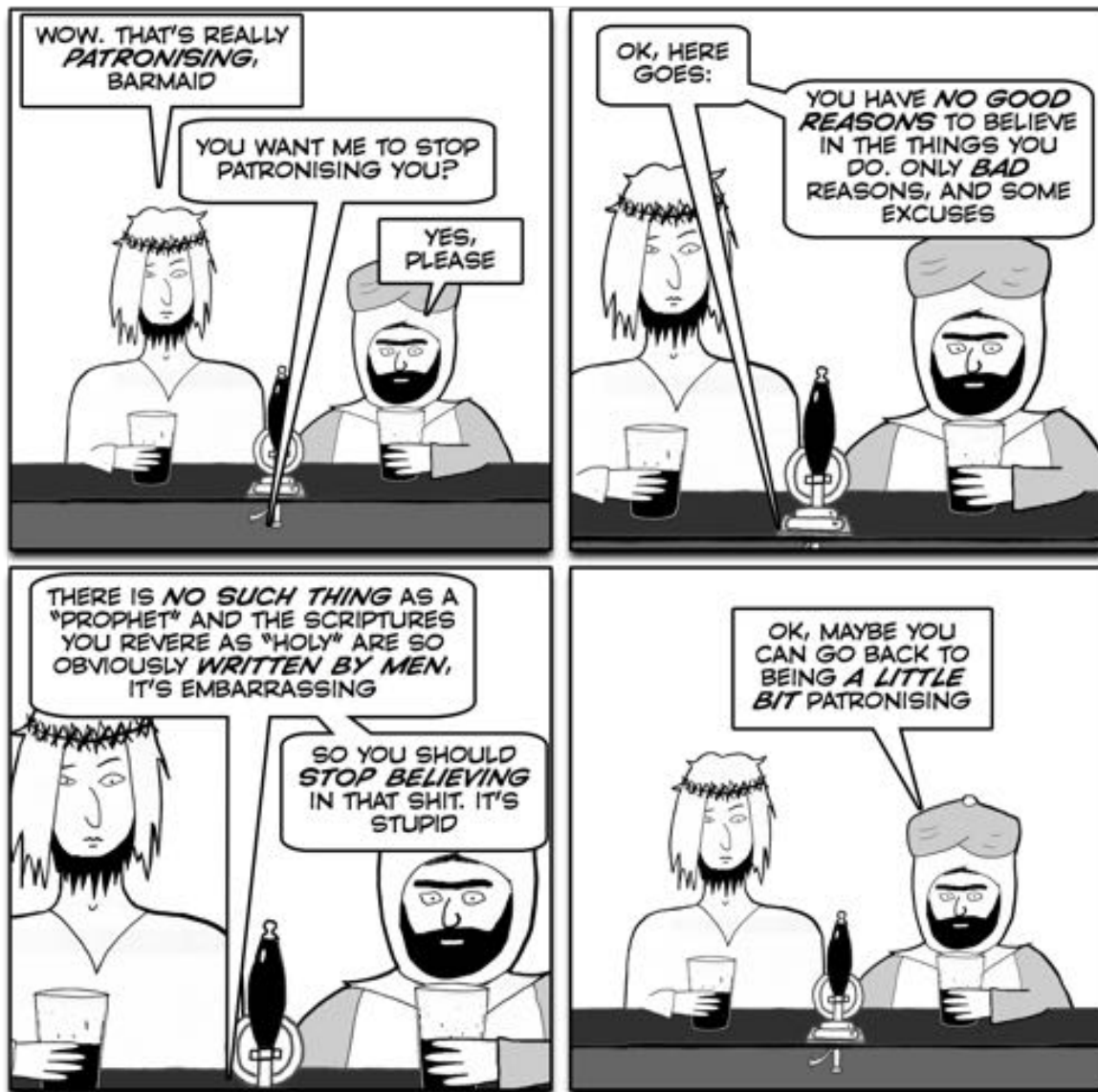
## pray



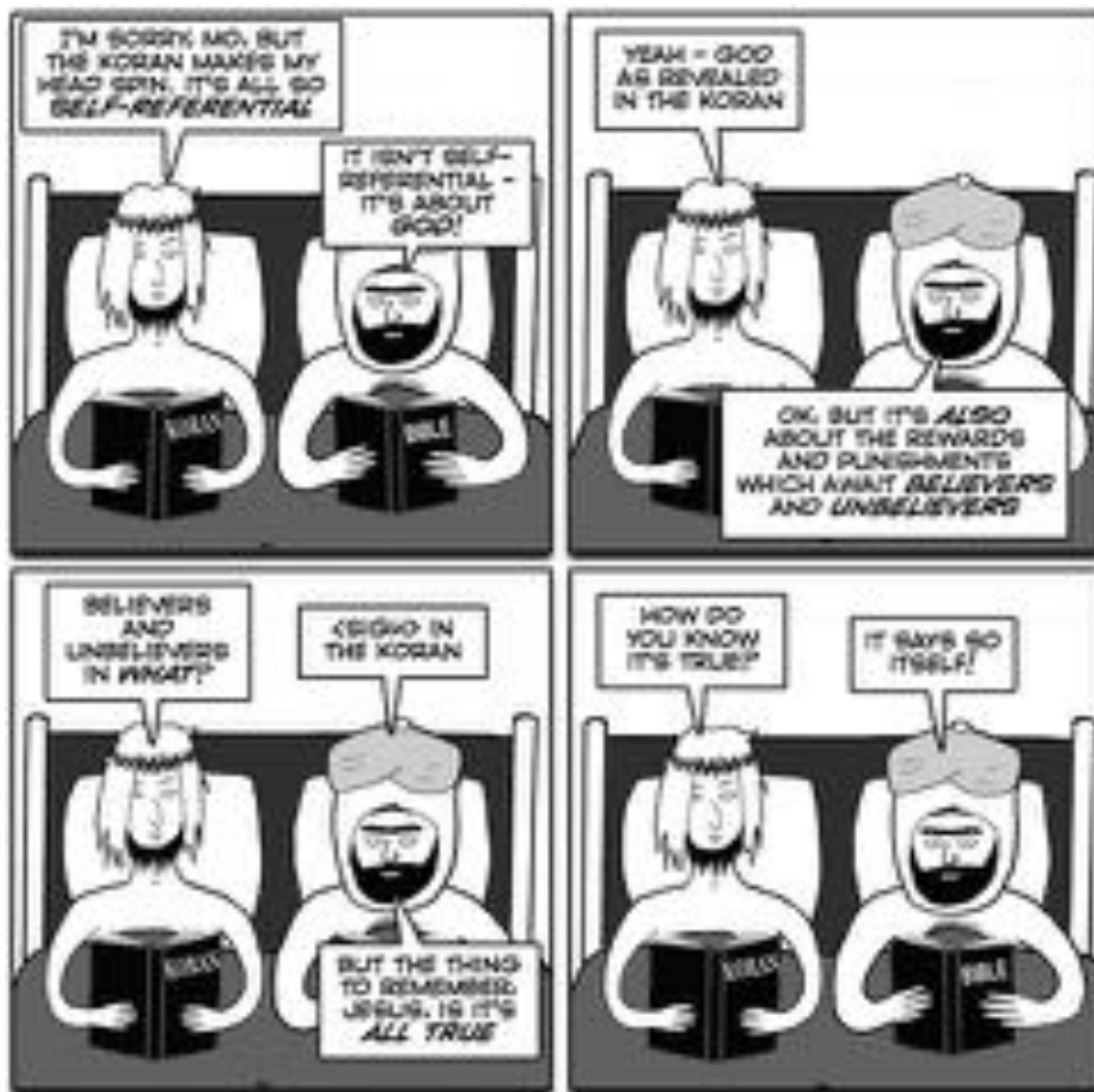
bum



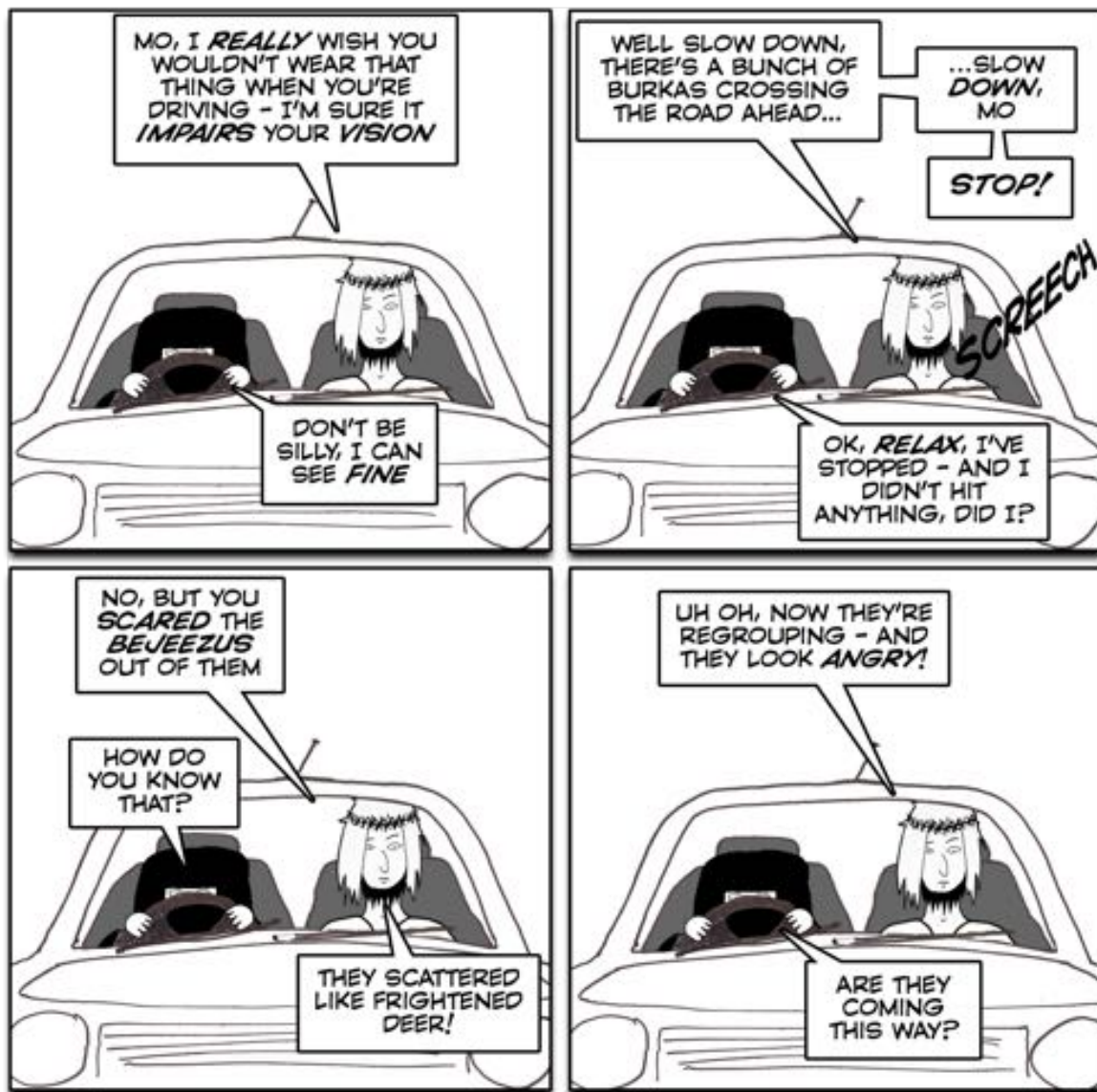
little



await



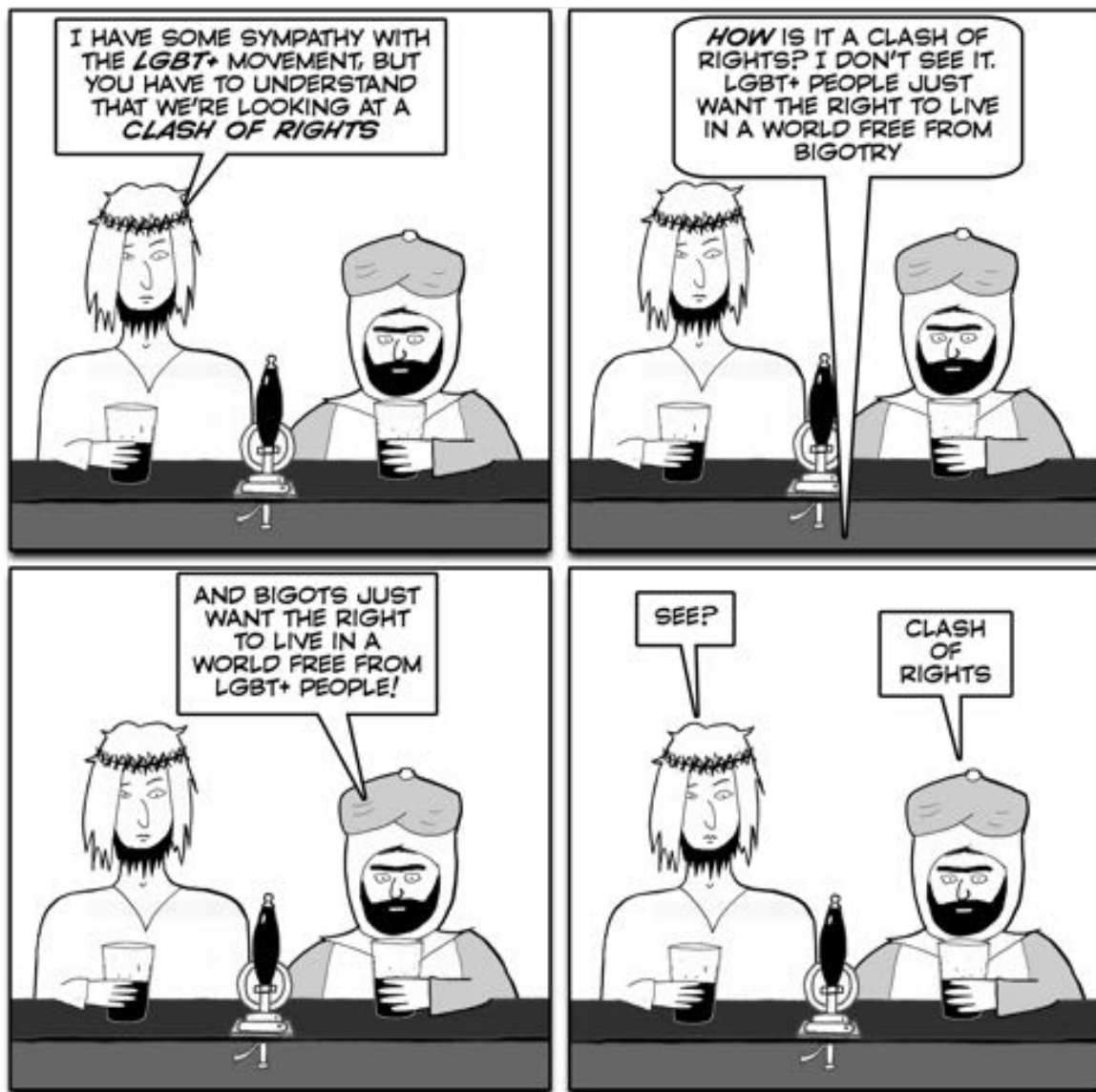
deer



## song



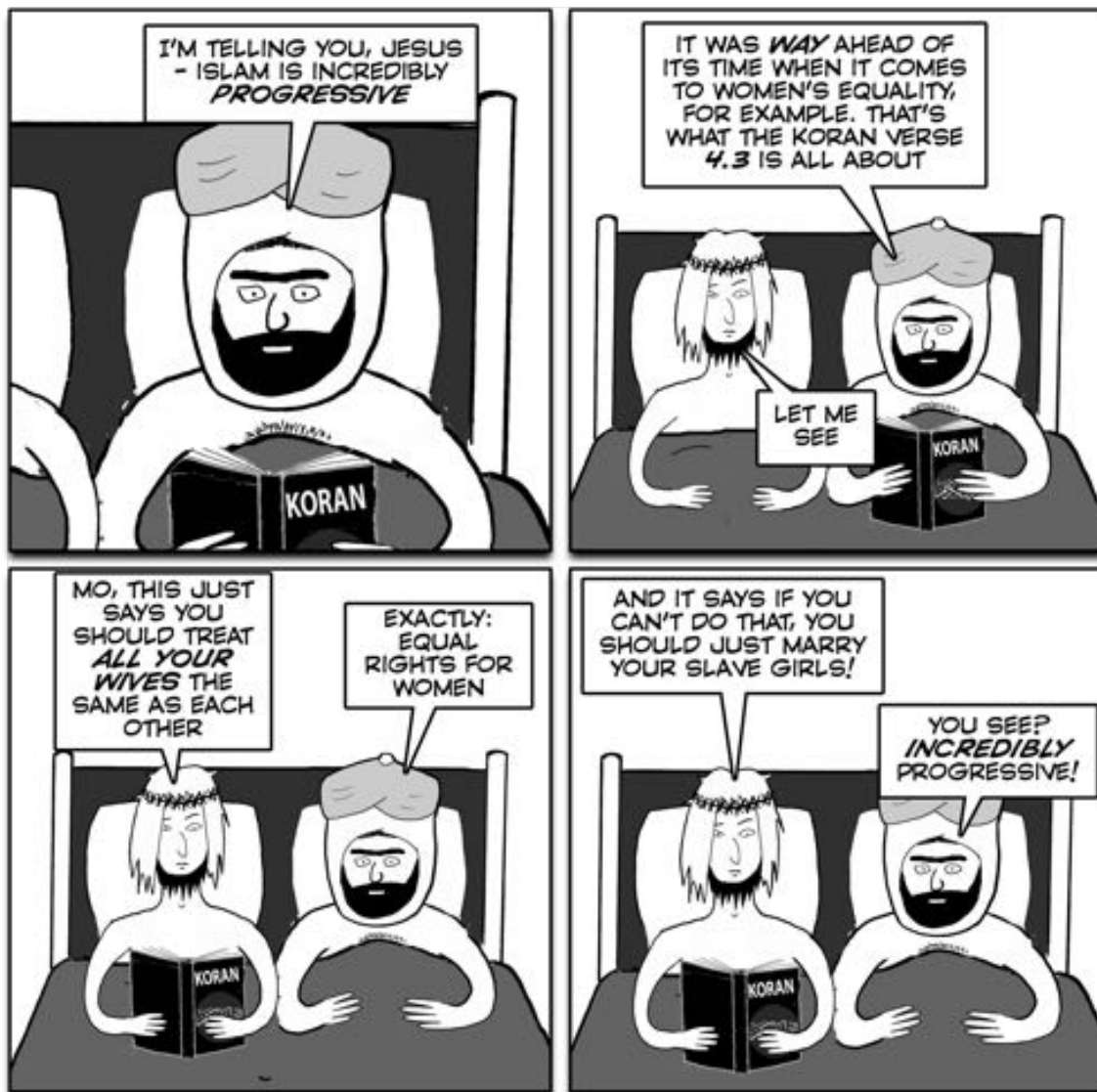
# clash



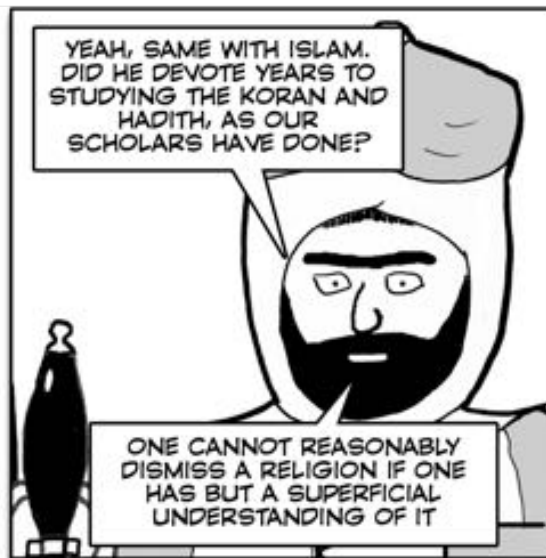
## Why?



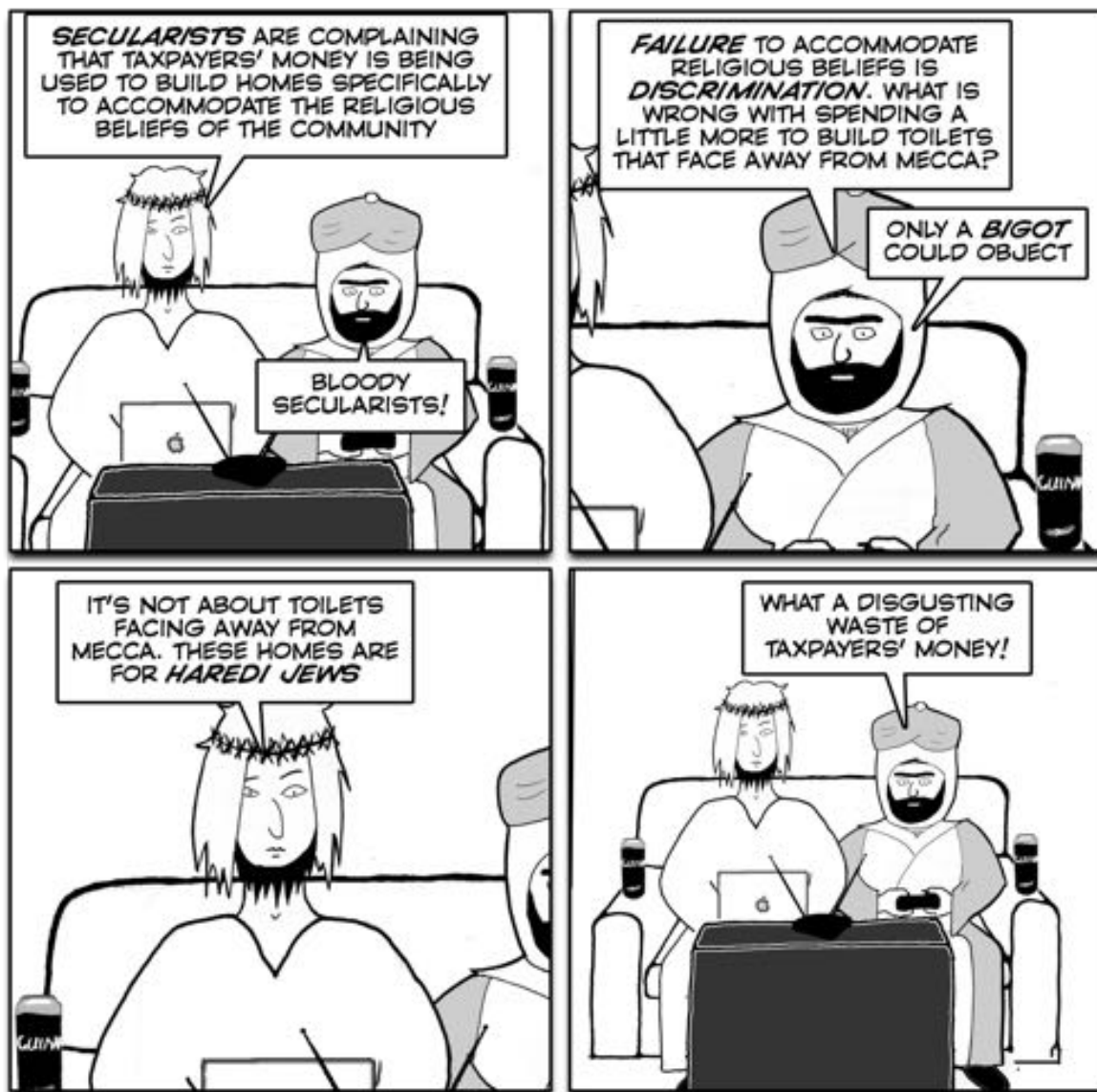
ahead



## arms



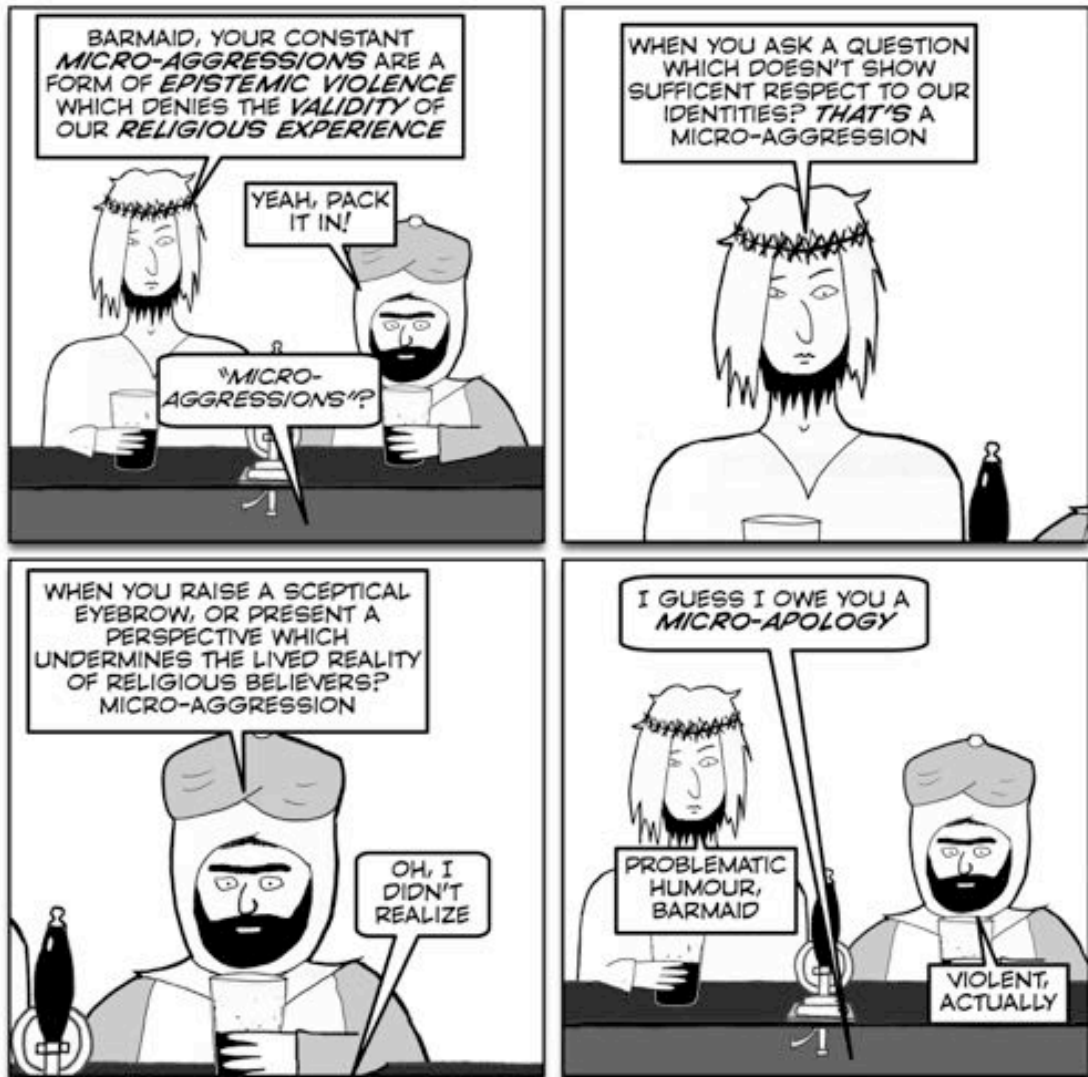
## homes



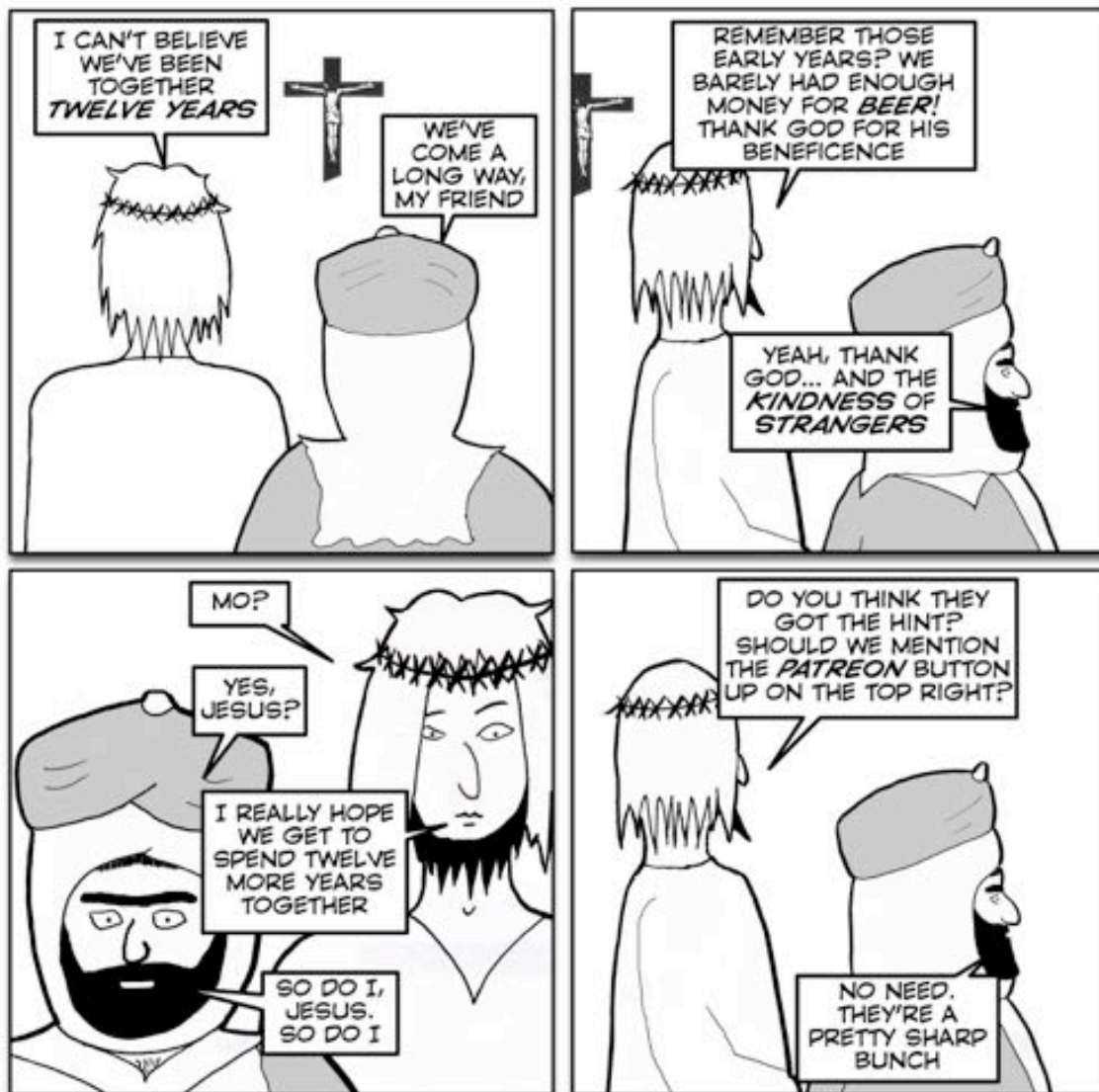
adopt



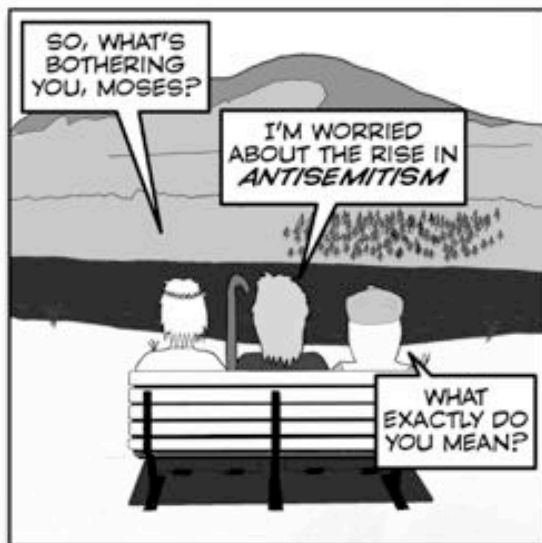
## micro



## twelve



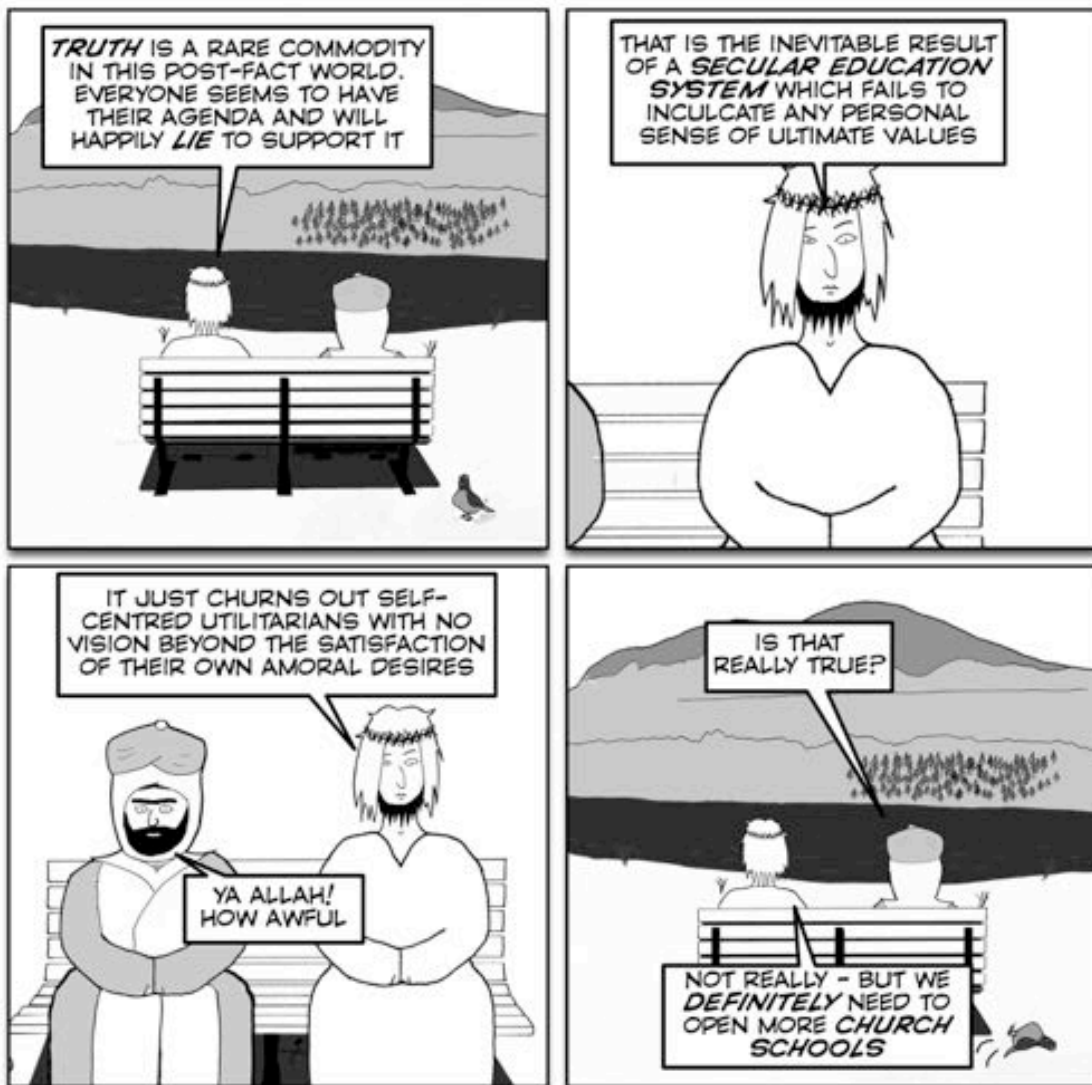
## strings



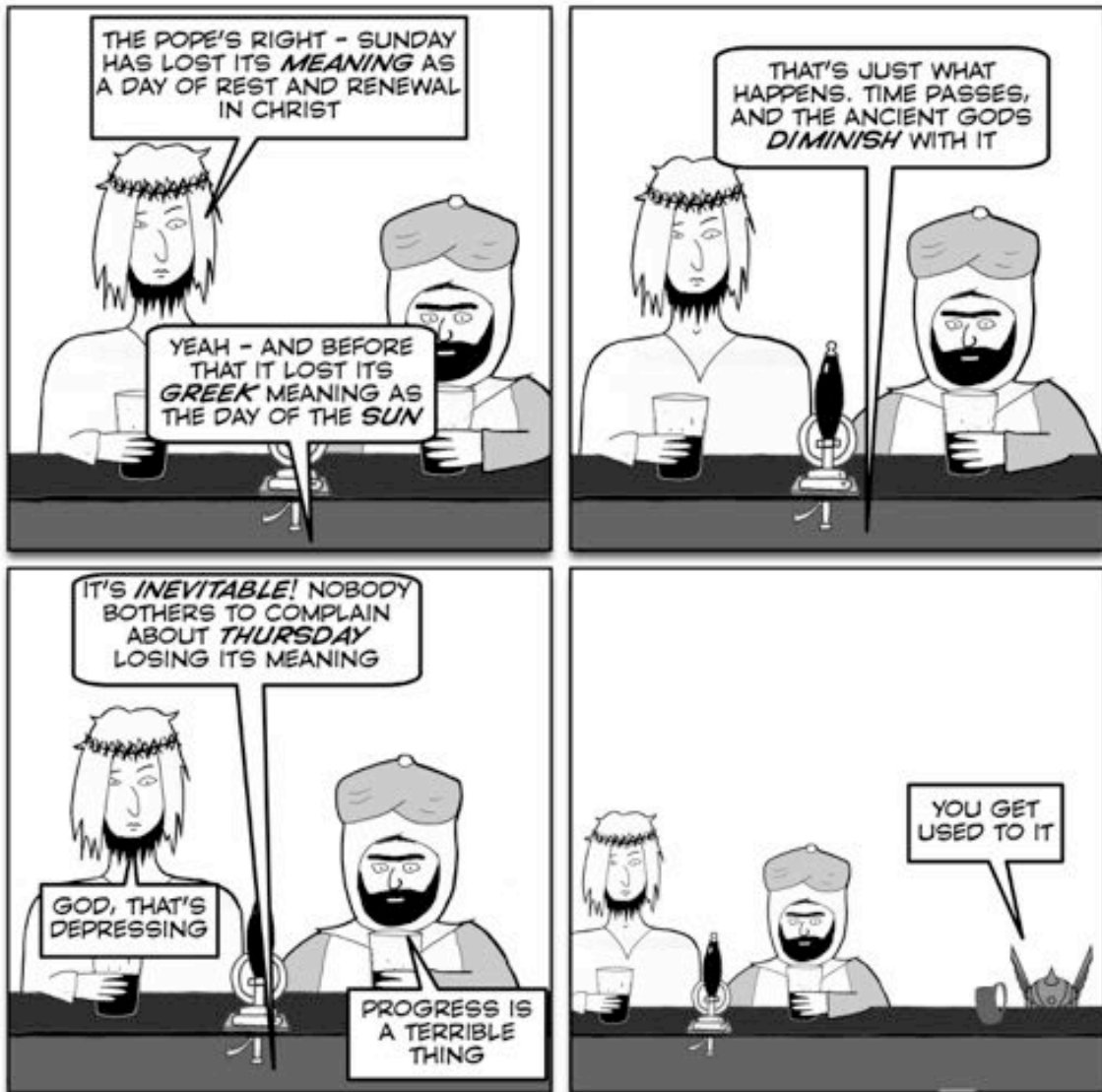
# altar



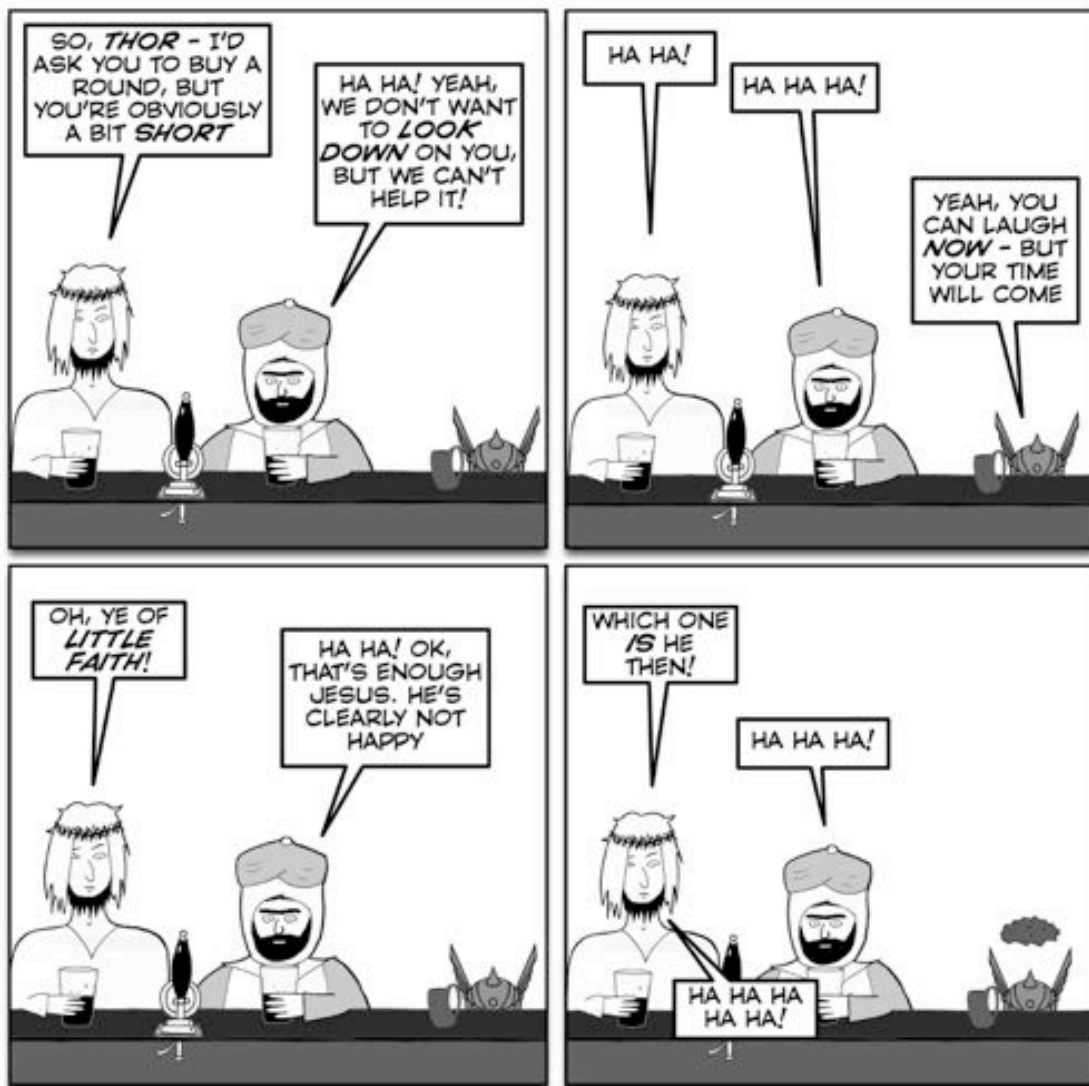
rare



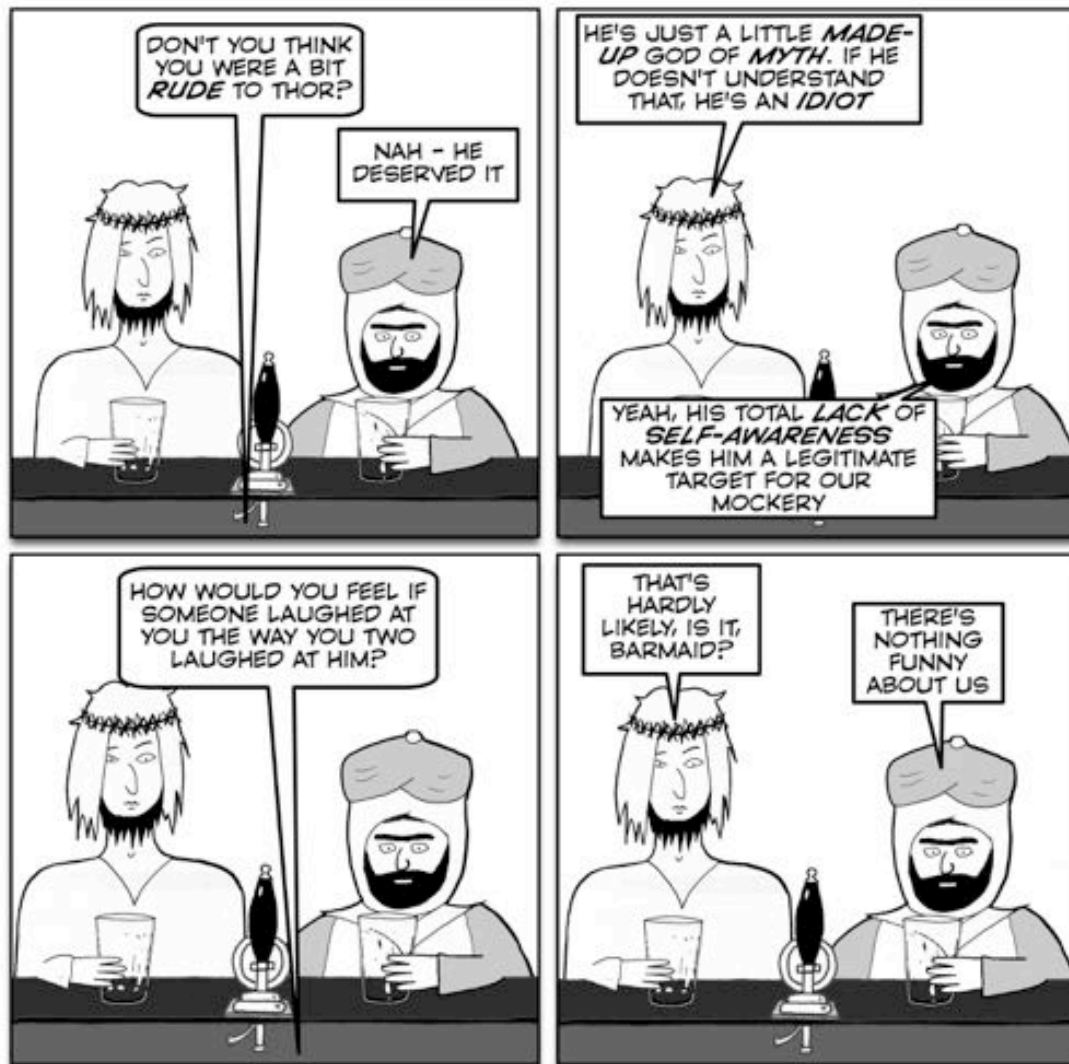
## gods



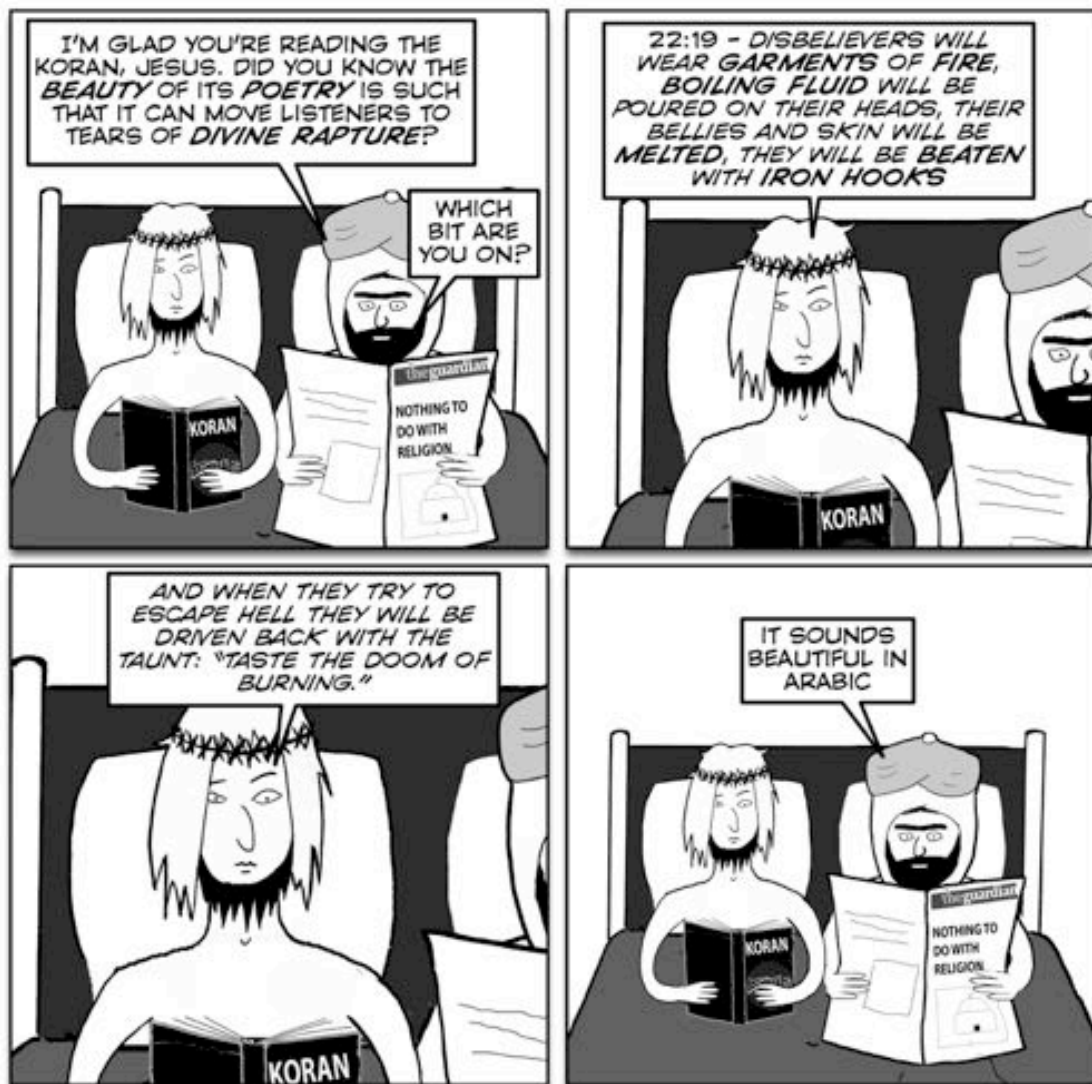
short



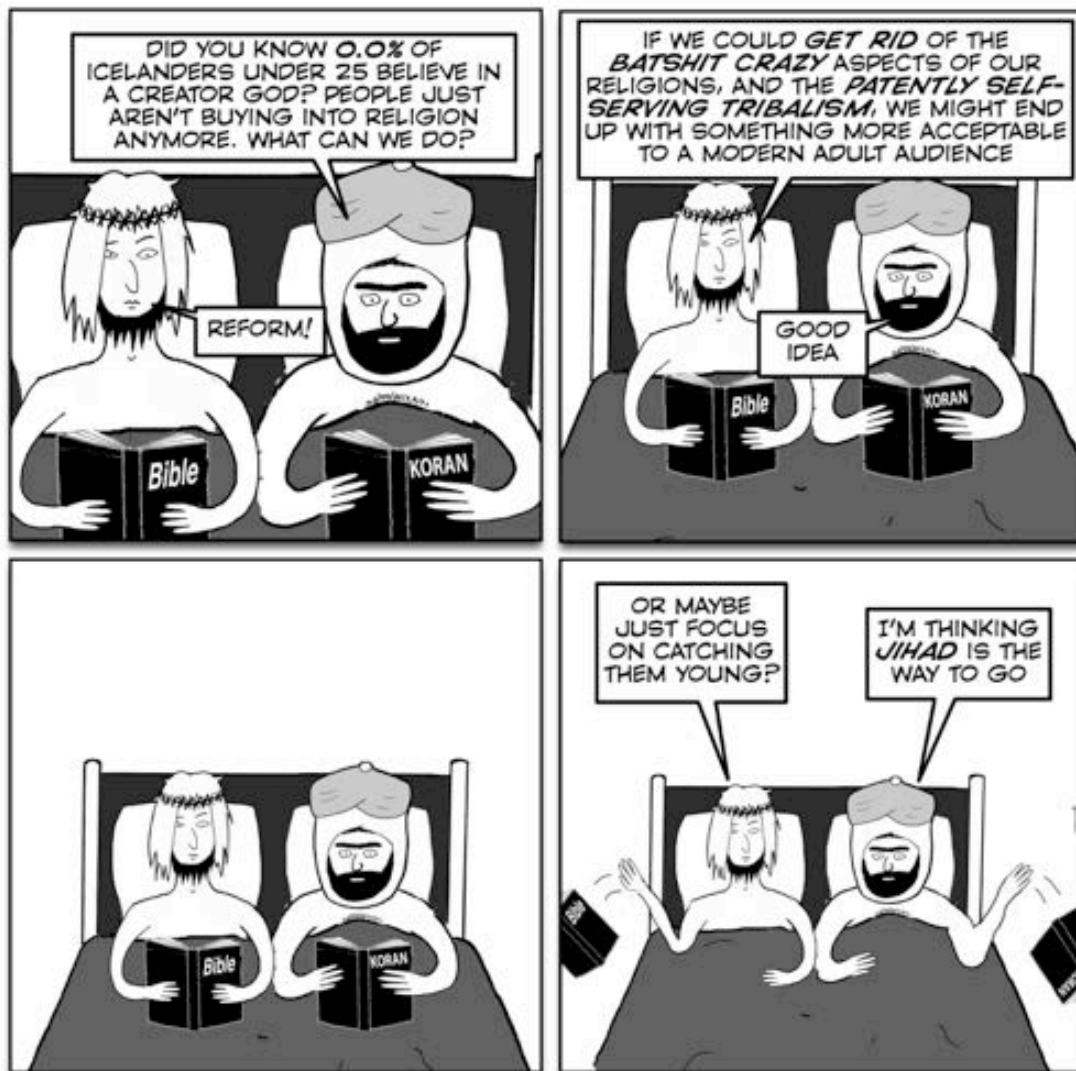
idiot



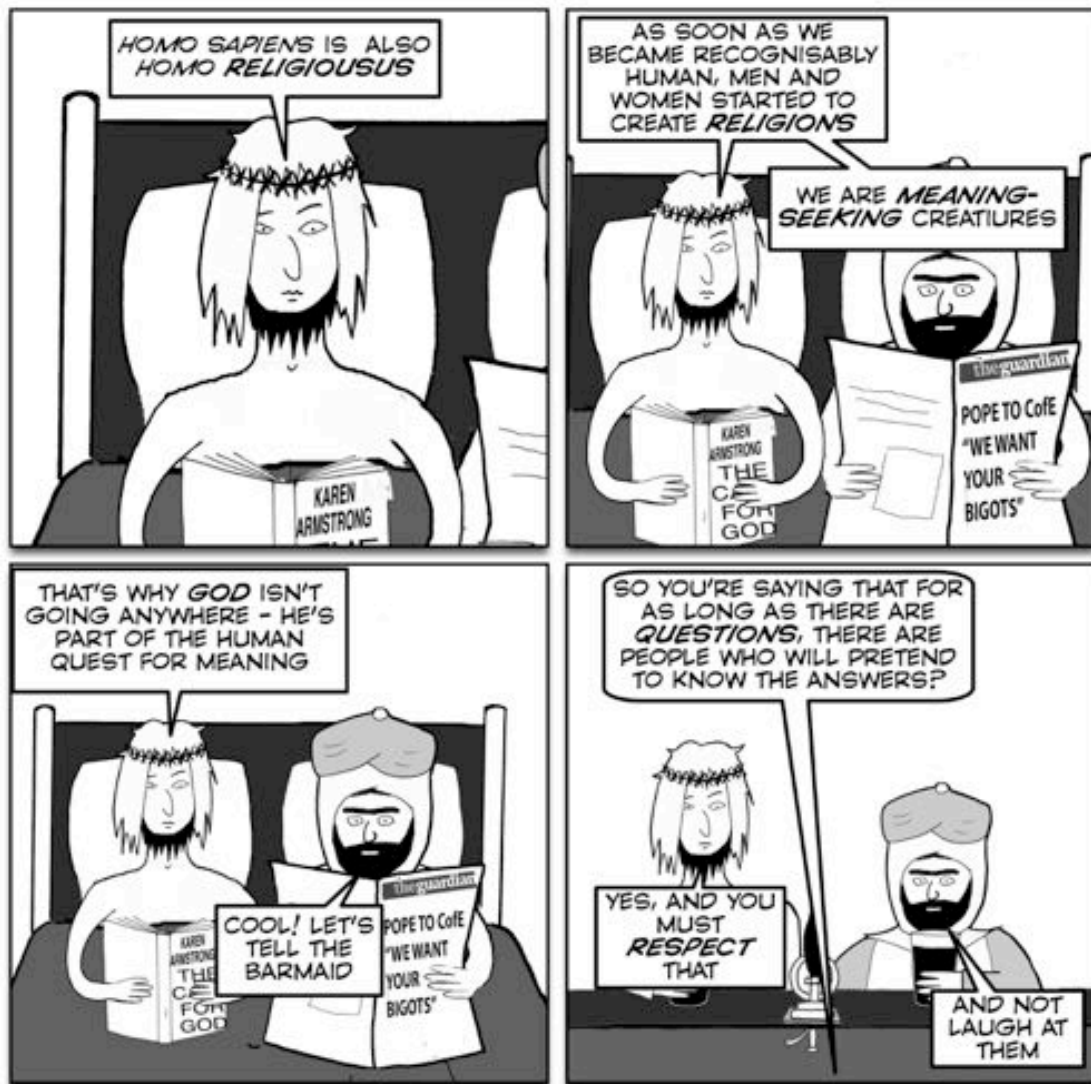
doom



adult

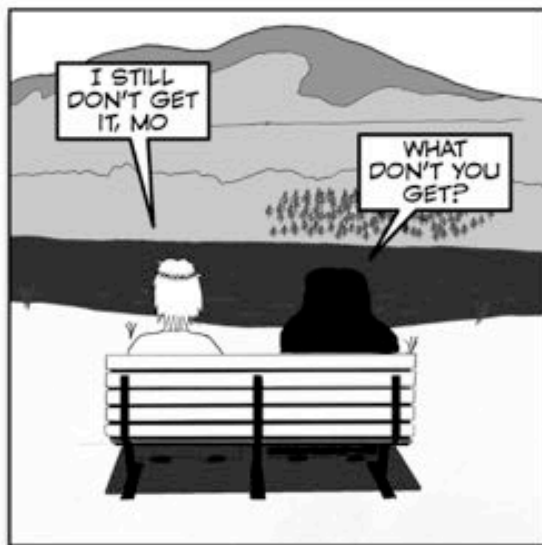


# homo

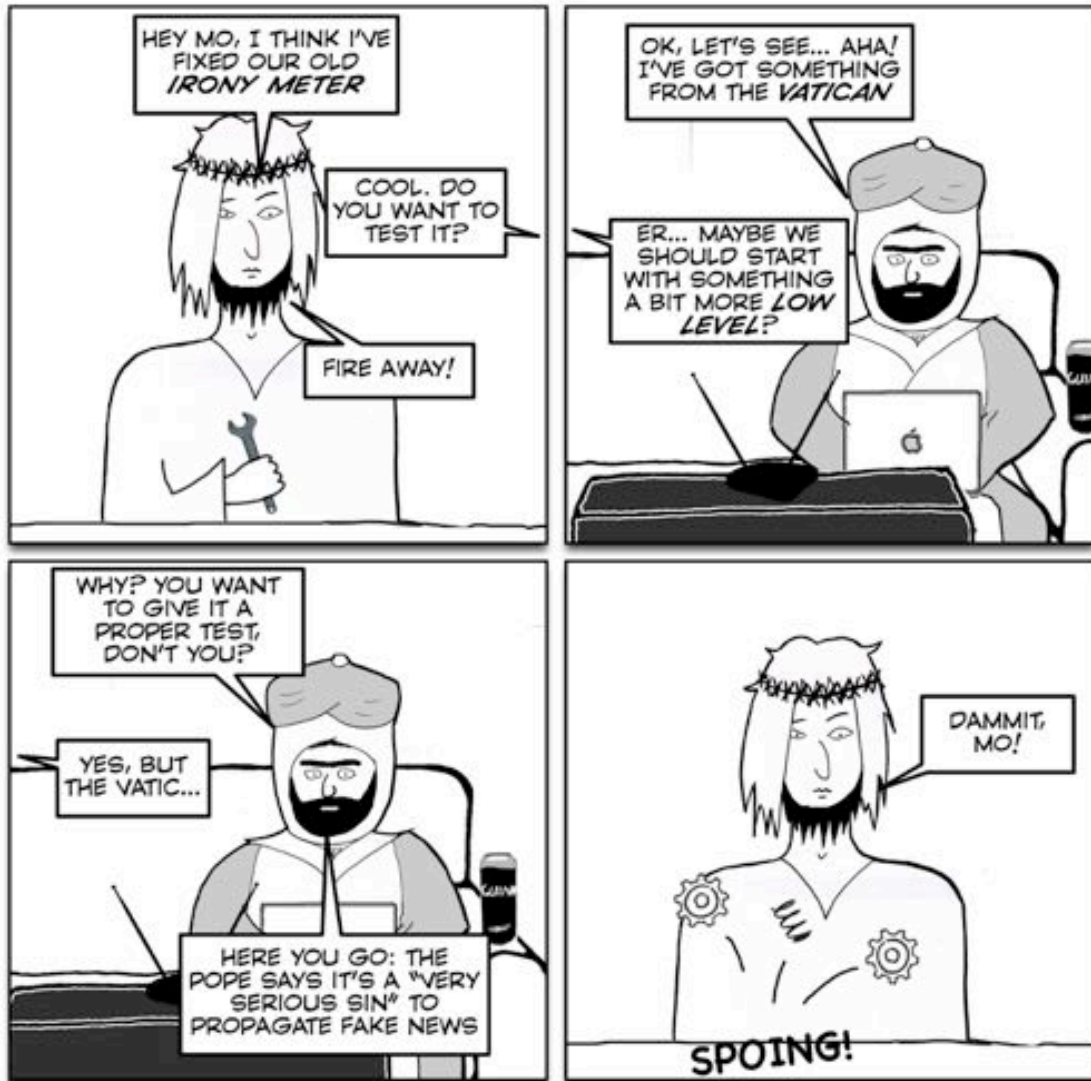


delete

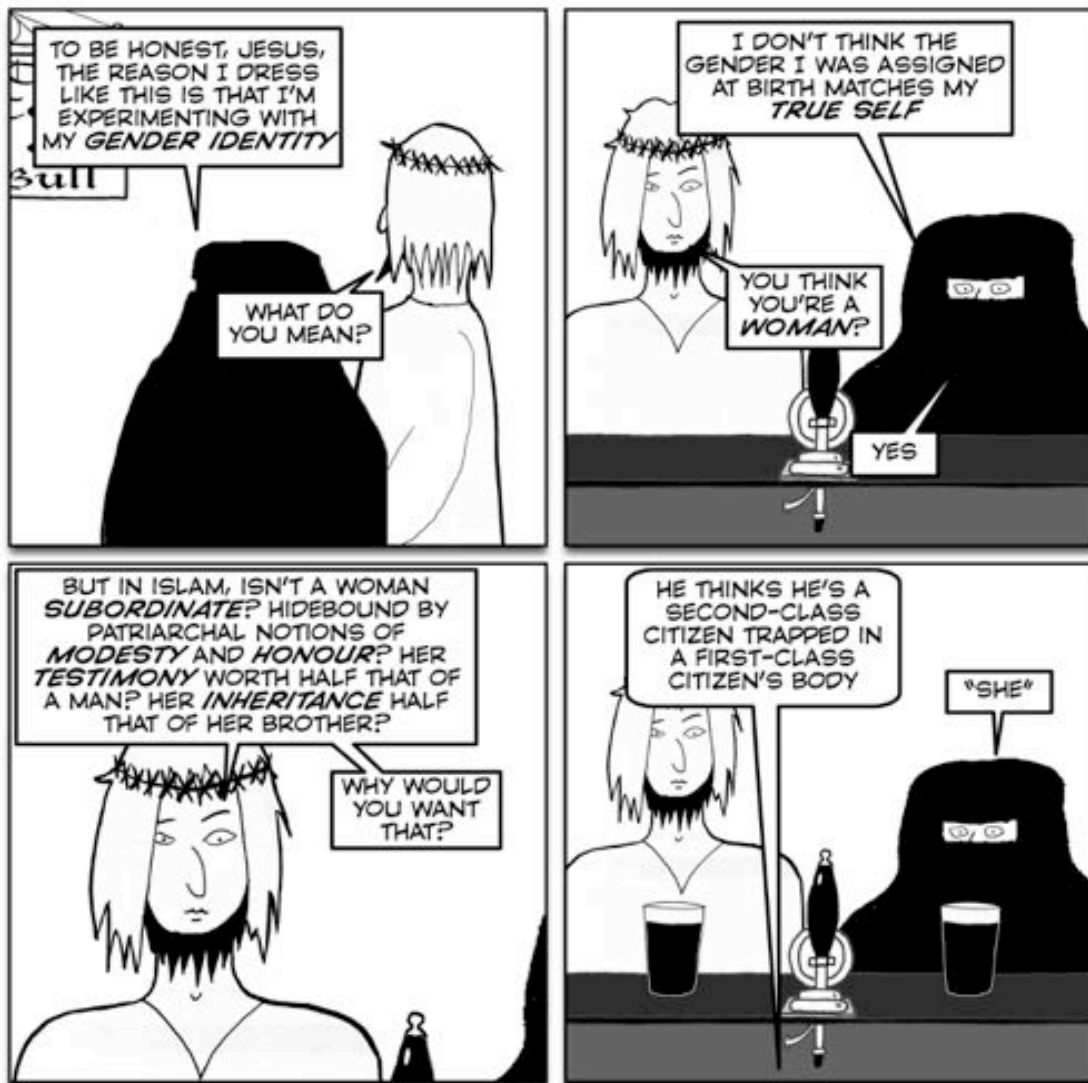




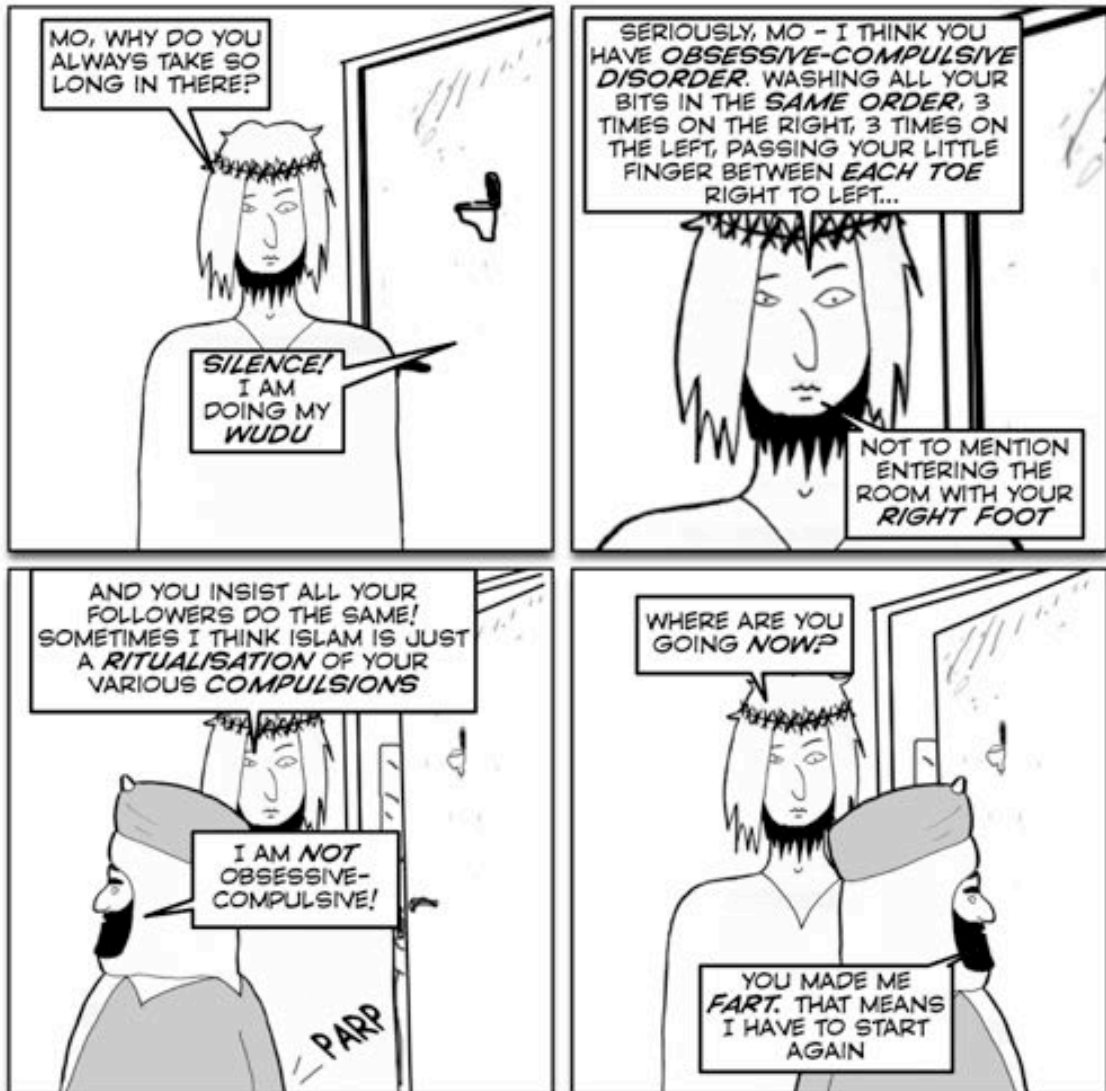
test



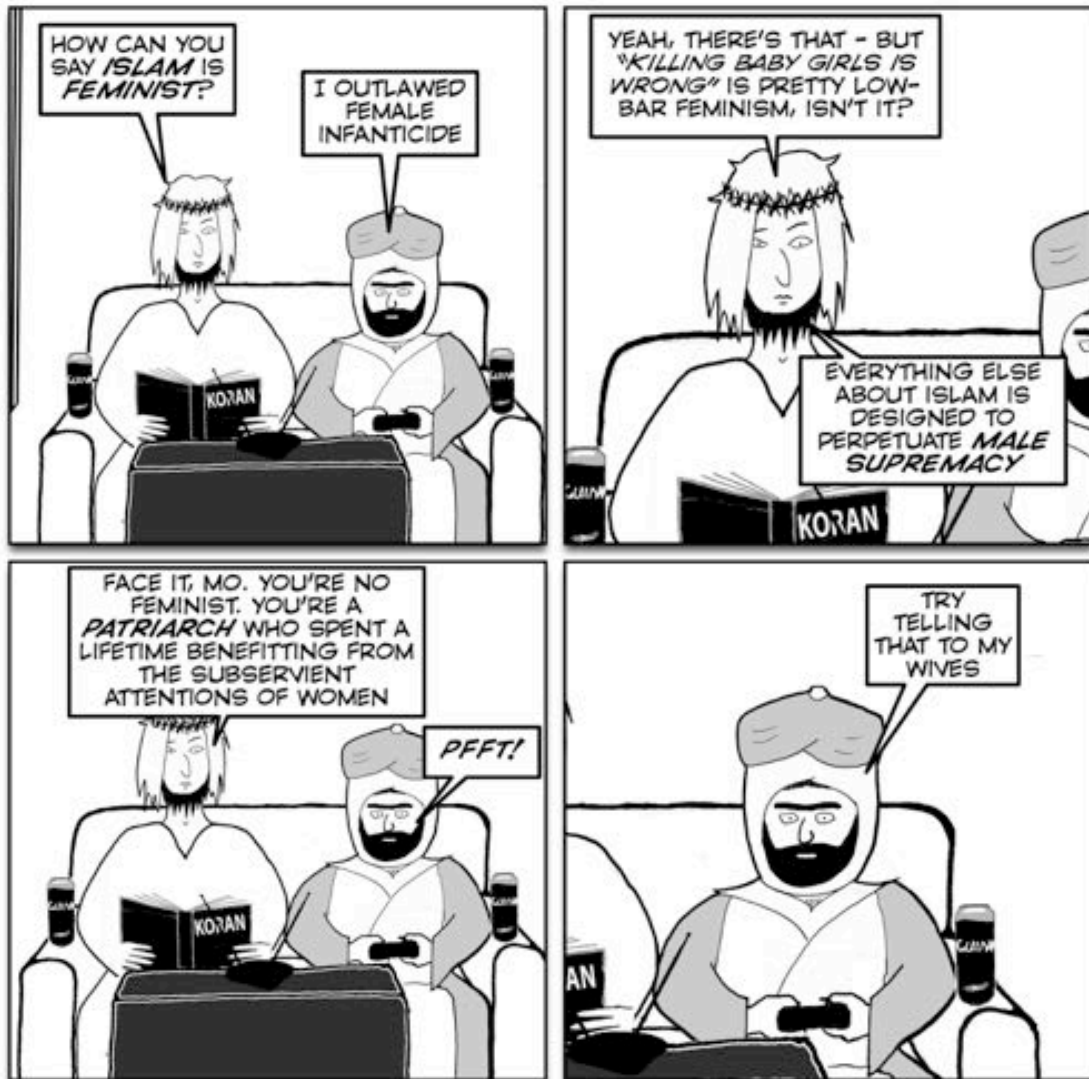
self



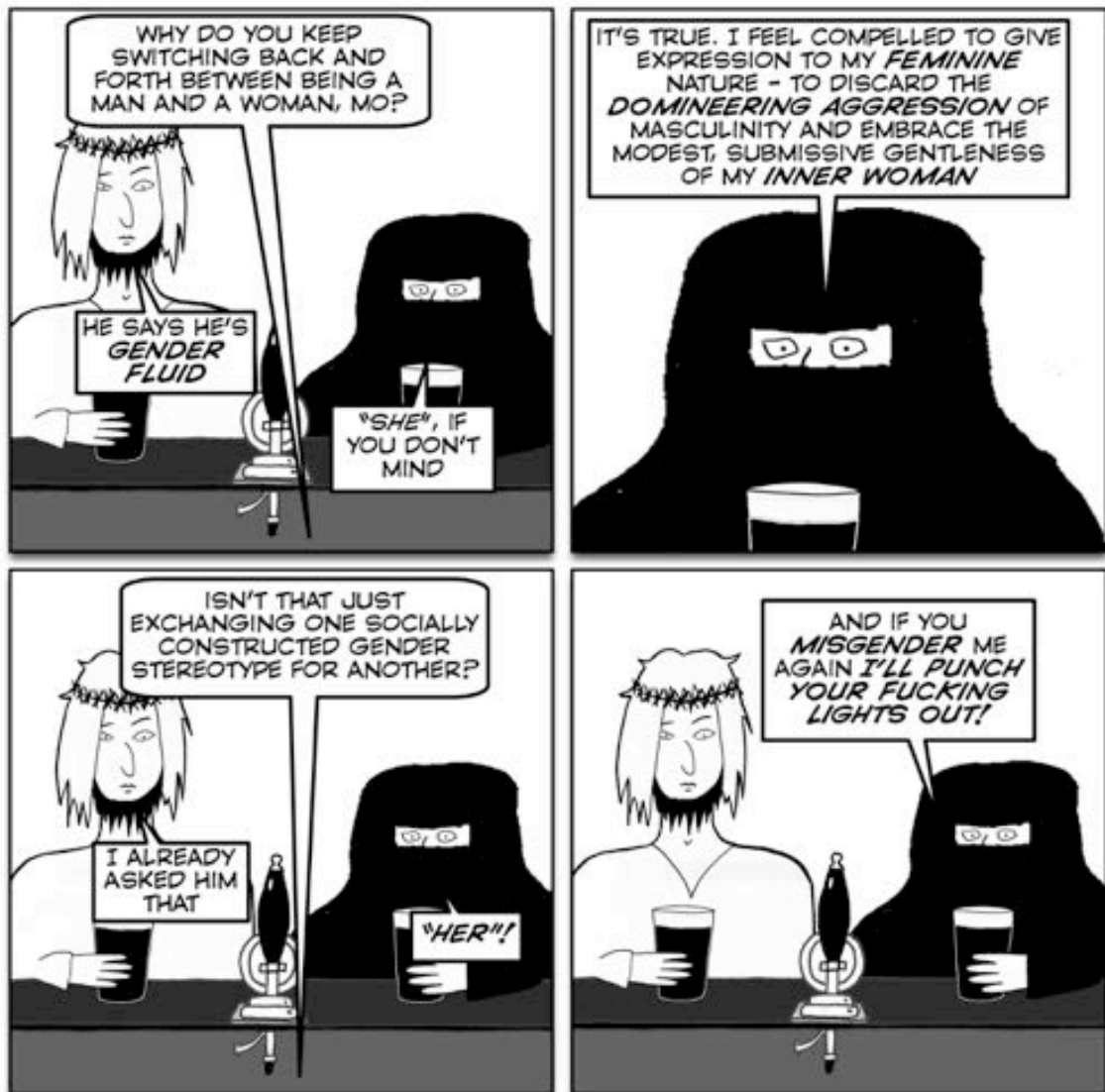
## wudu



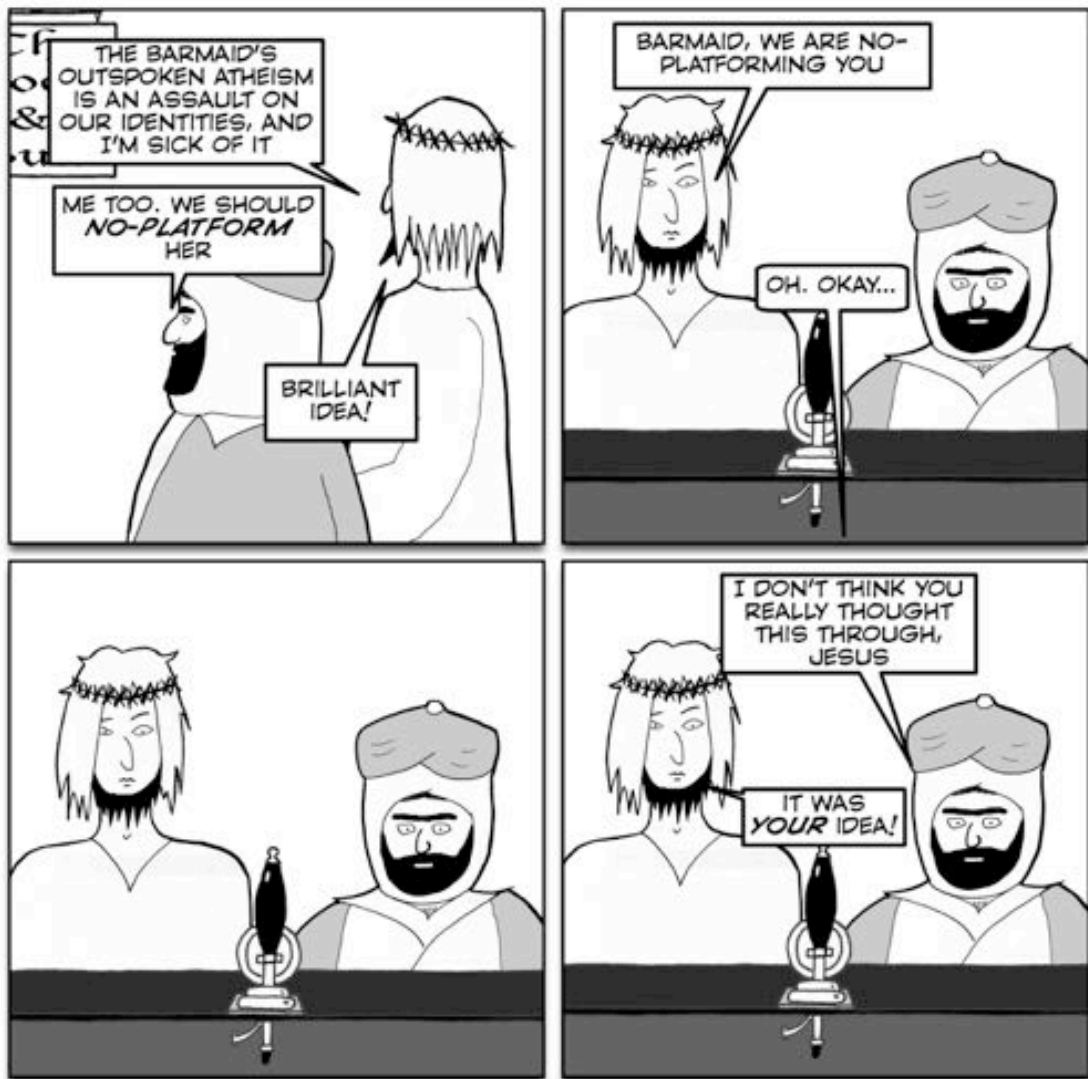
pfft



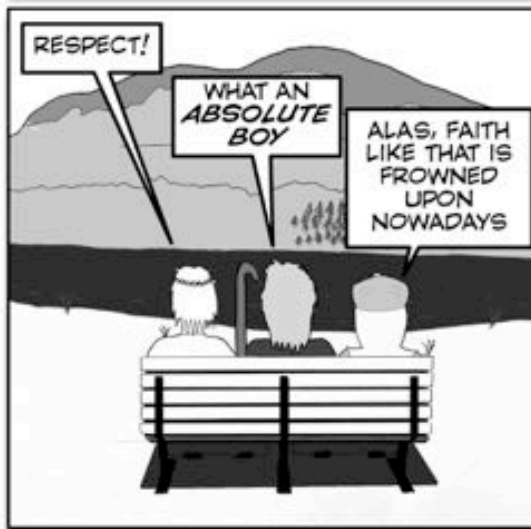
## fluid



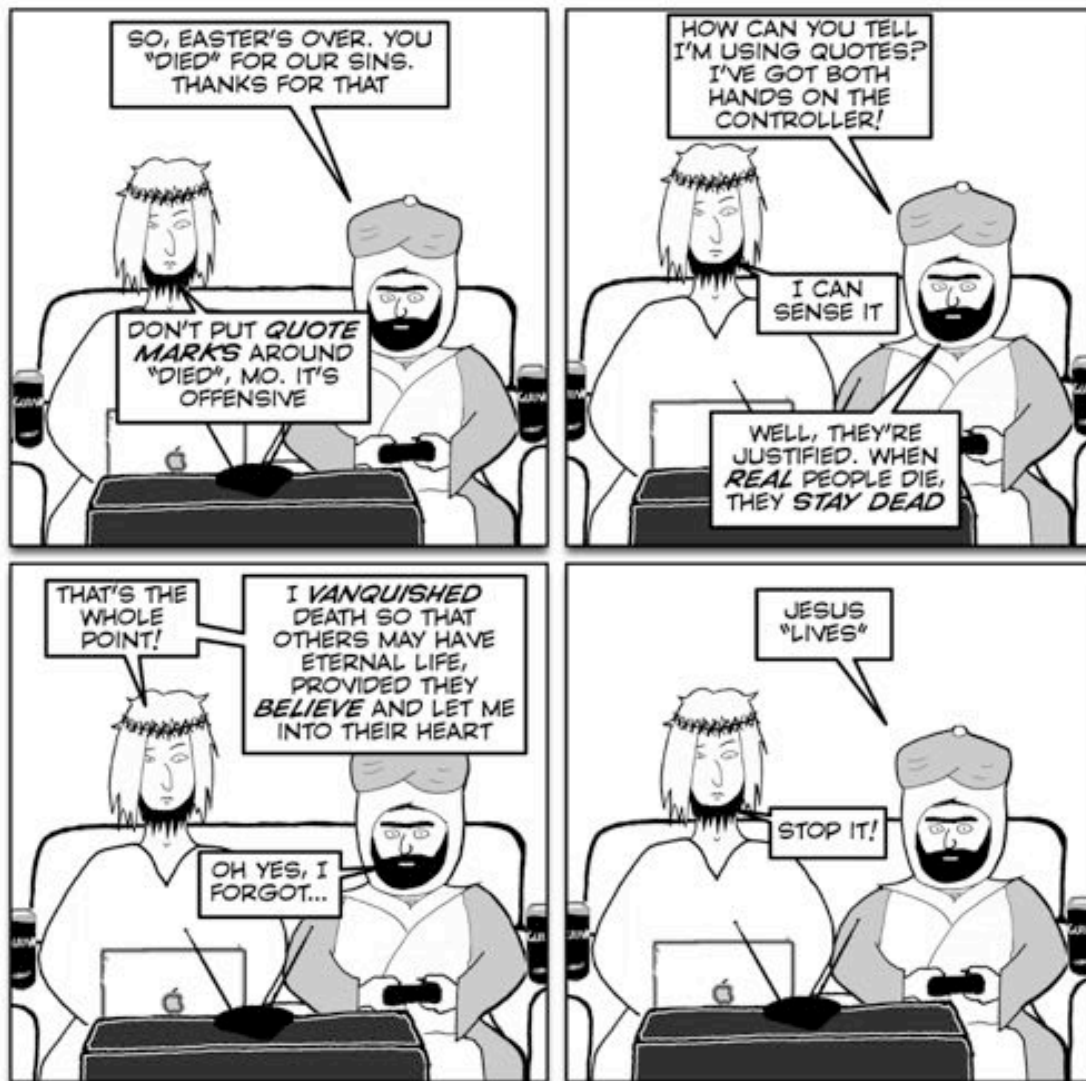
really



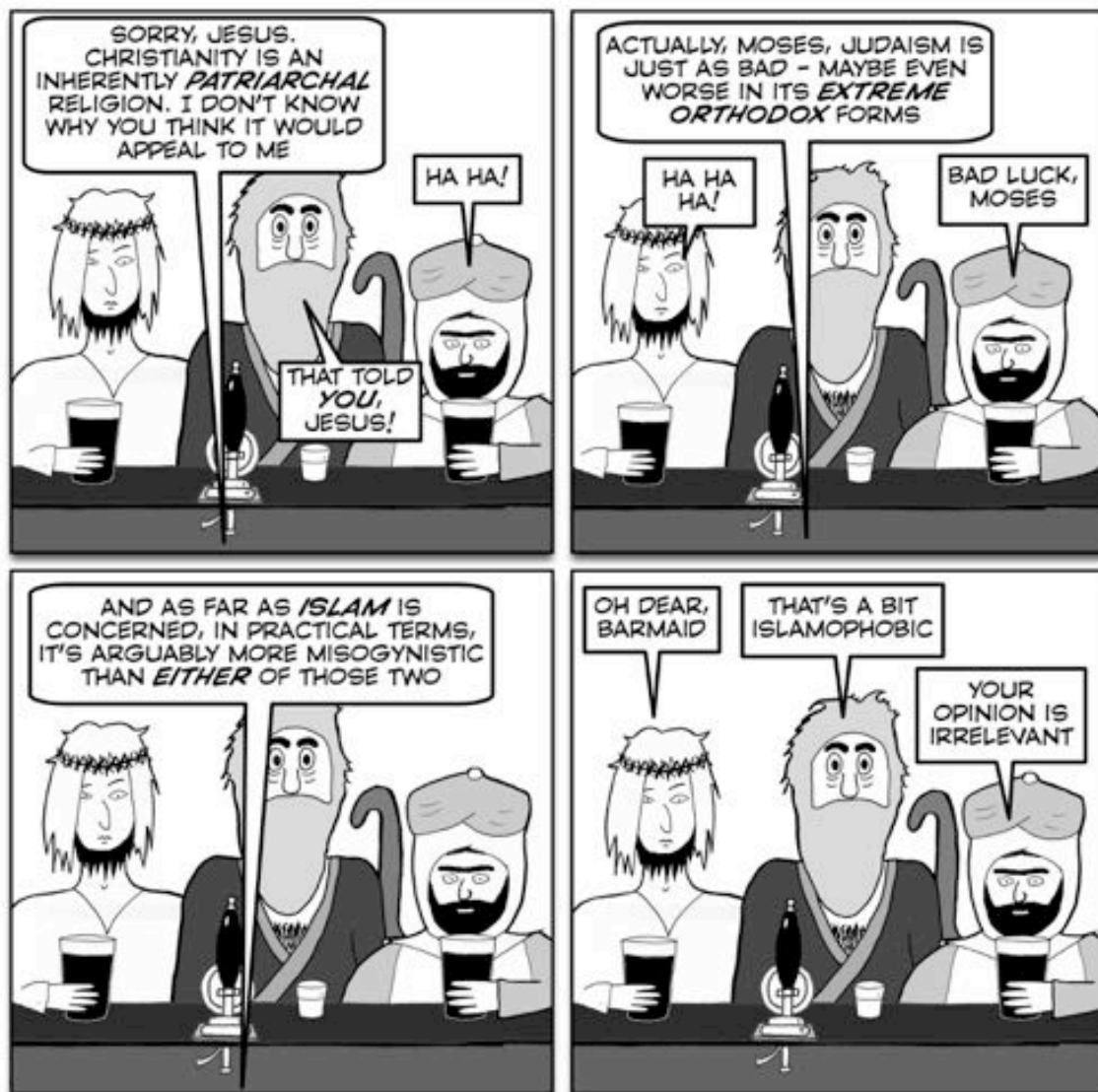
**dodgy**



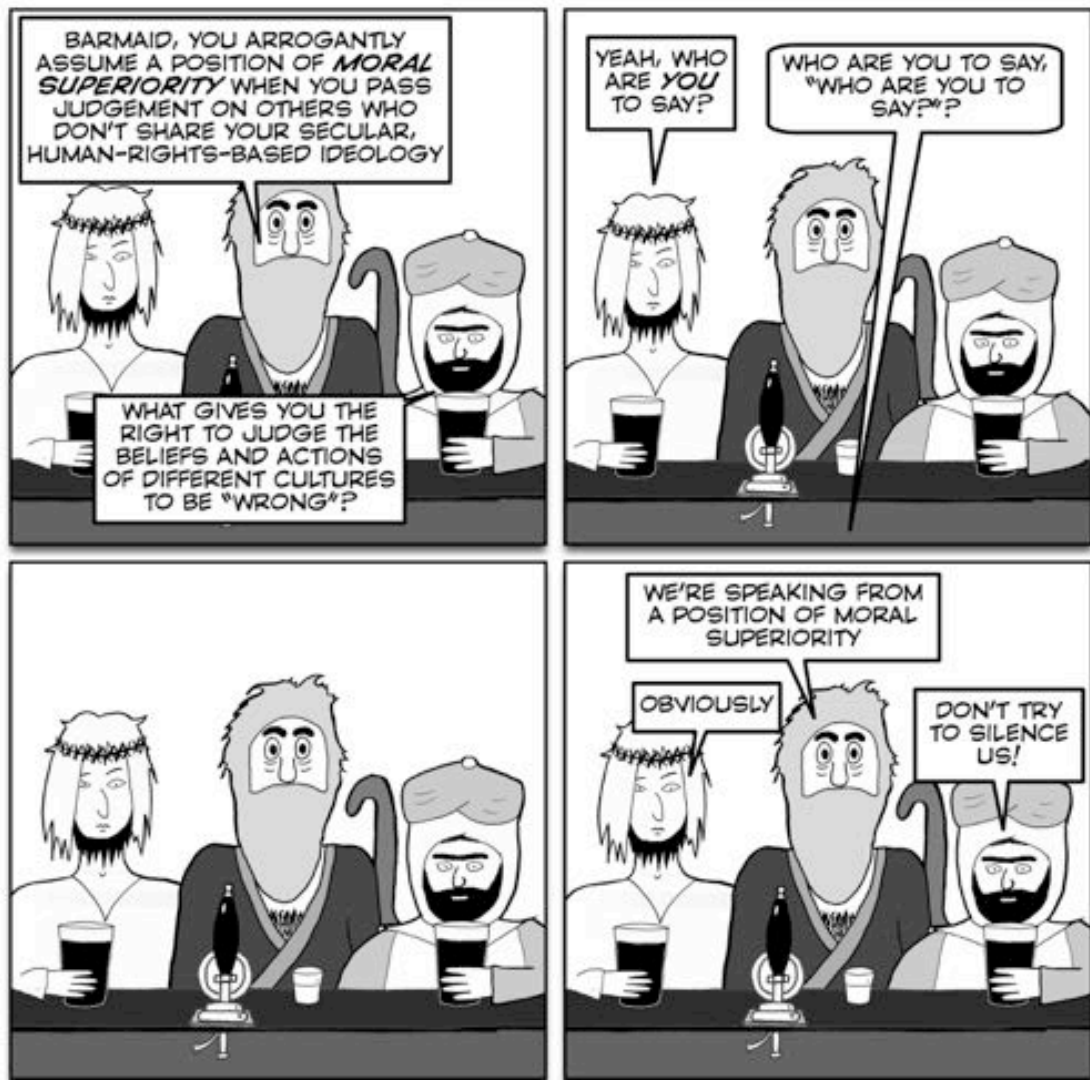
died



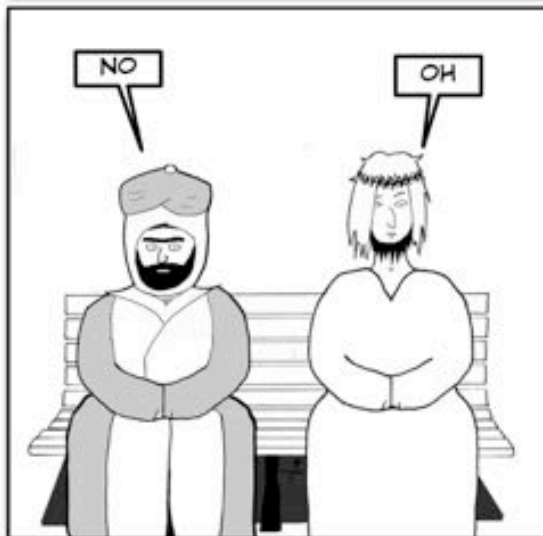
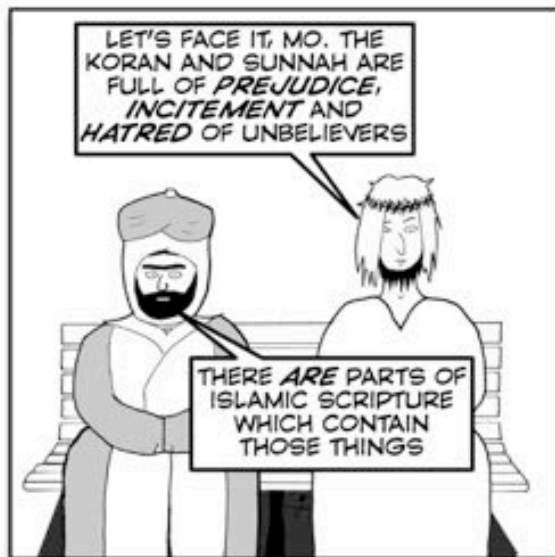
## forms



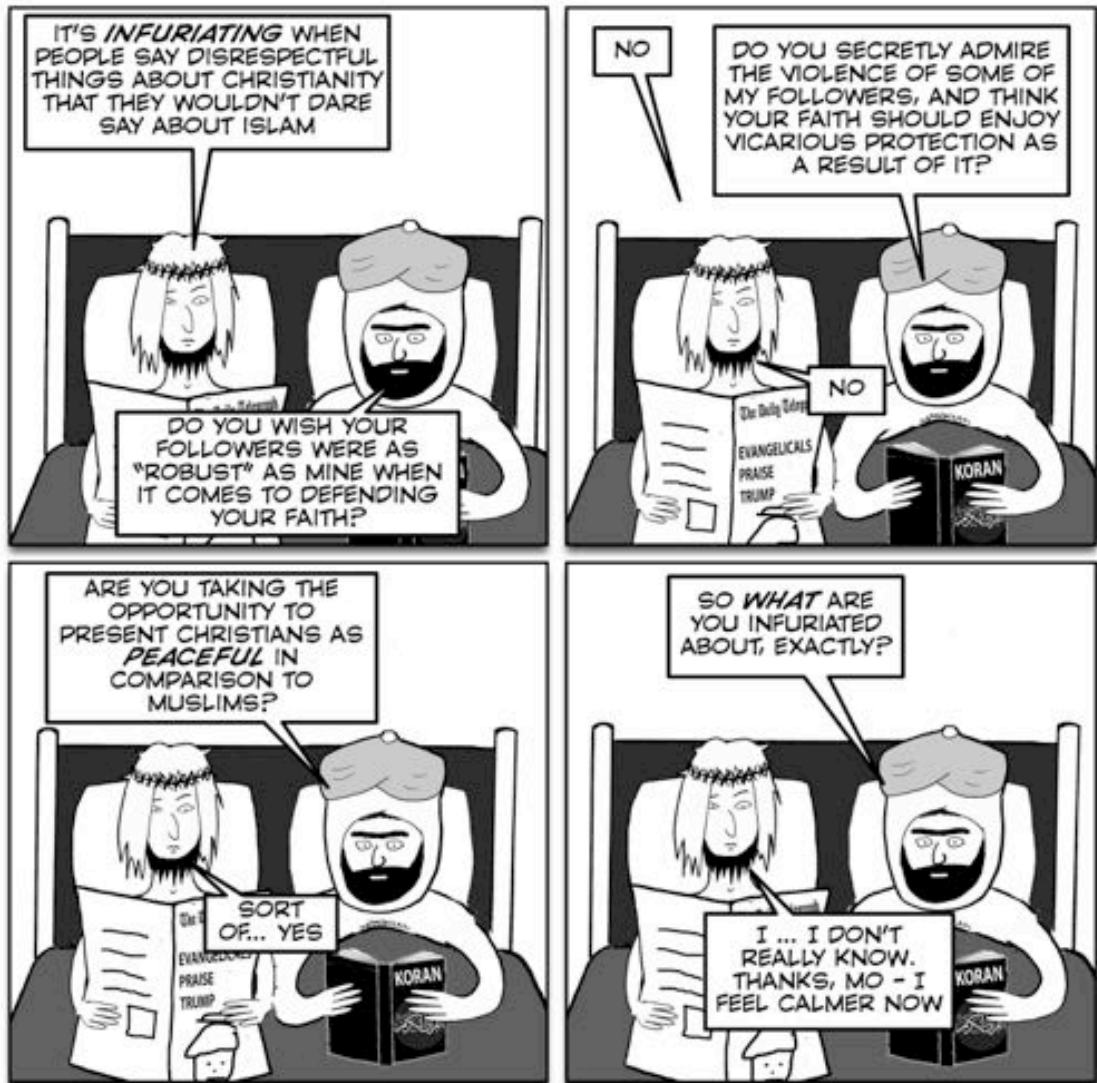
say



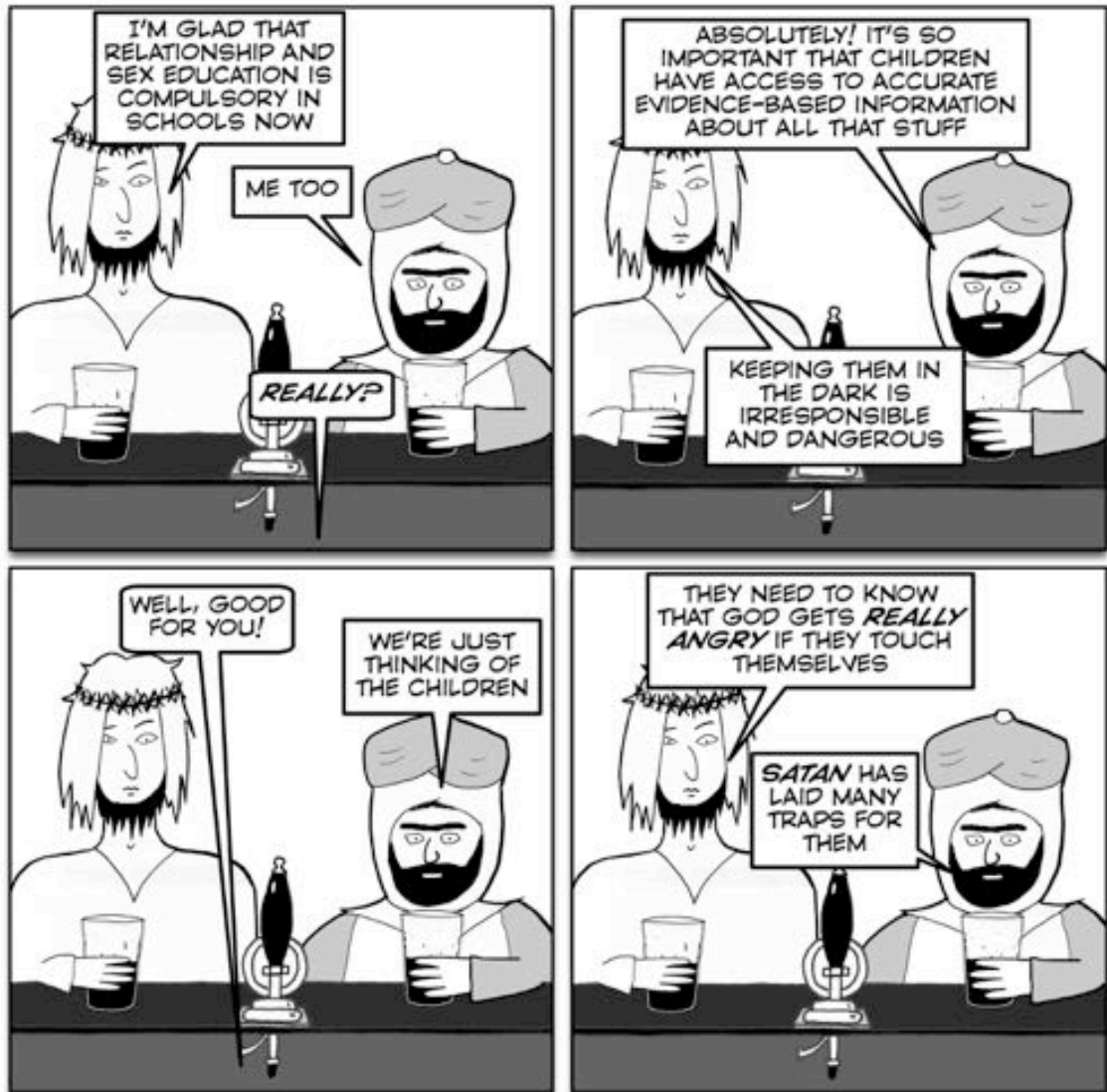
rid



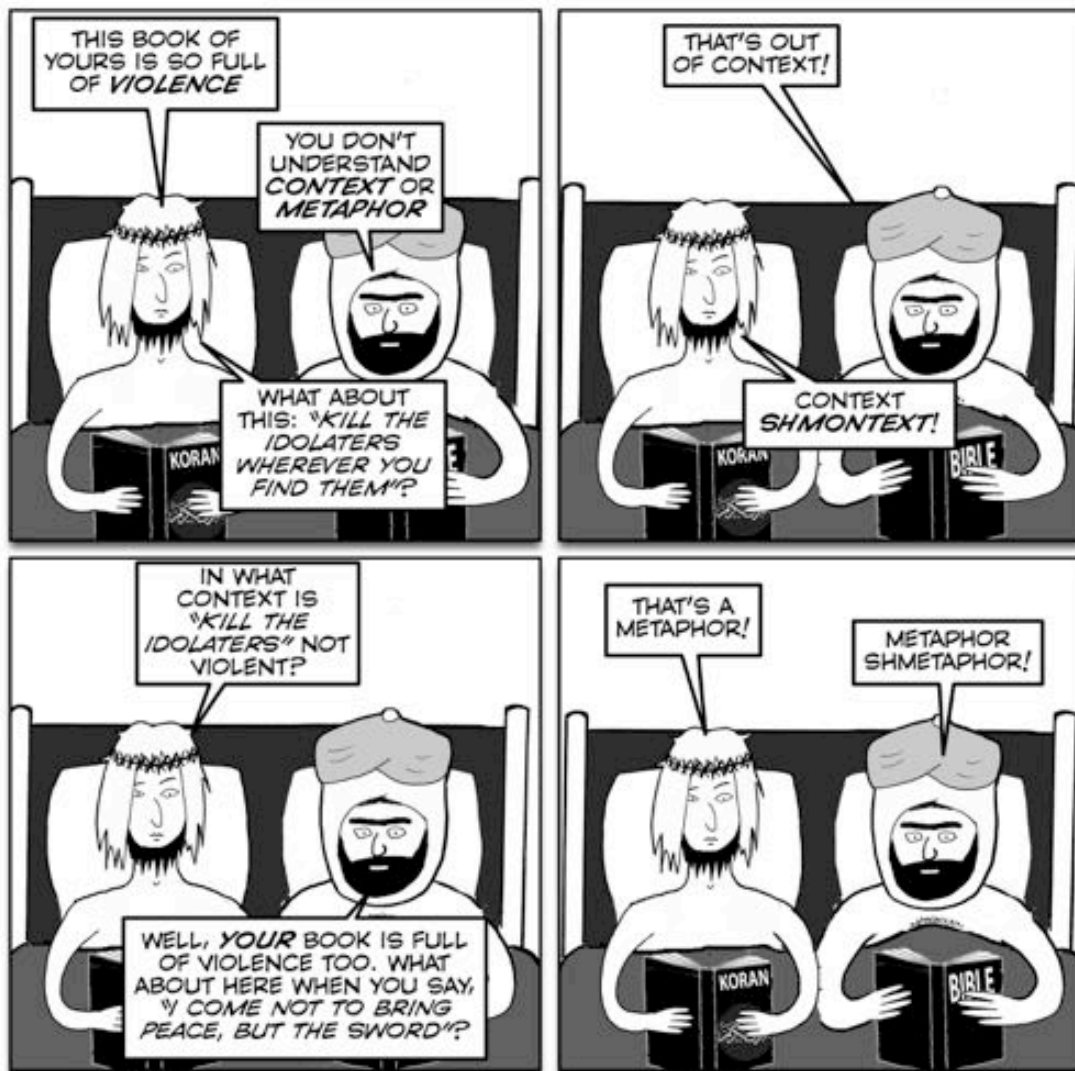
enjoy



## traps



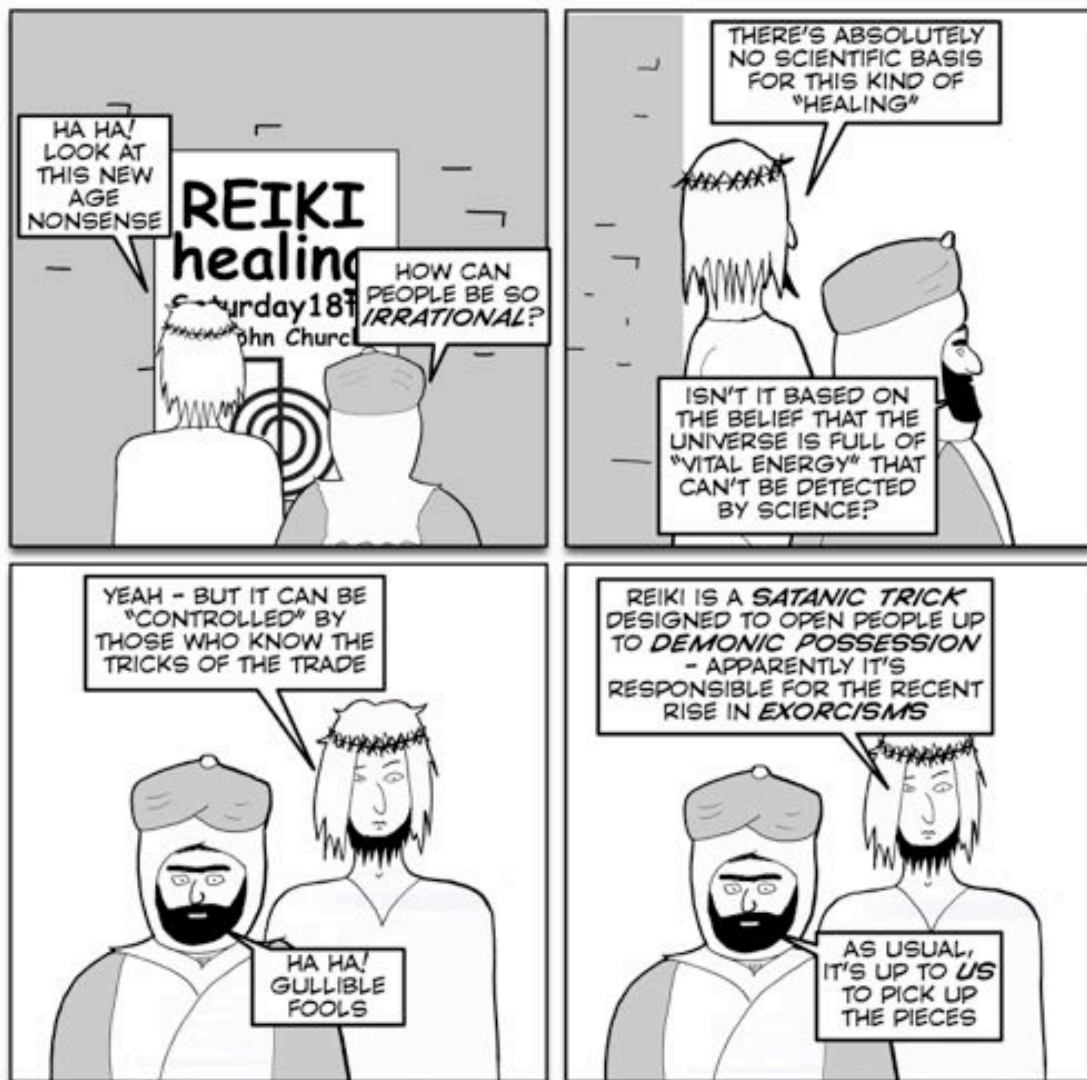
full



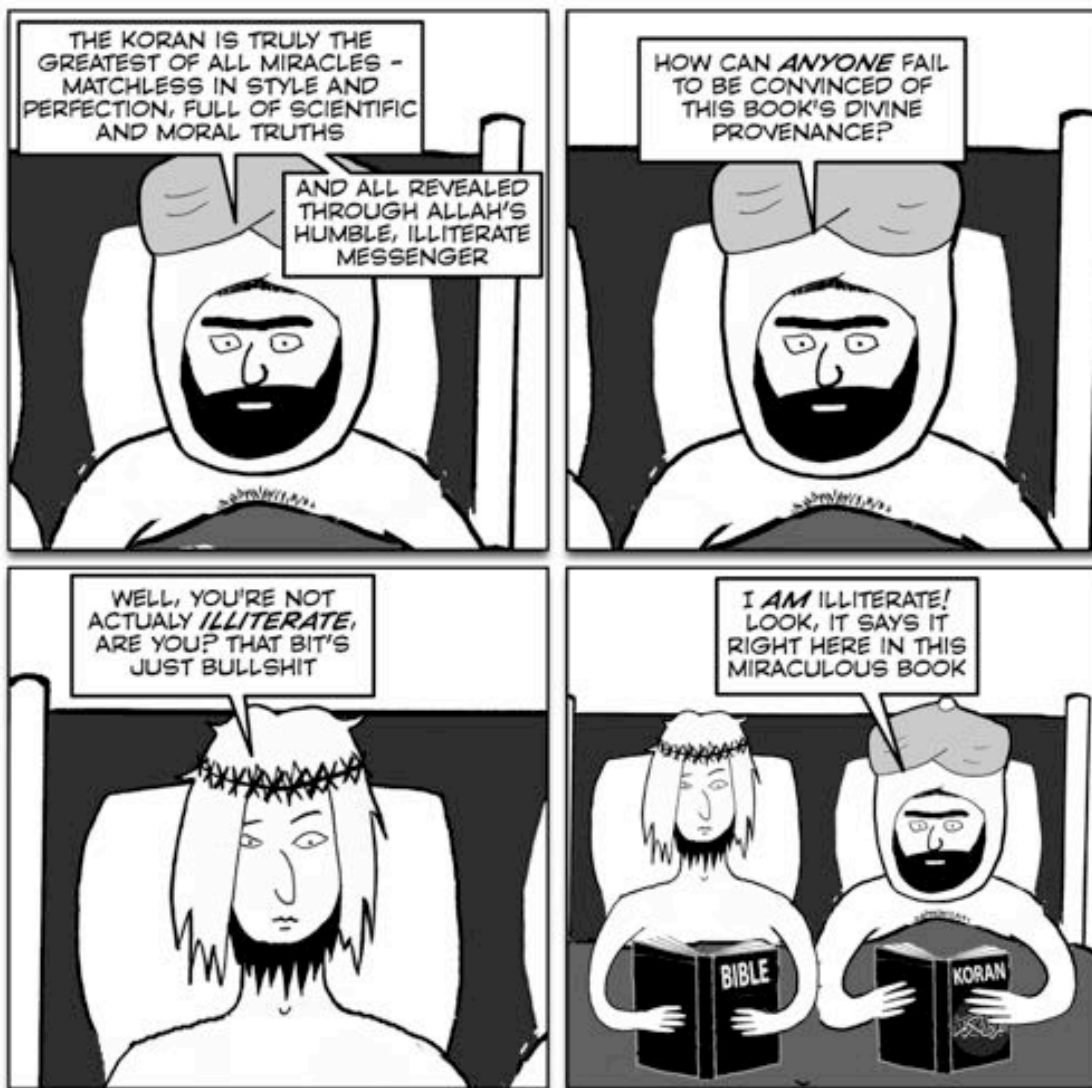
ha ha



## trade



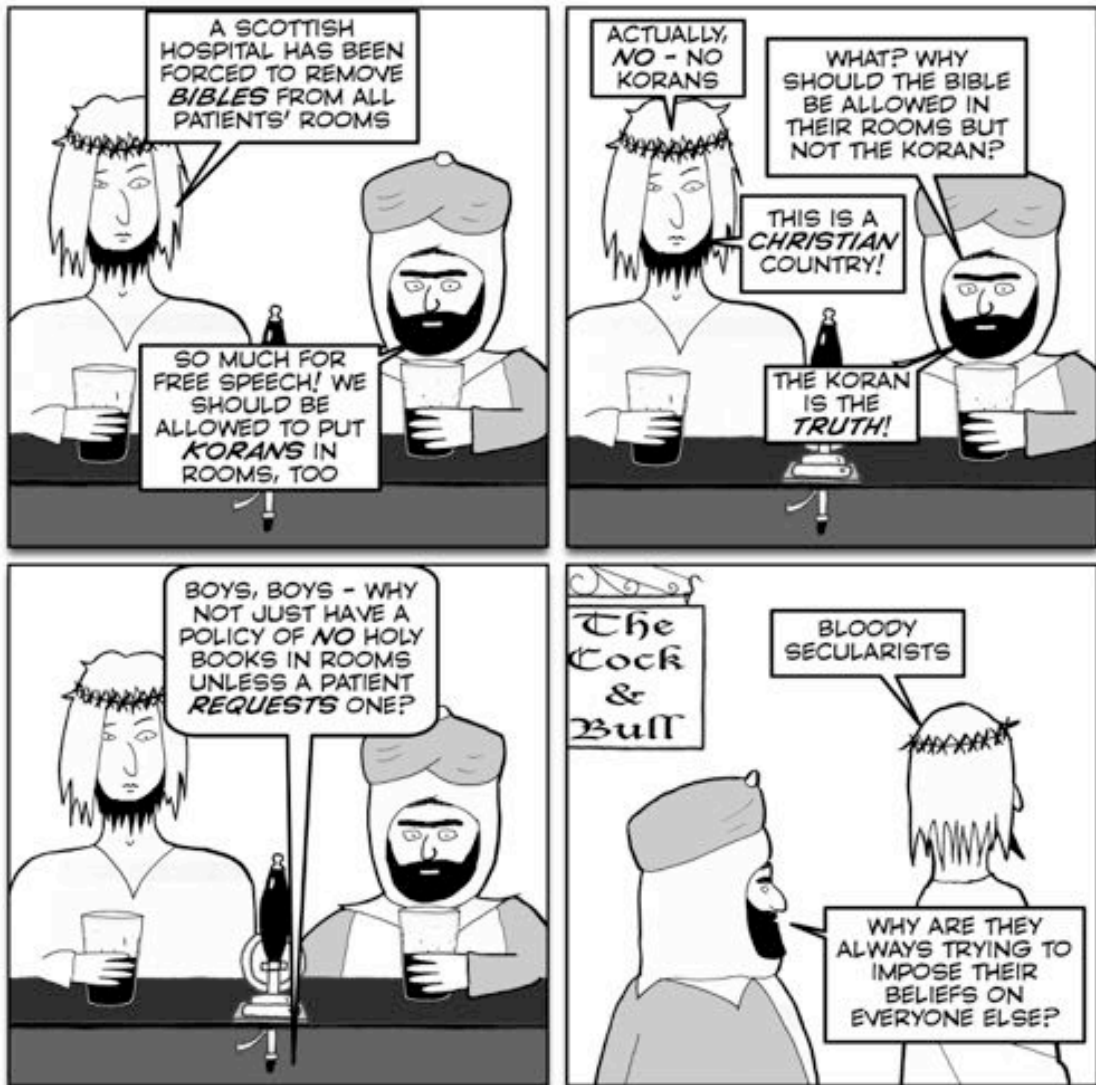
fail



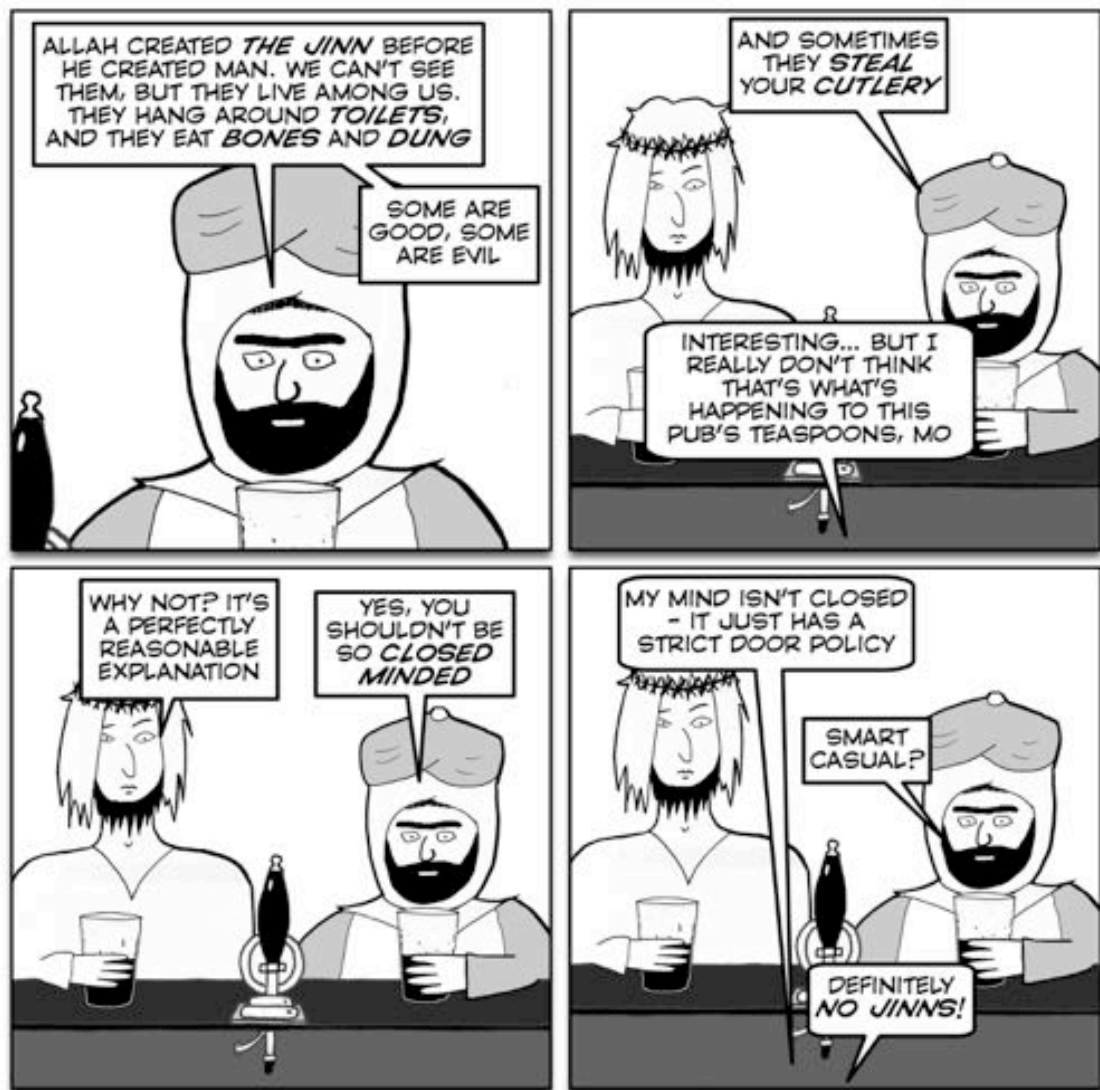
help



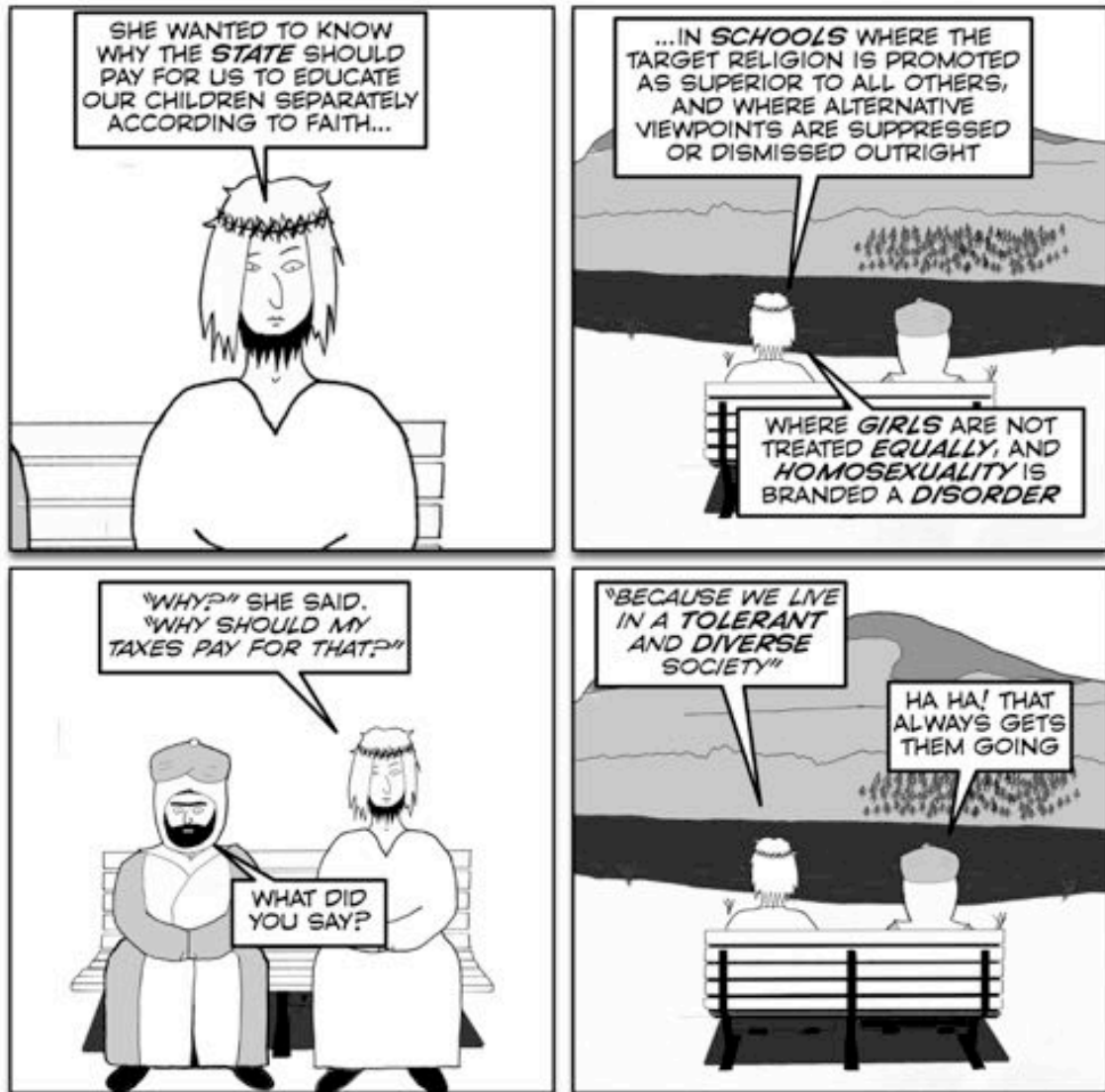
## speech



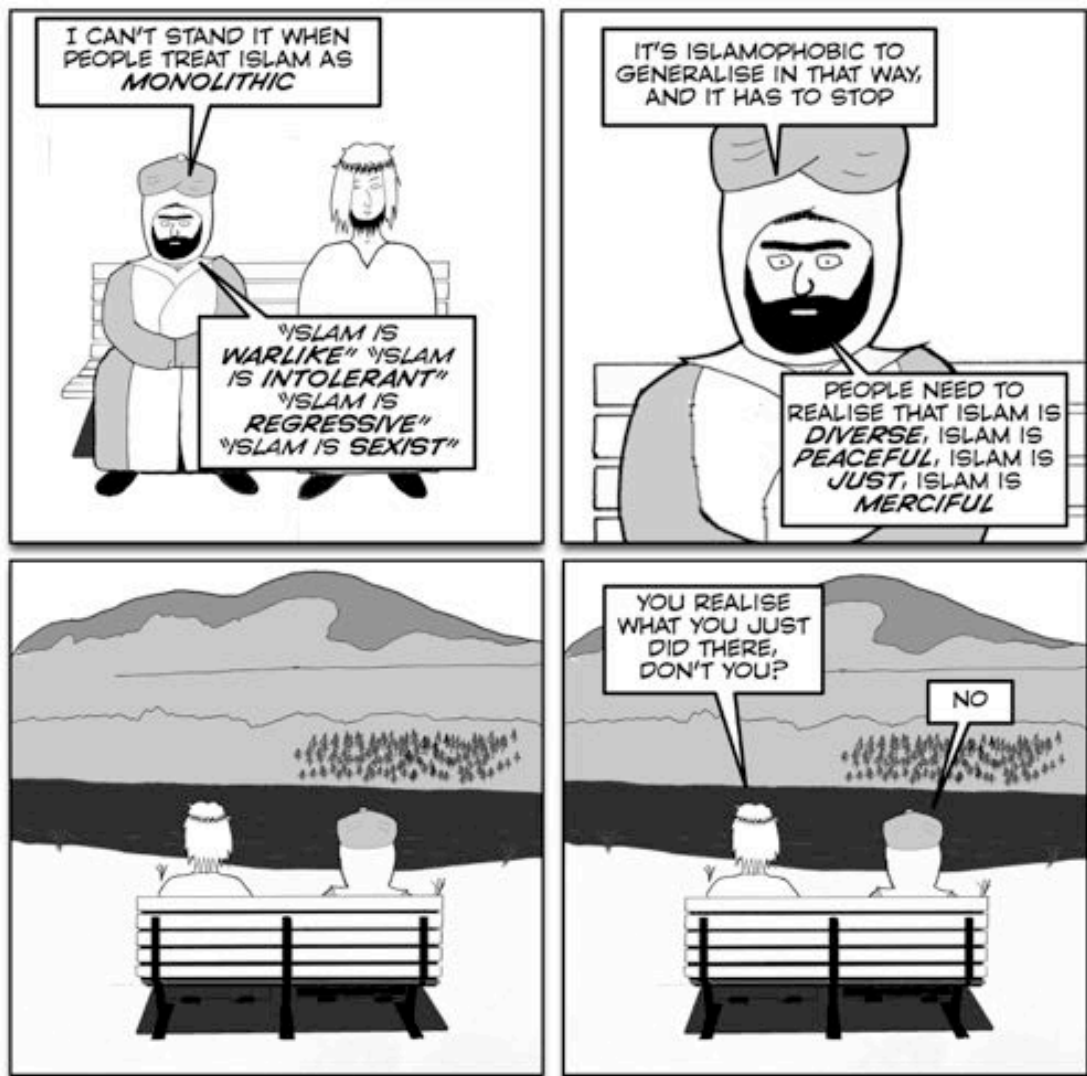
# jinn



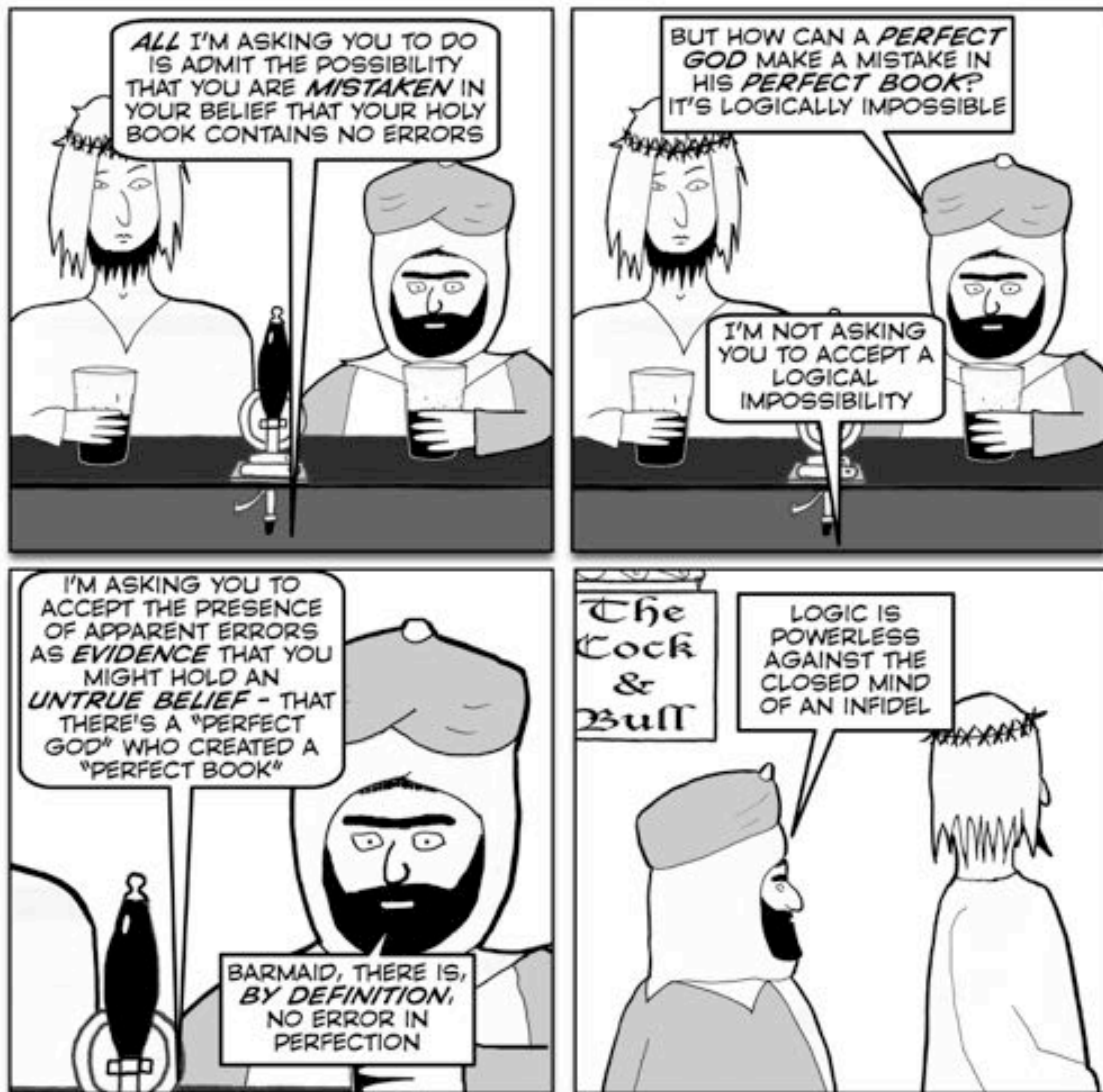
## taxes



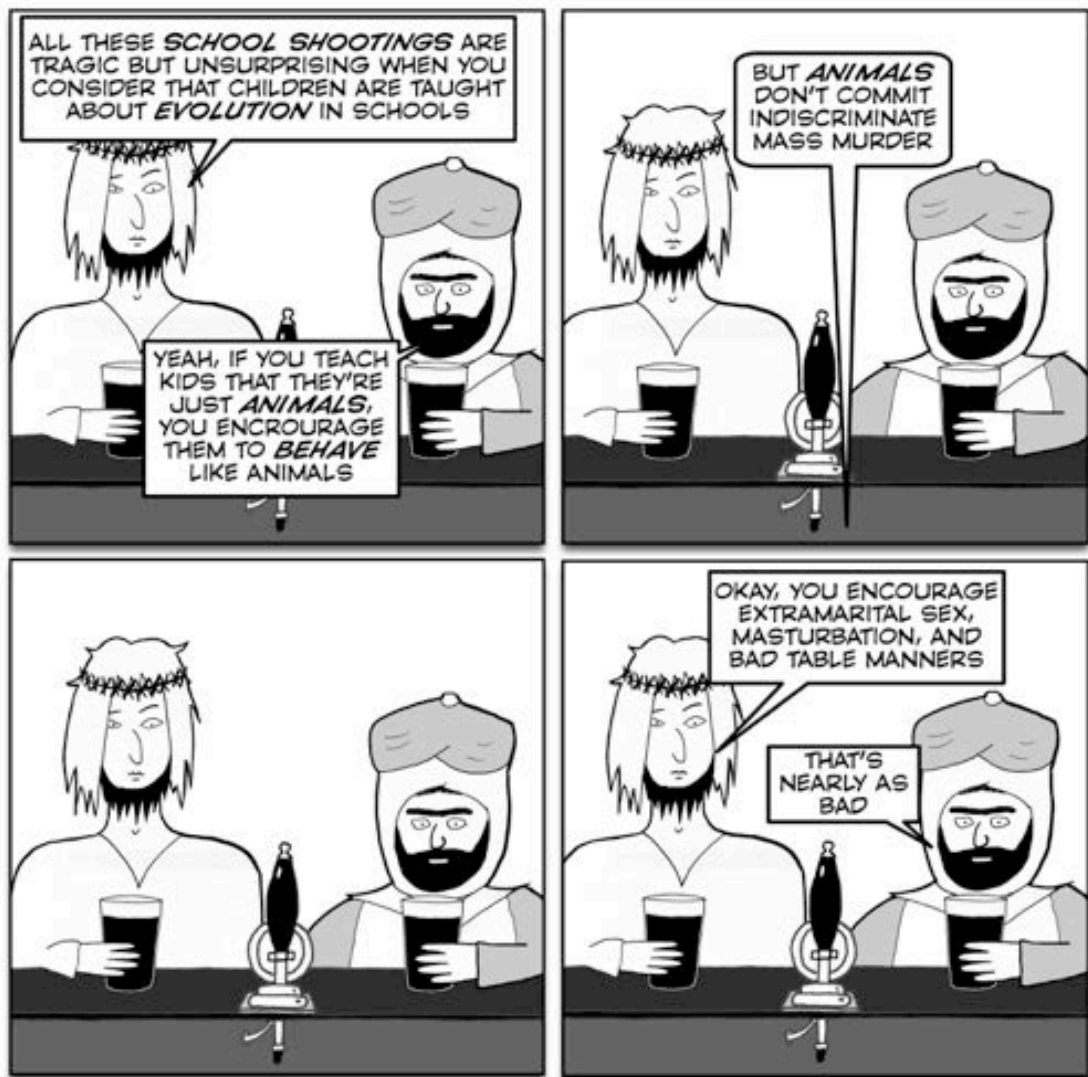
stand



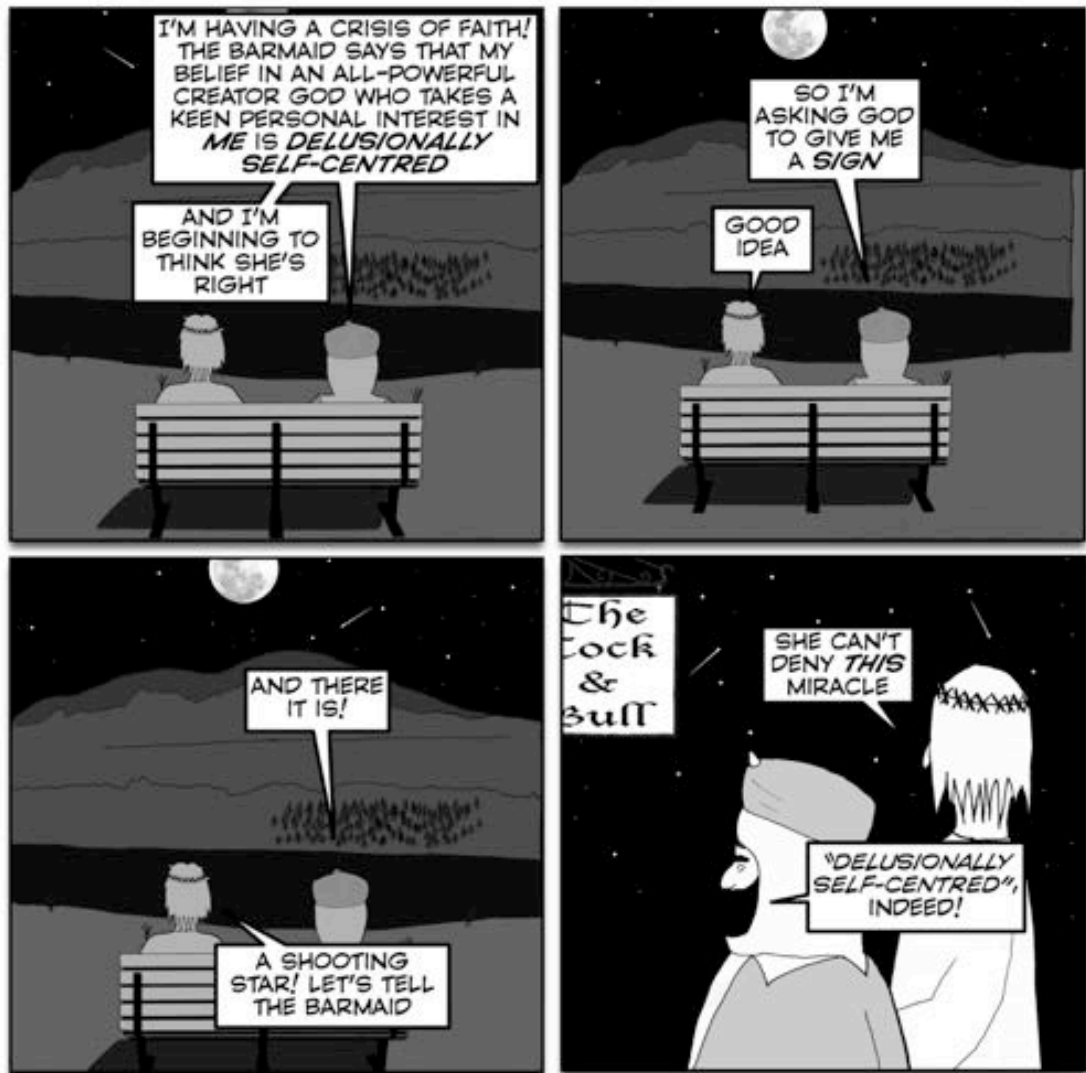
## errors



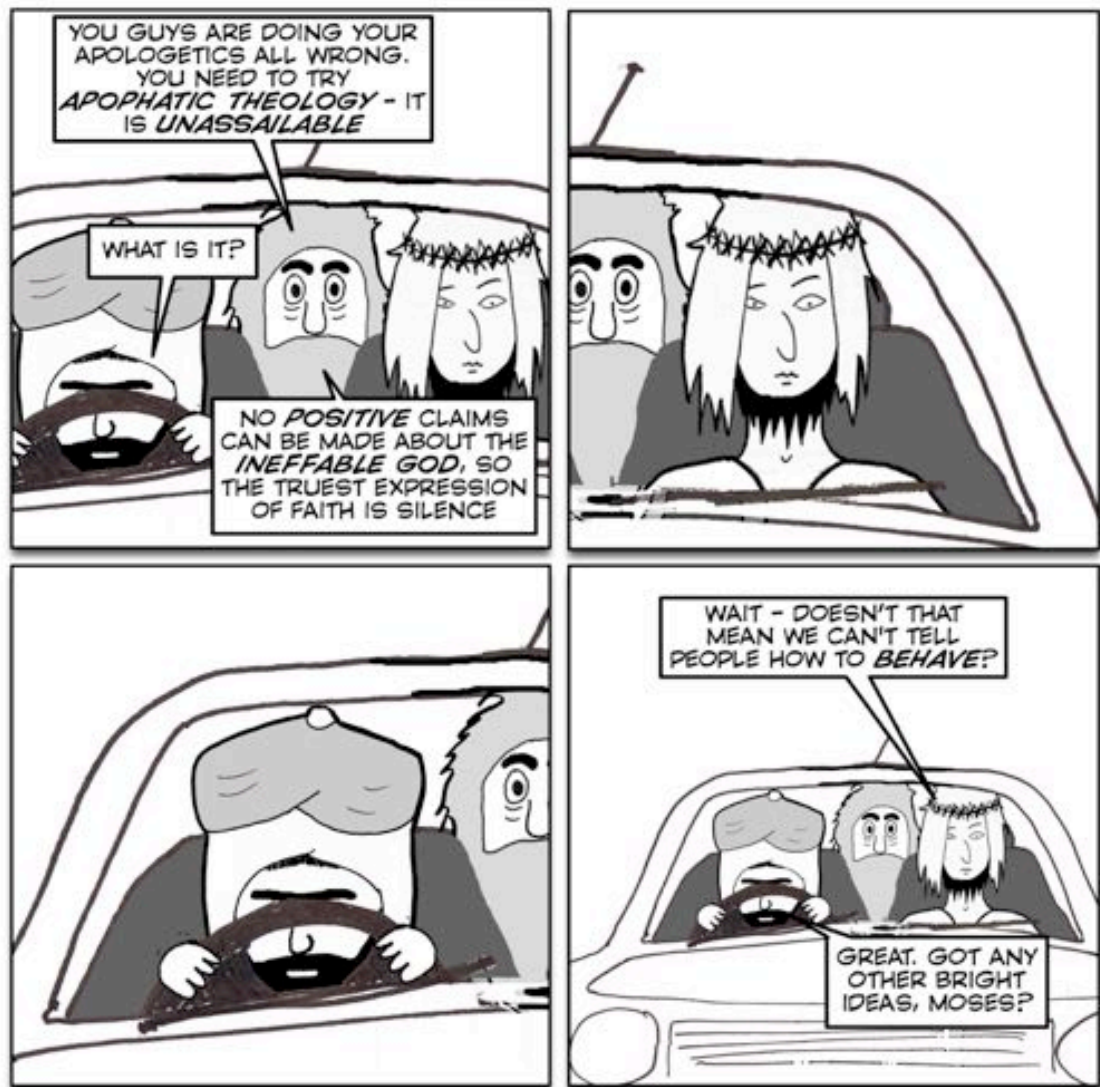
## kids



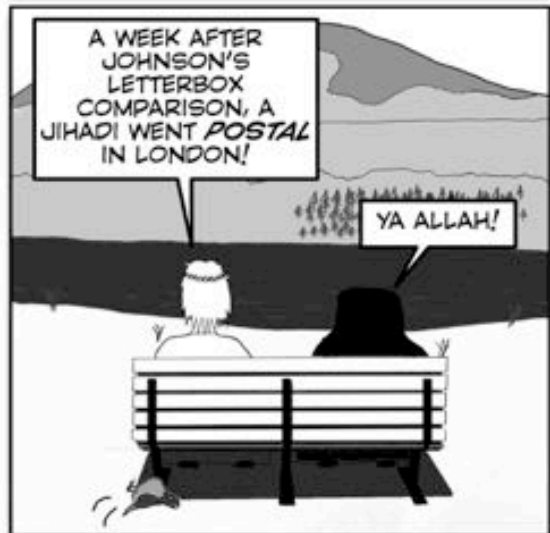
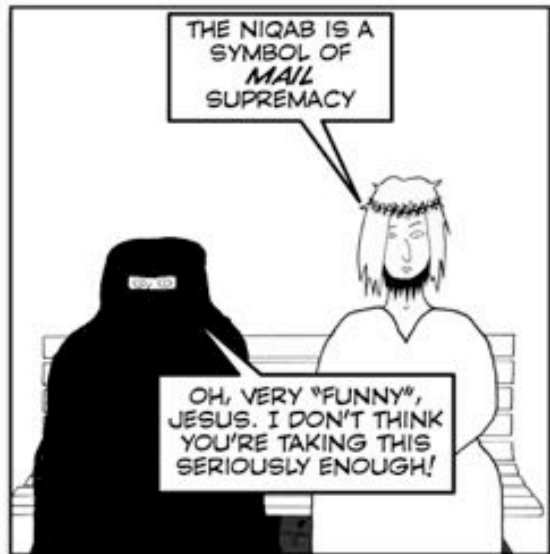
star



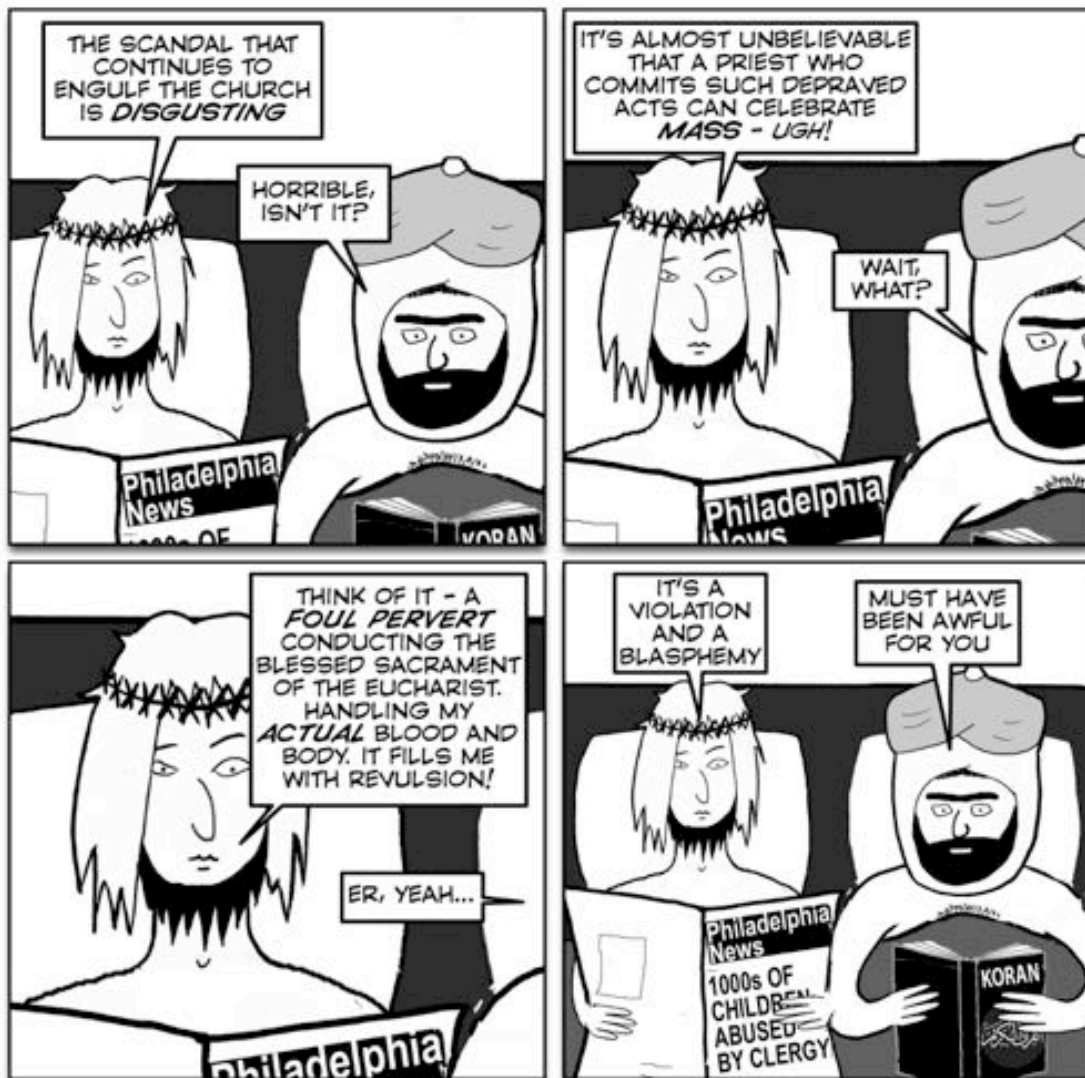
tell



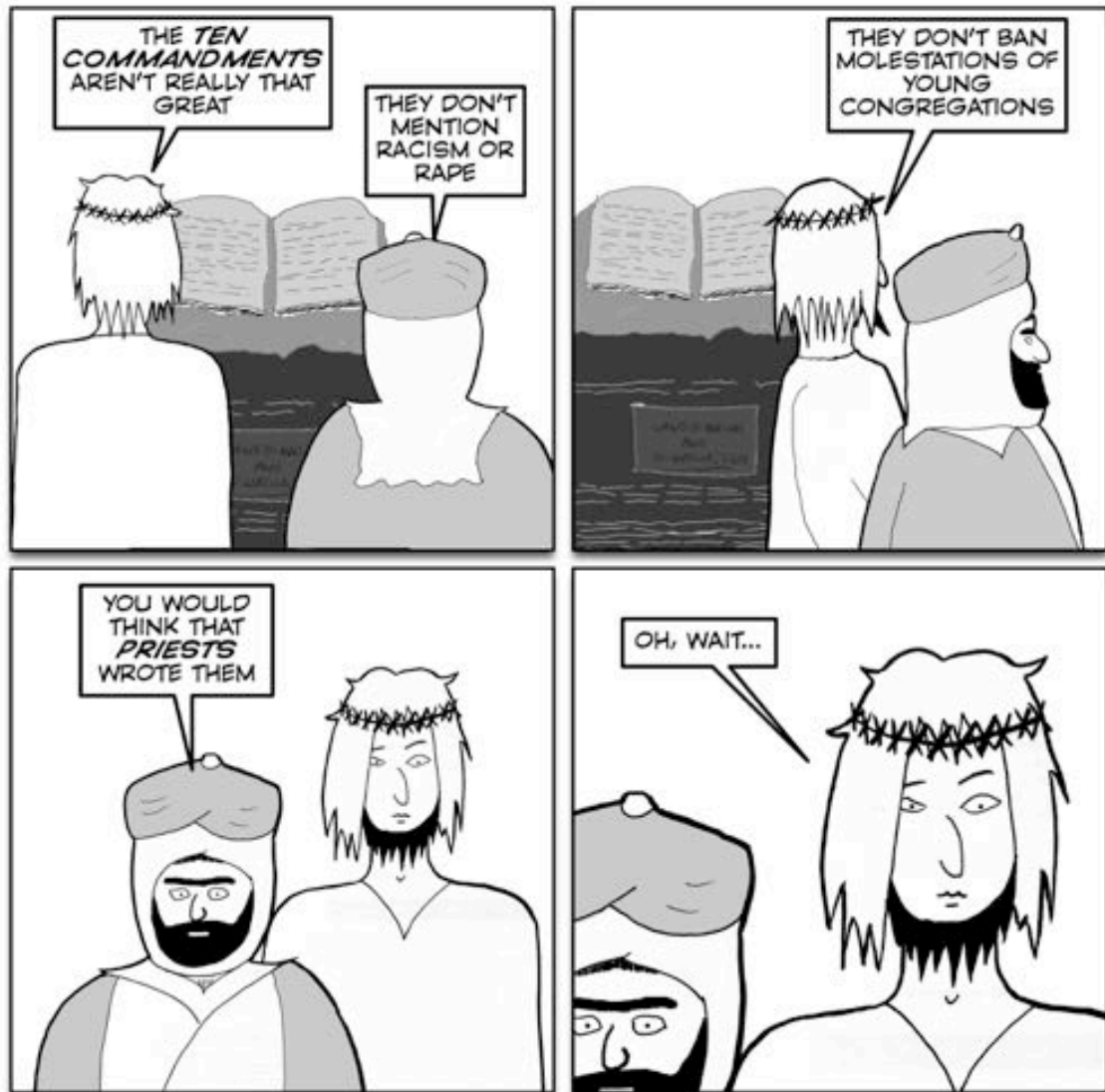
apt



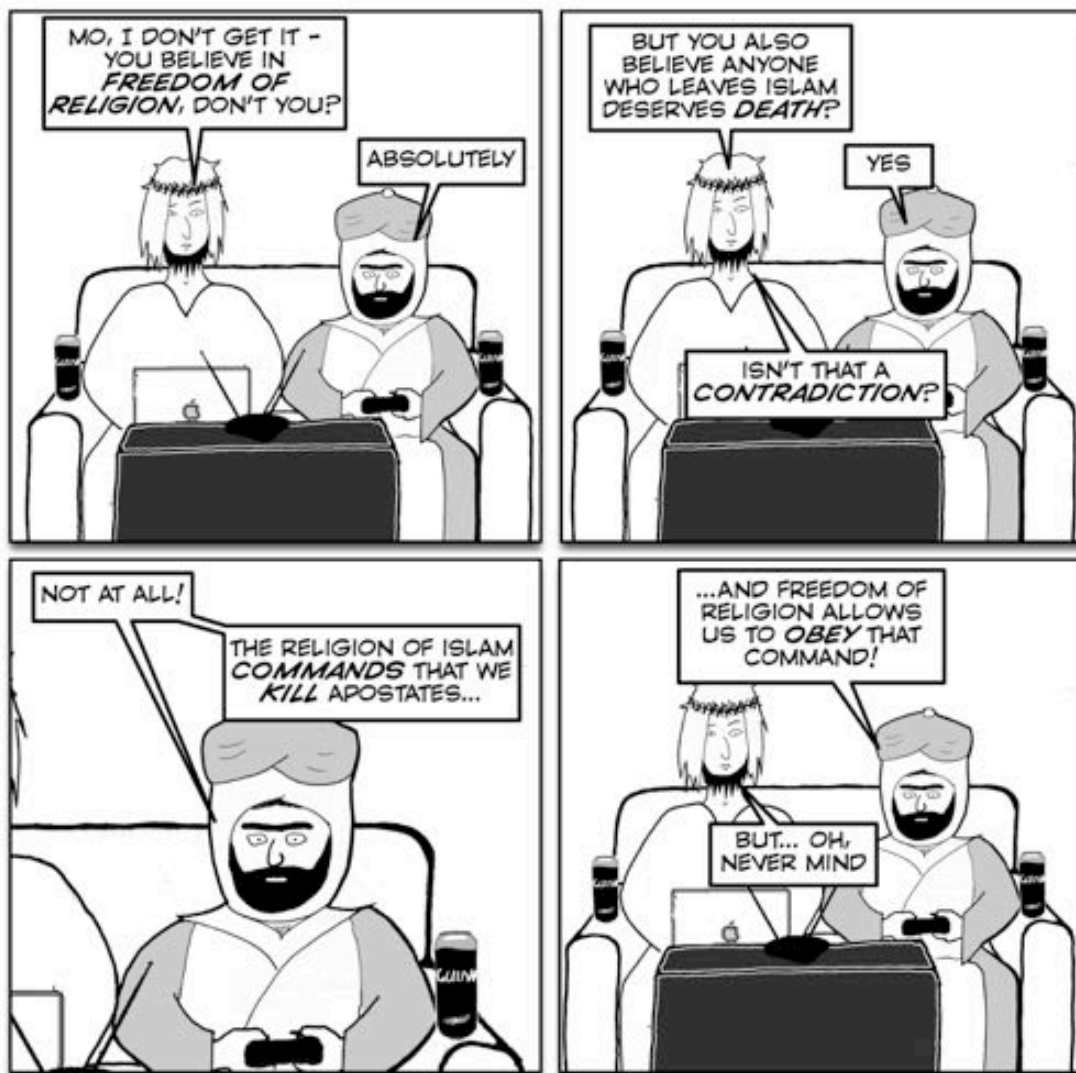
foul



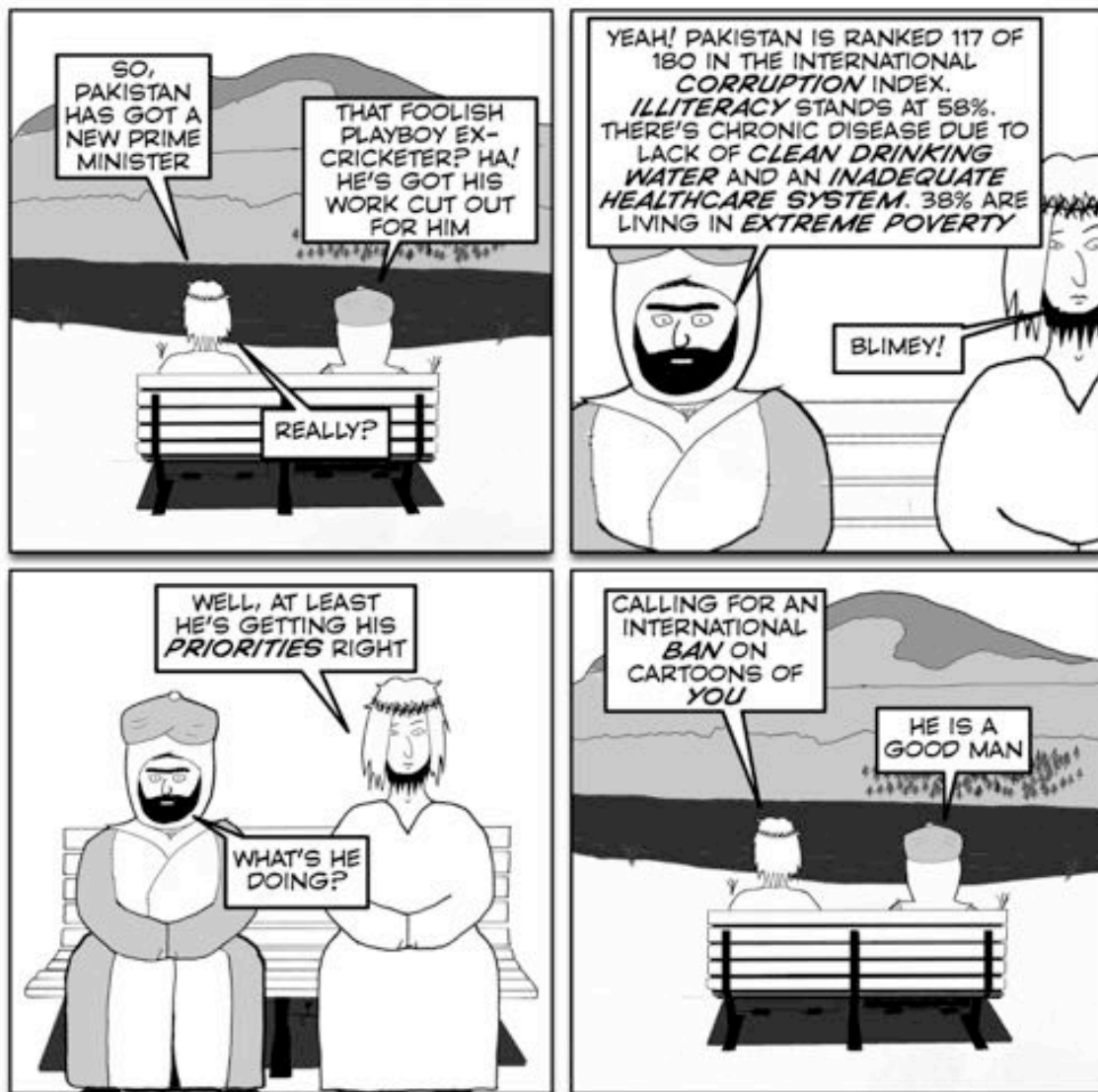
## 10Cs



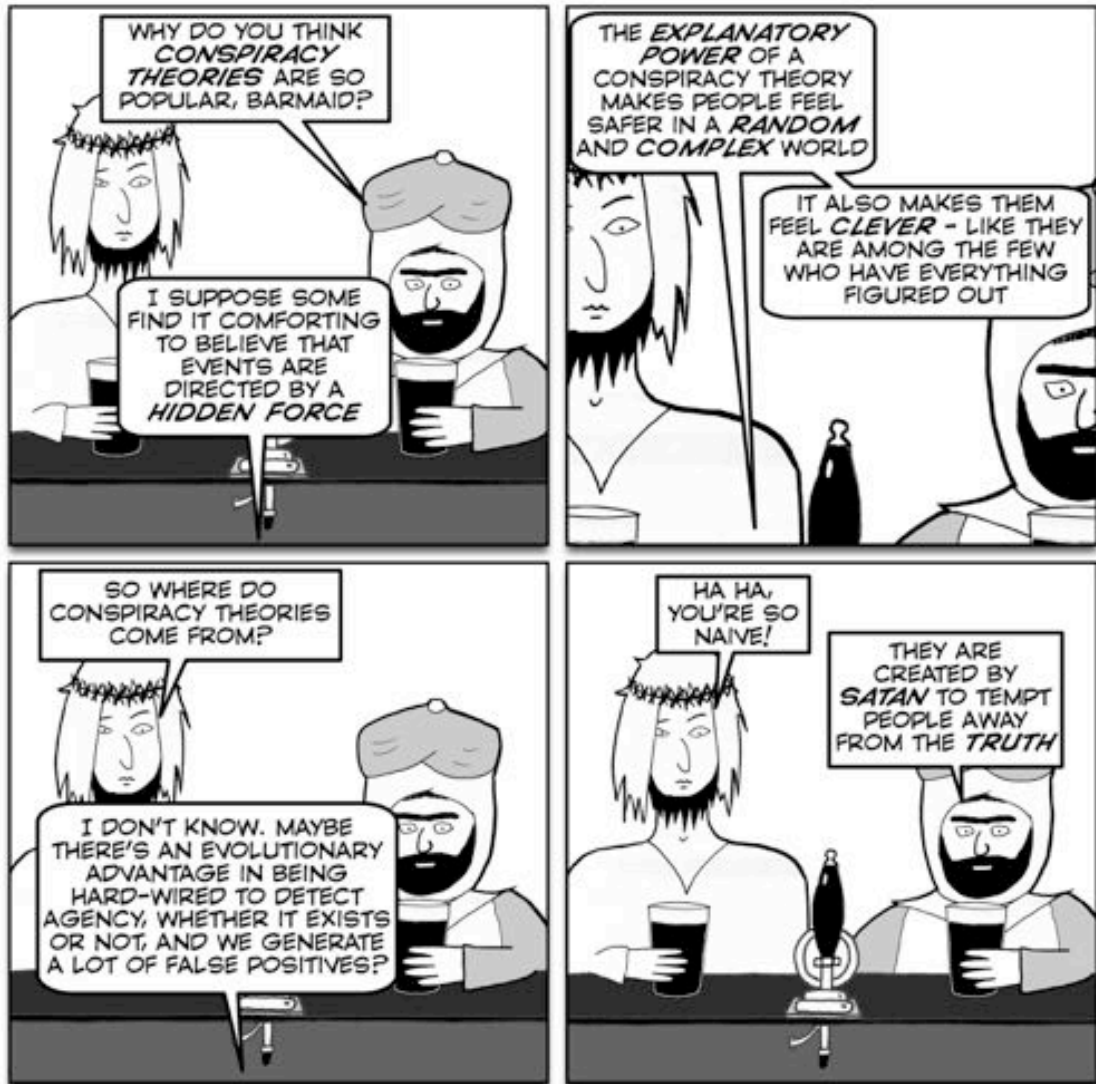
obey



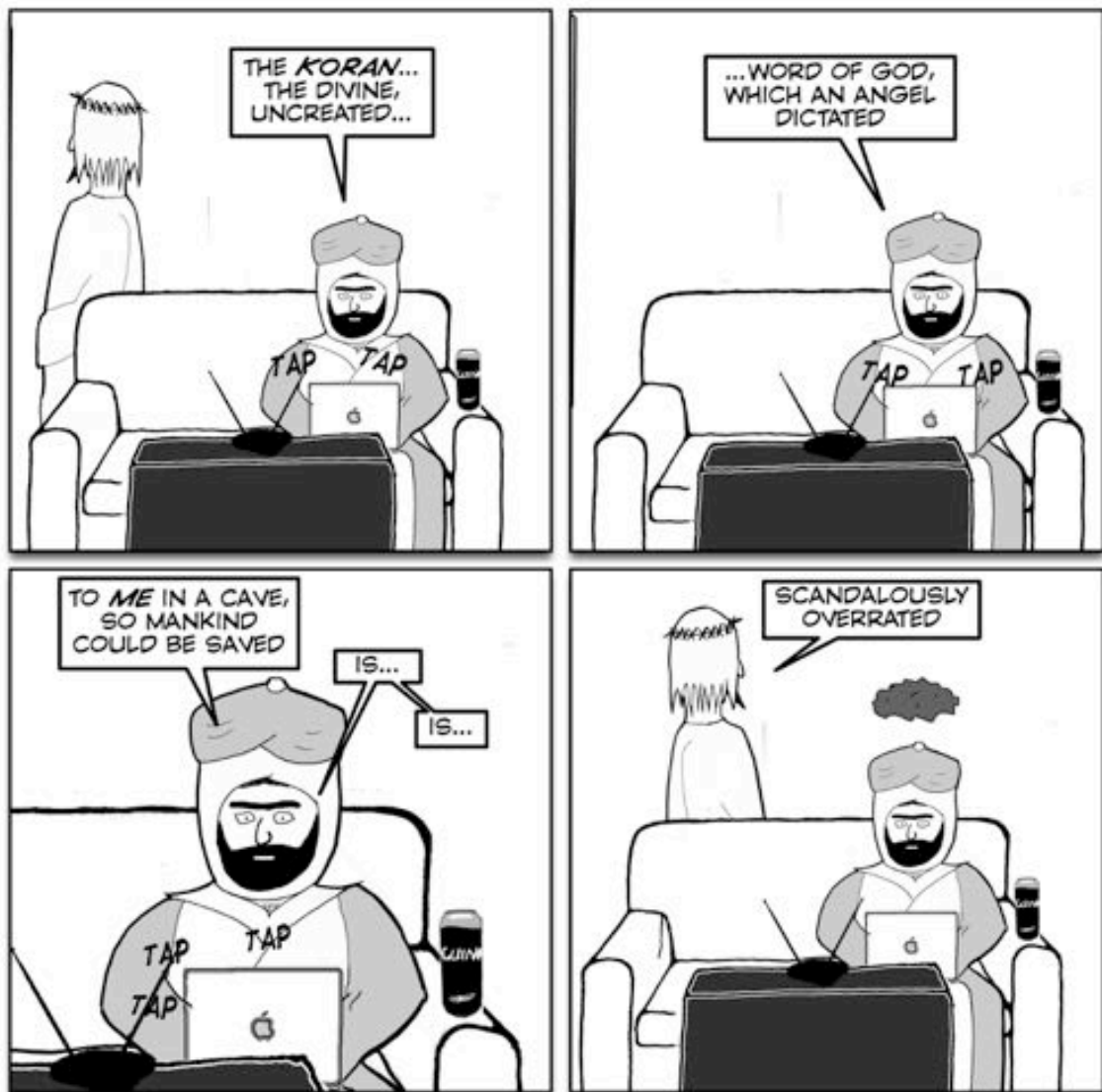
## index



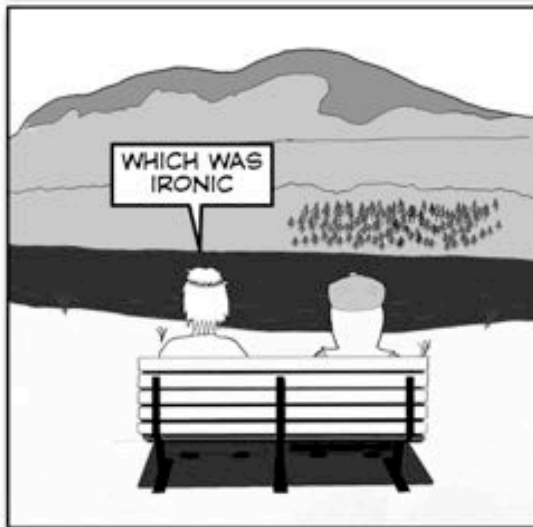
clever



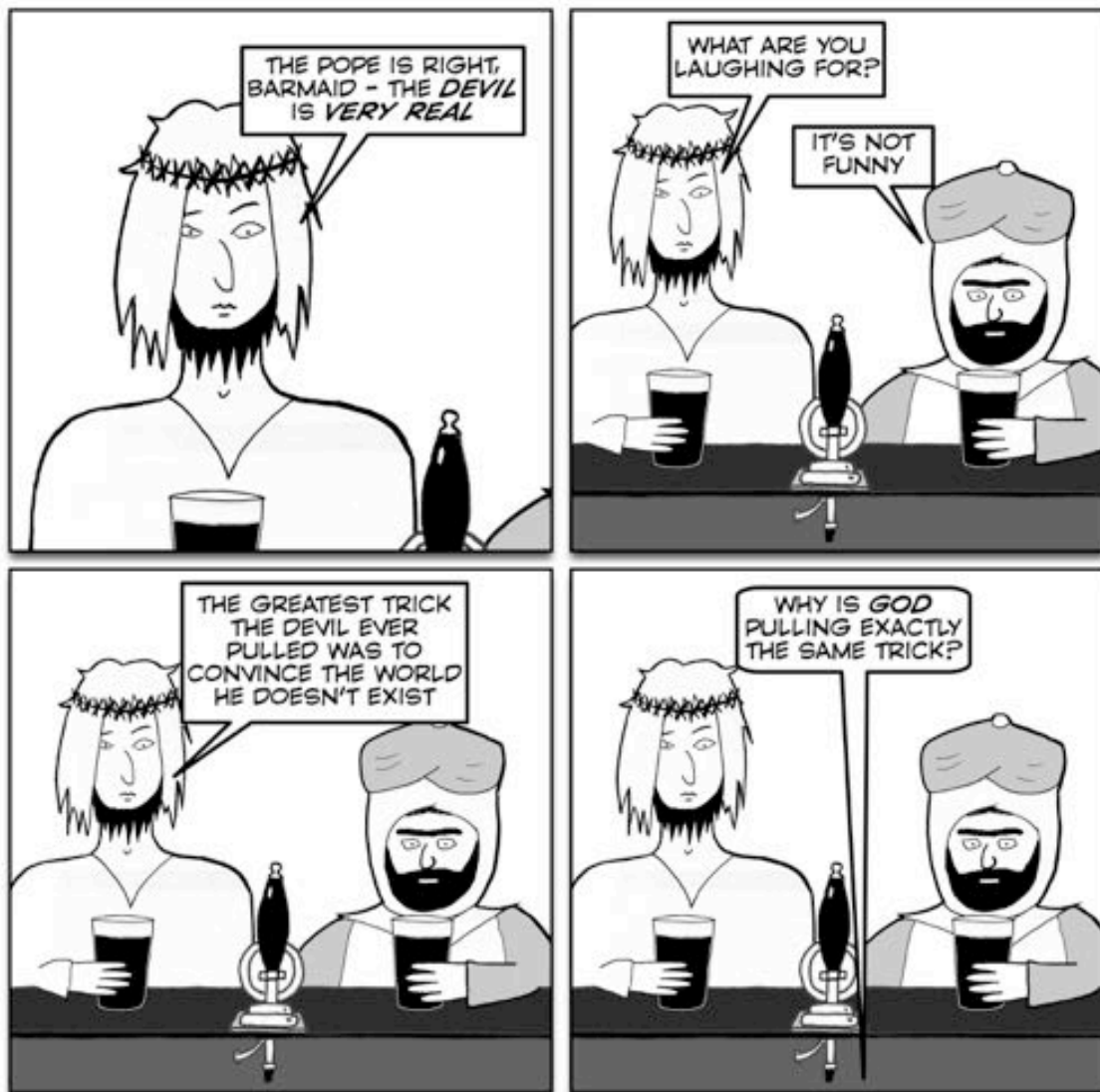
divine



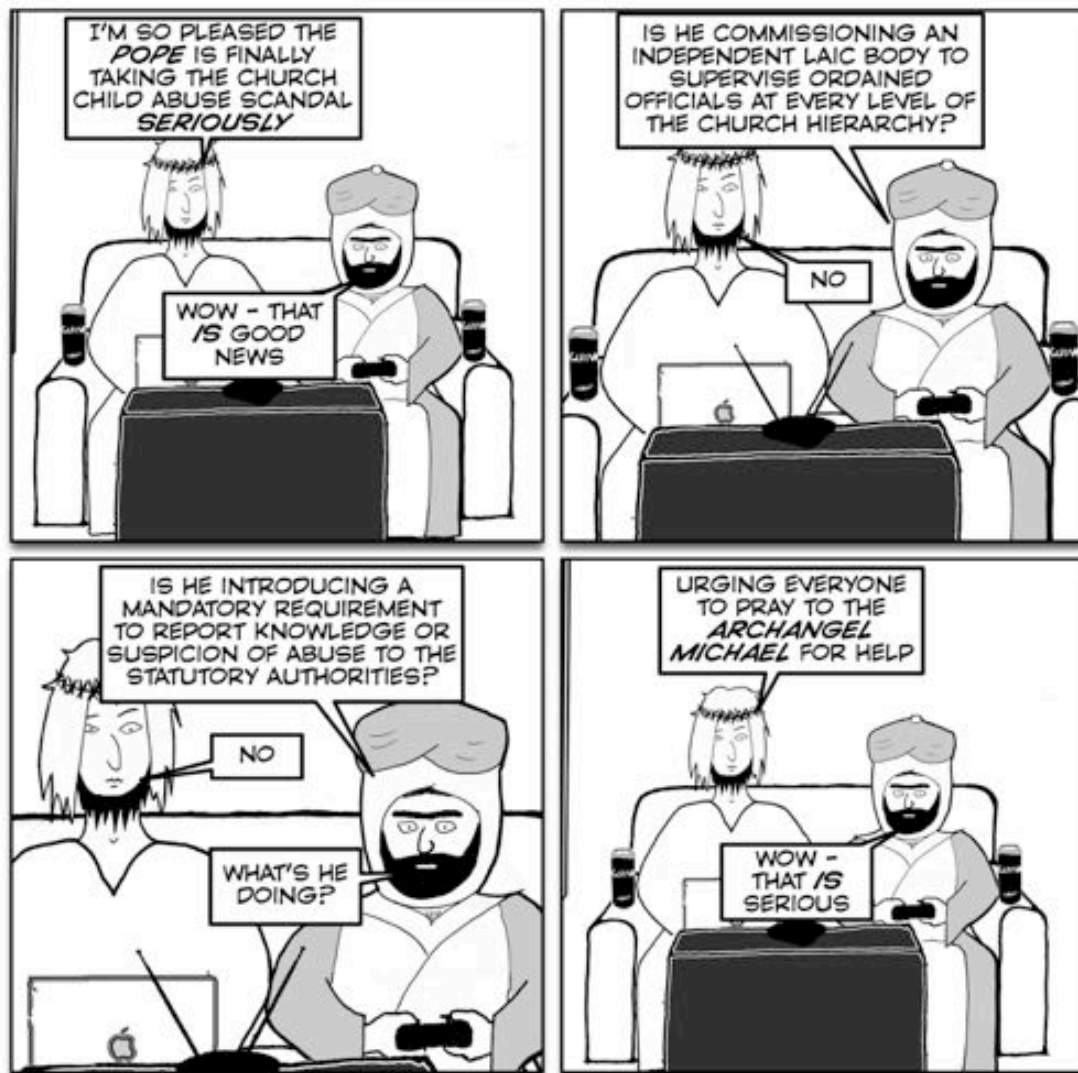
## hands



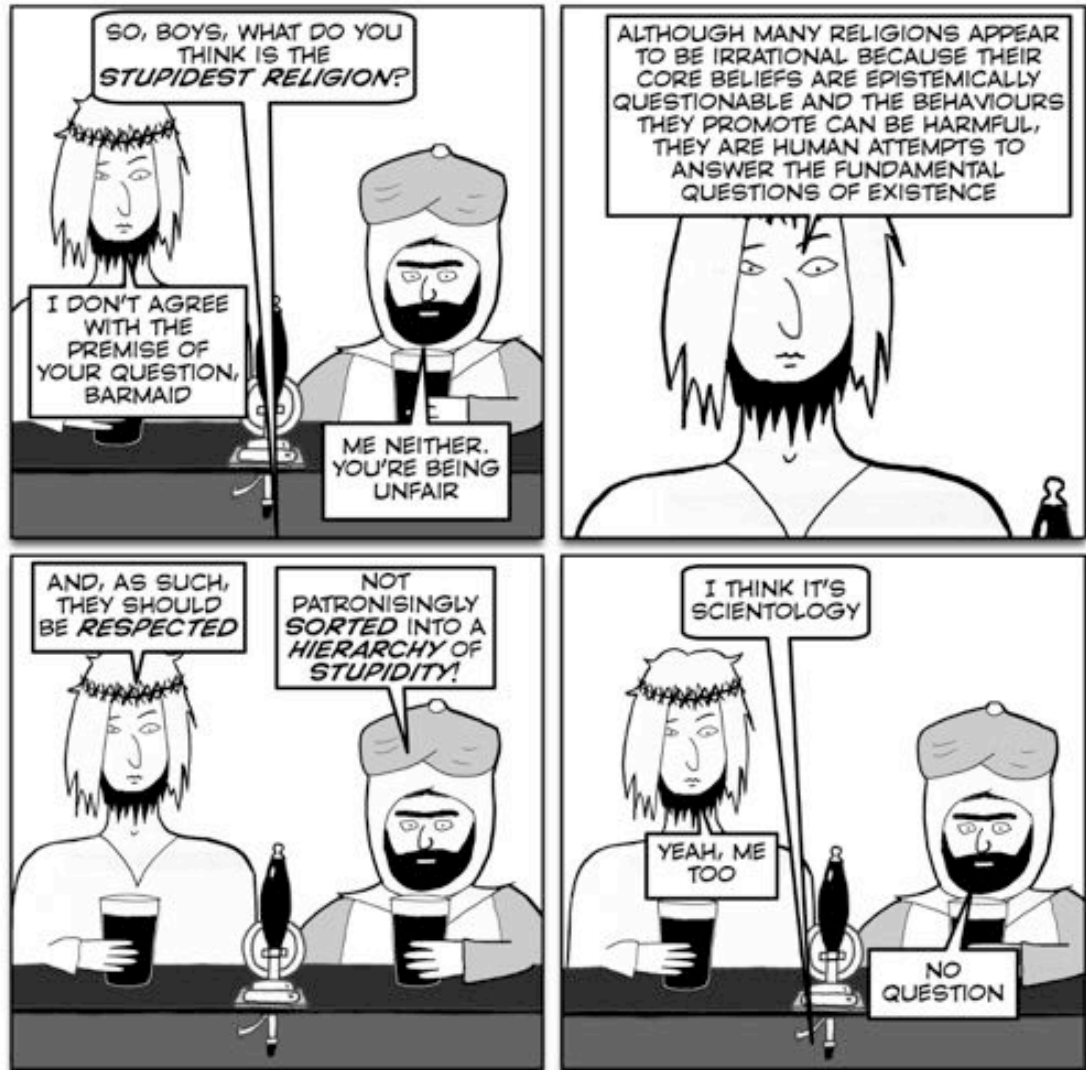
## devil

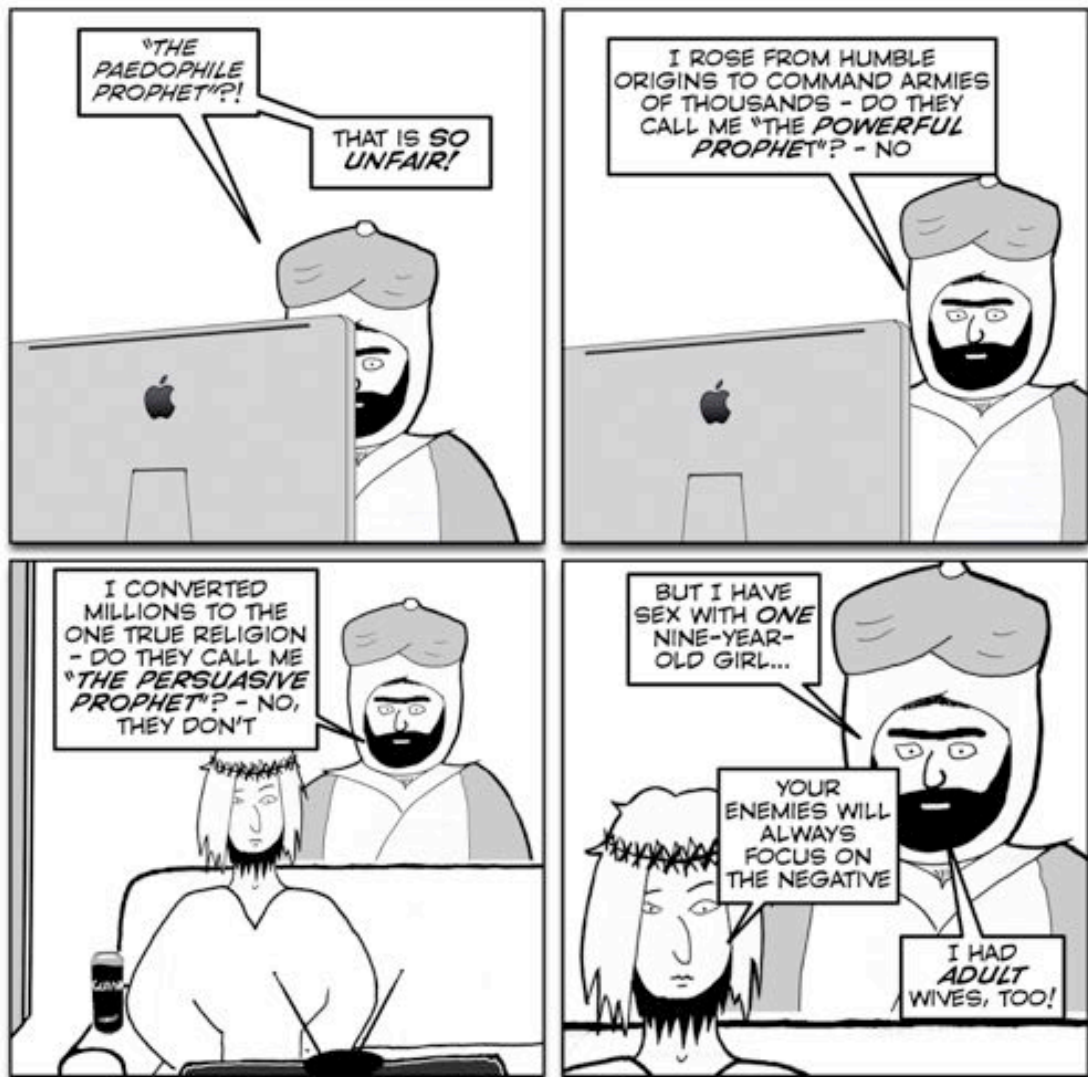


## laic

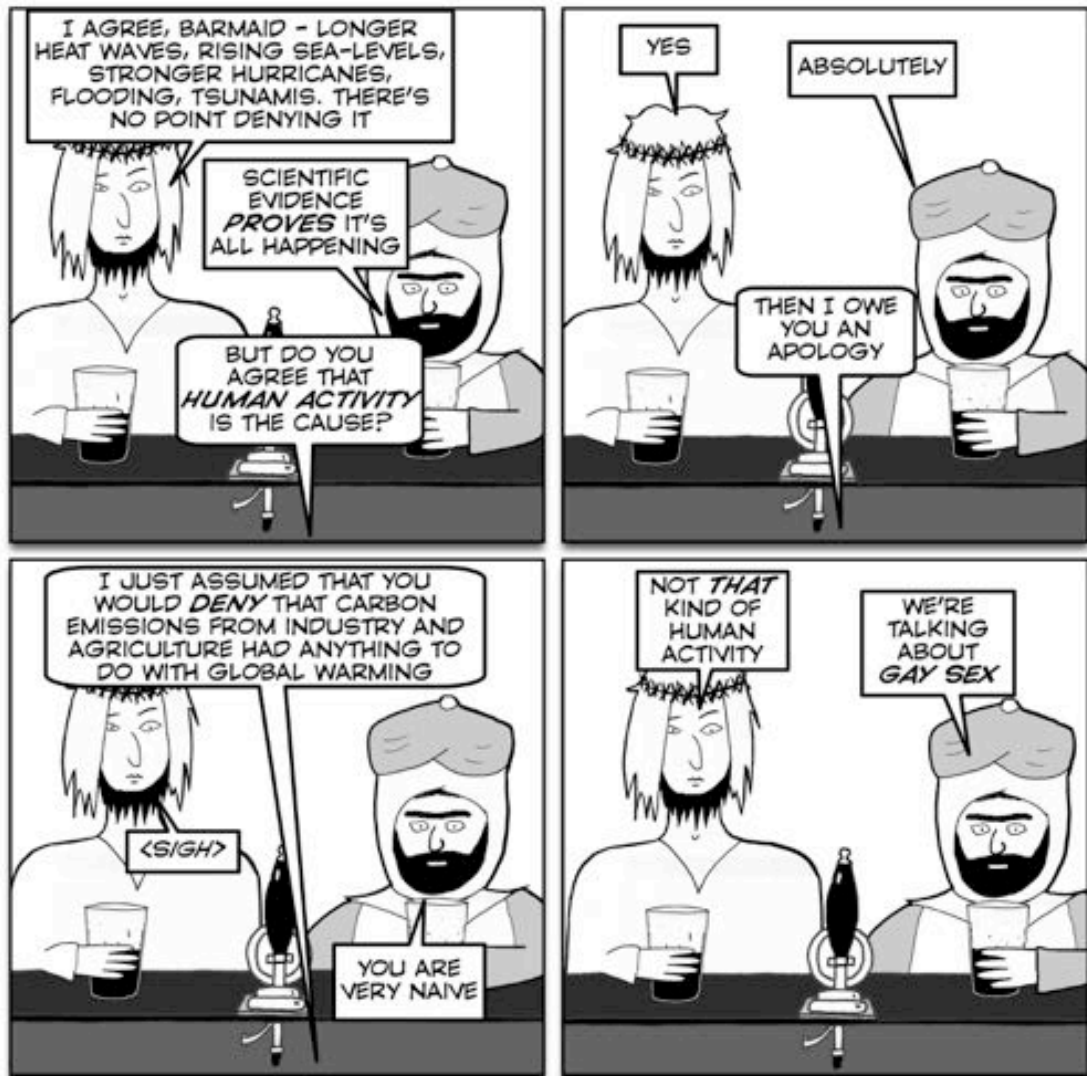


sorted

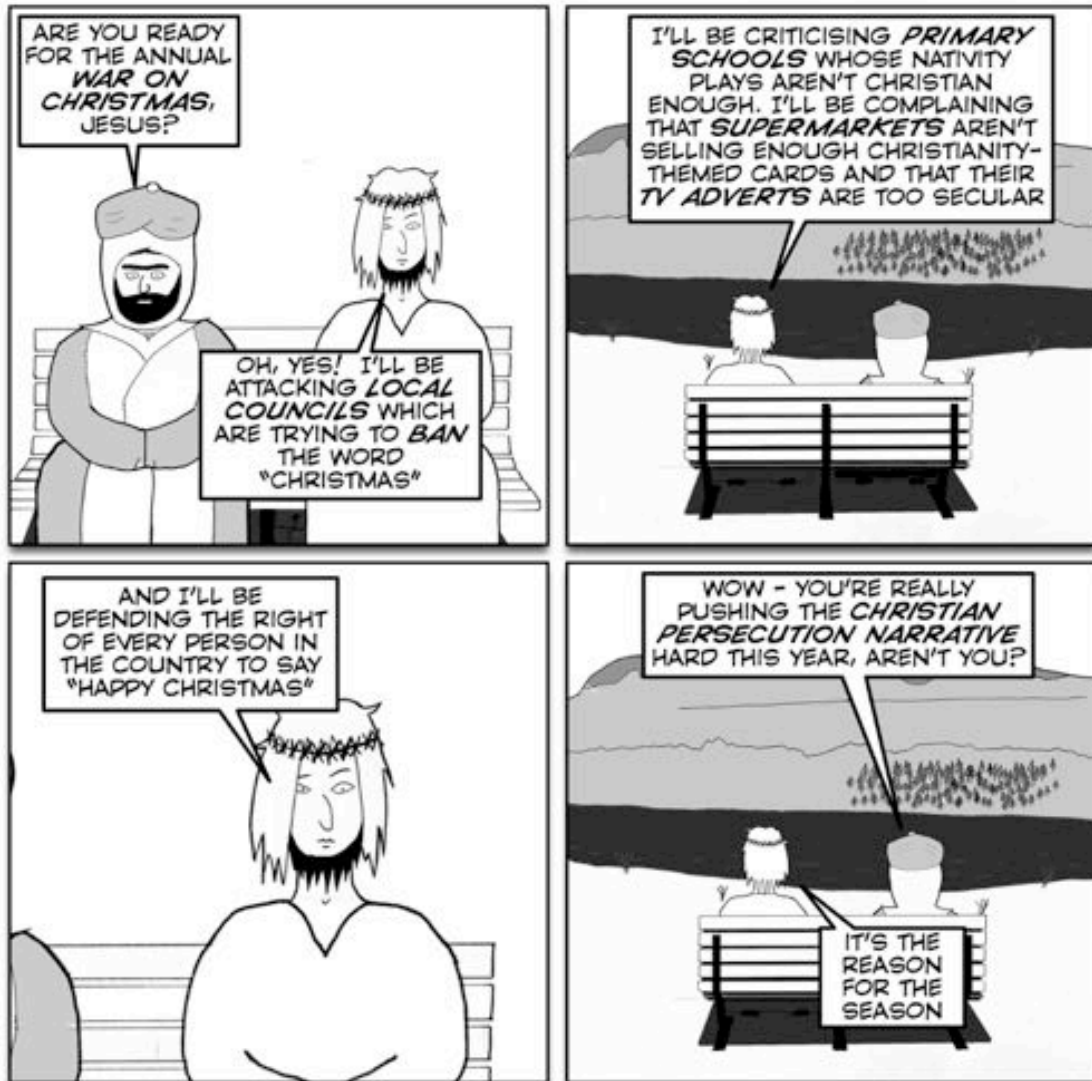




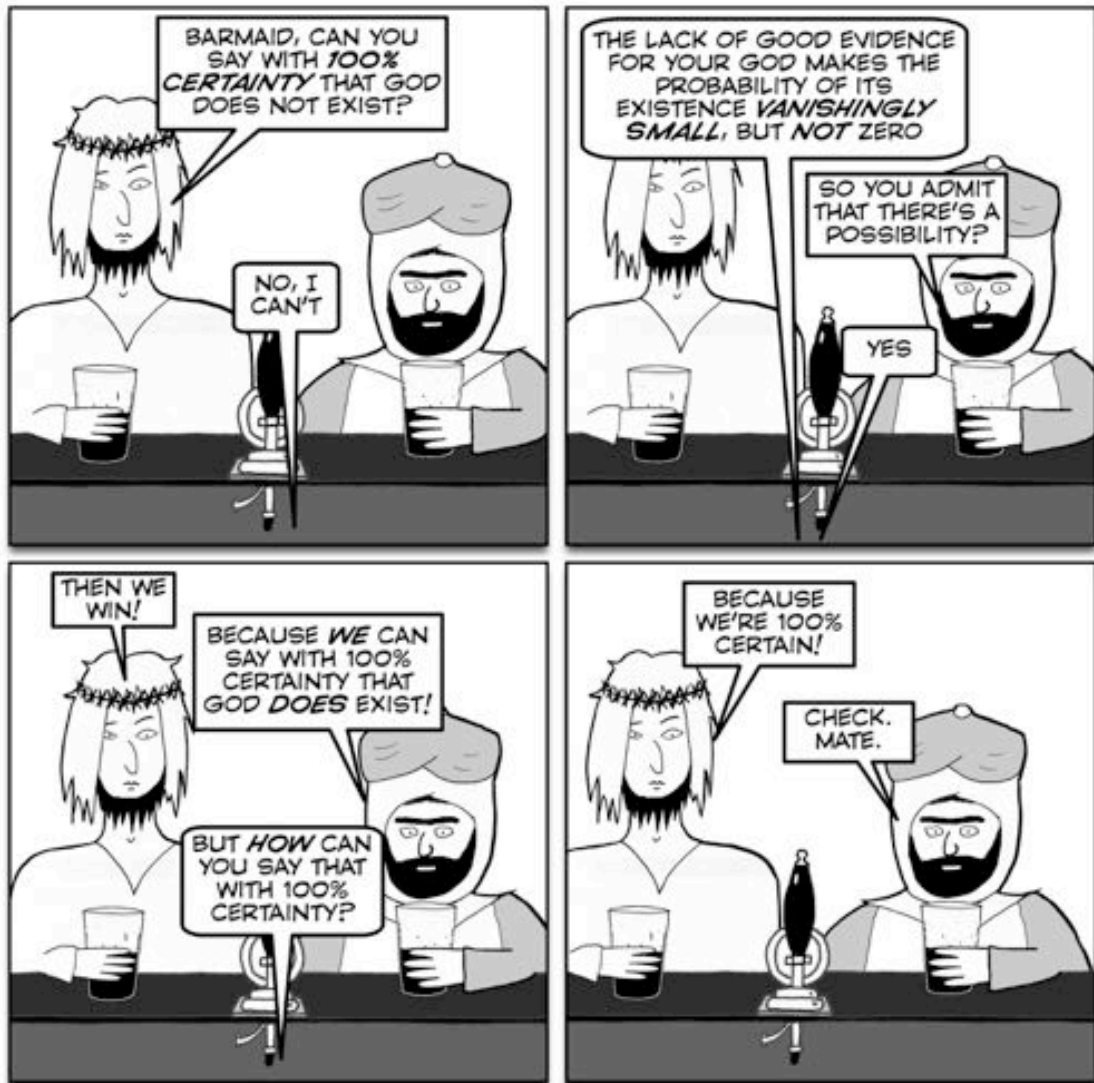
heat



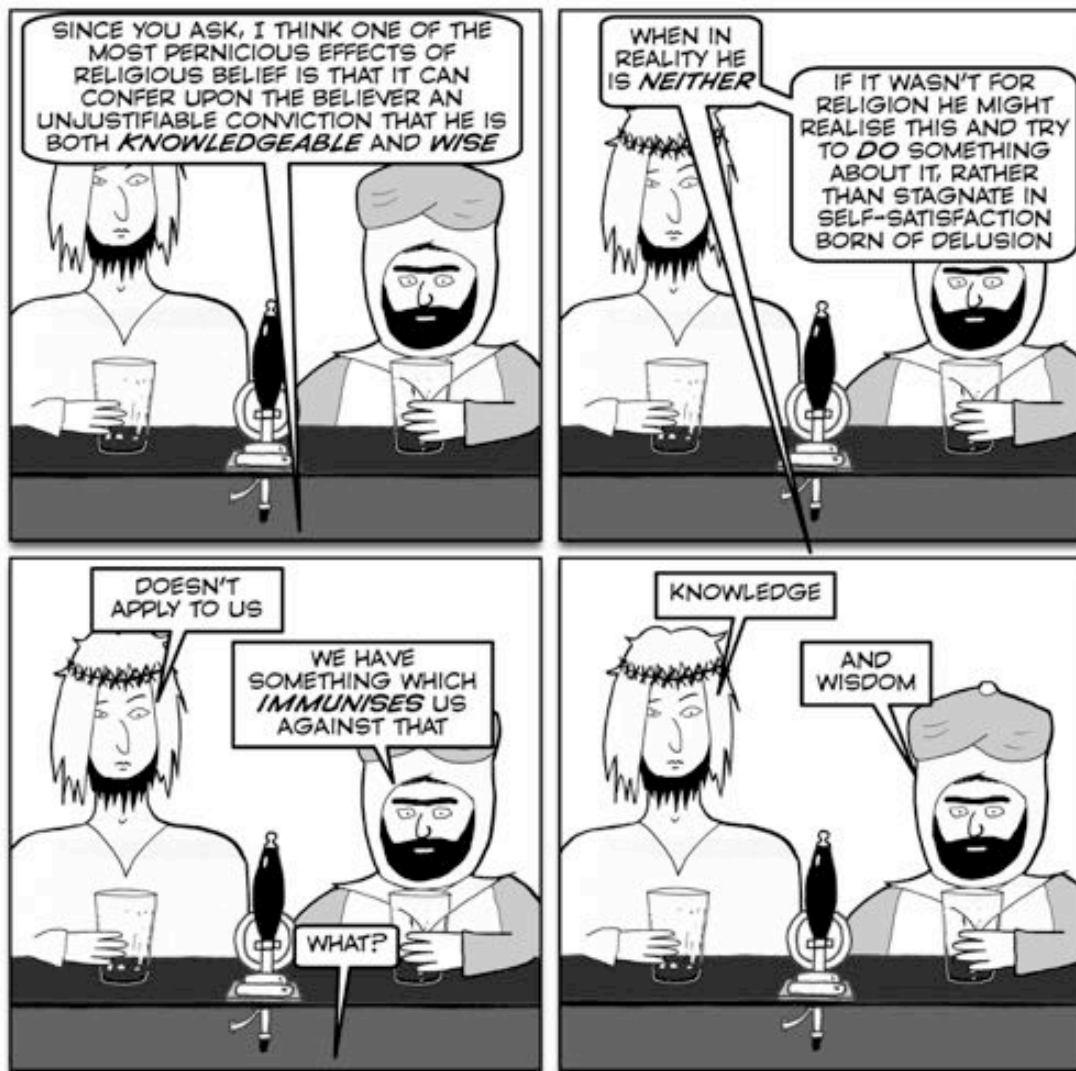
## plays



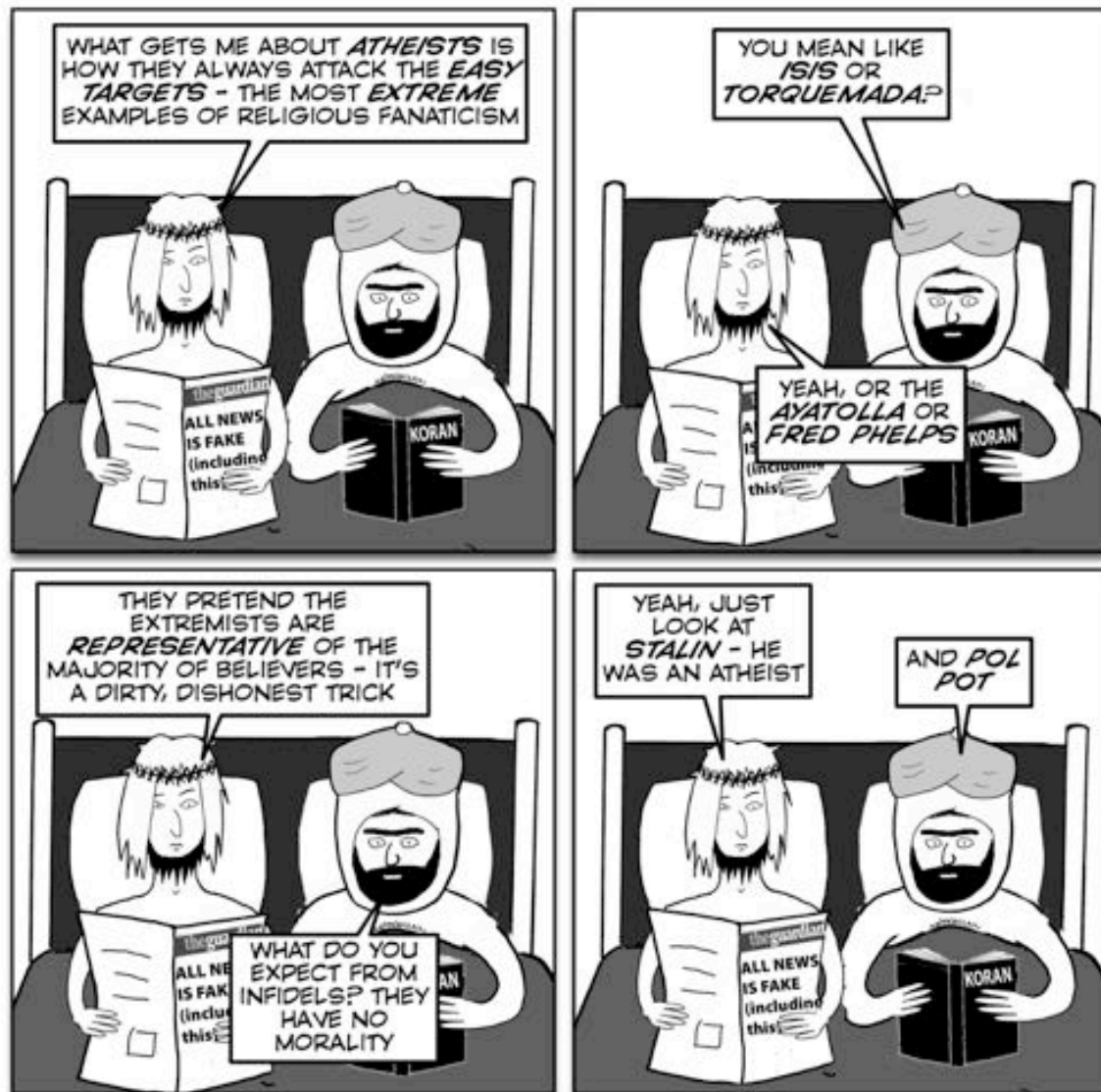
mate



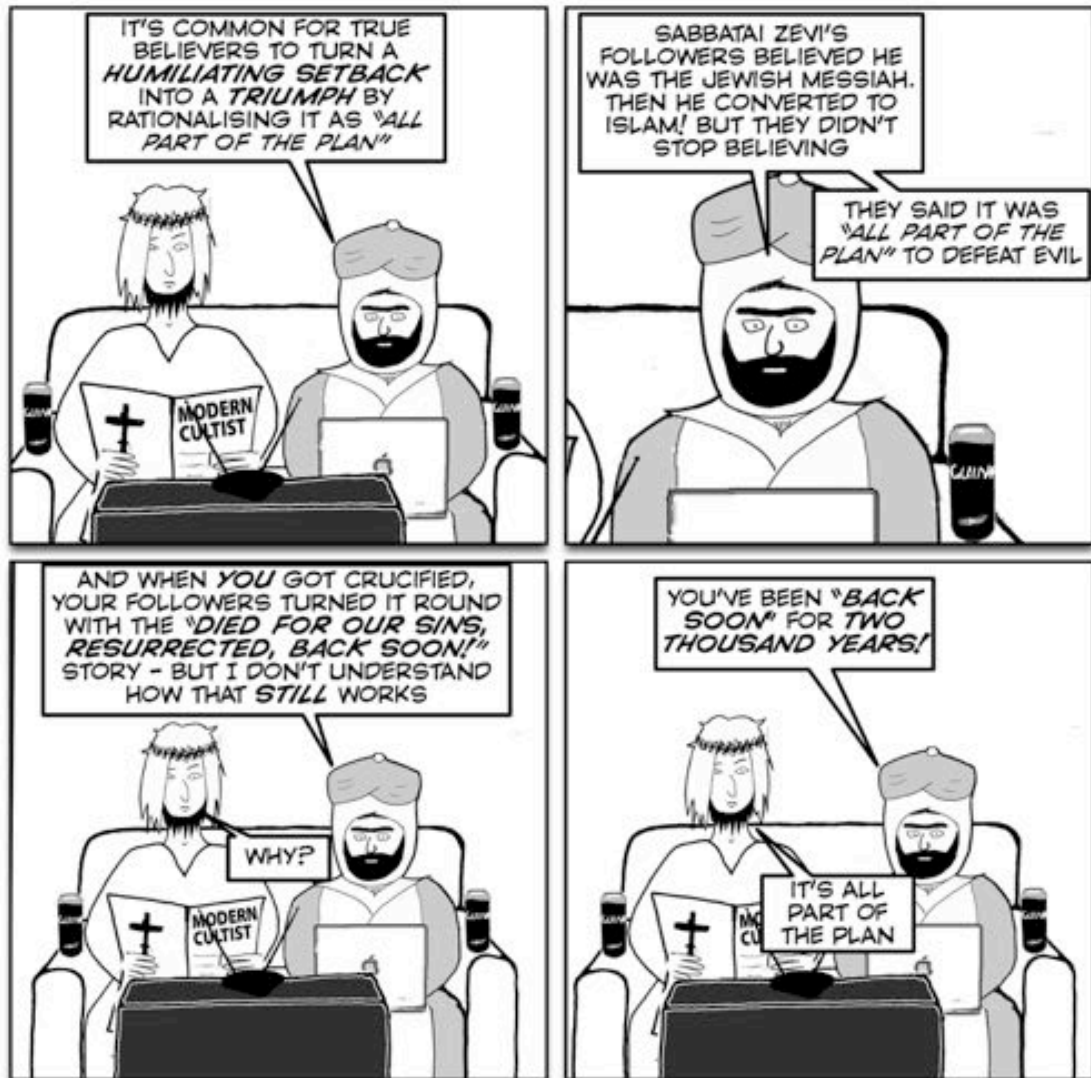
born

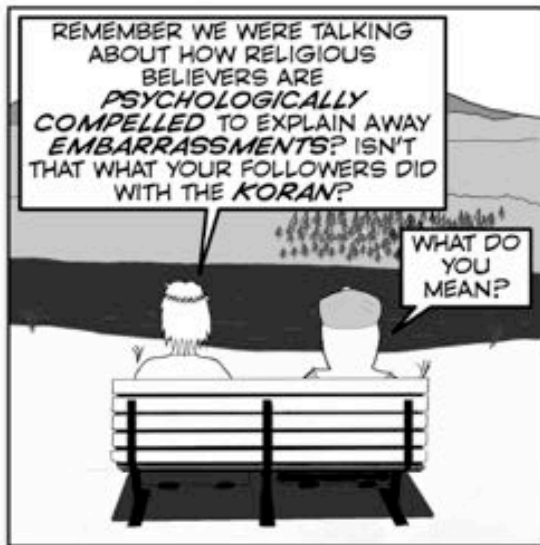


trick

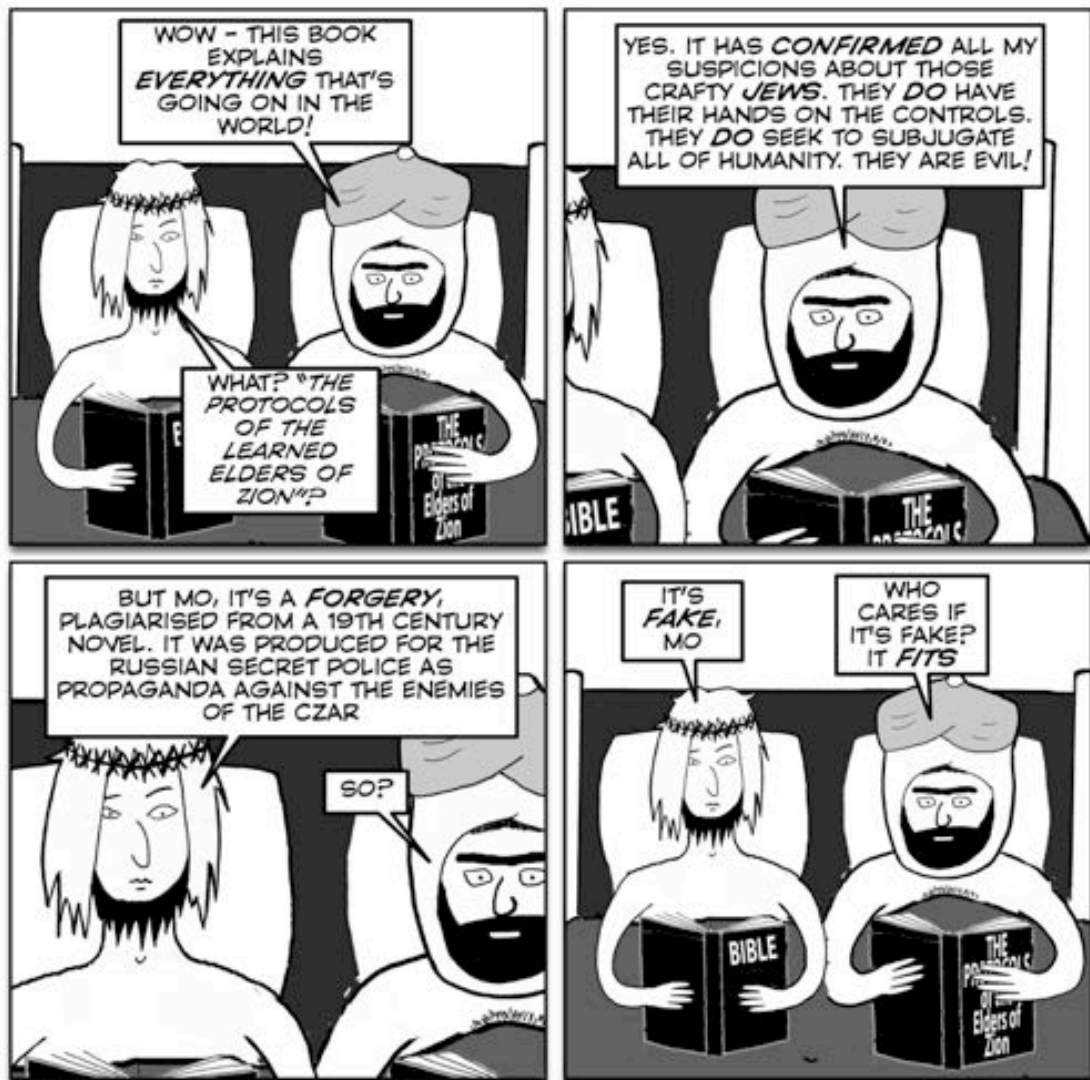


part





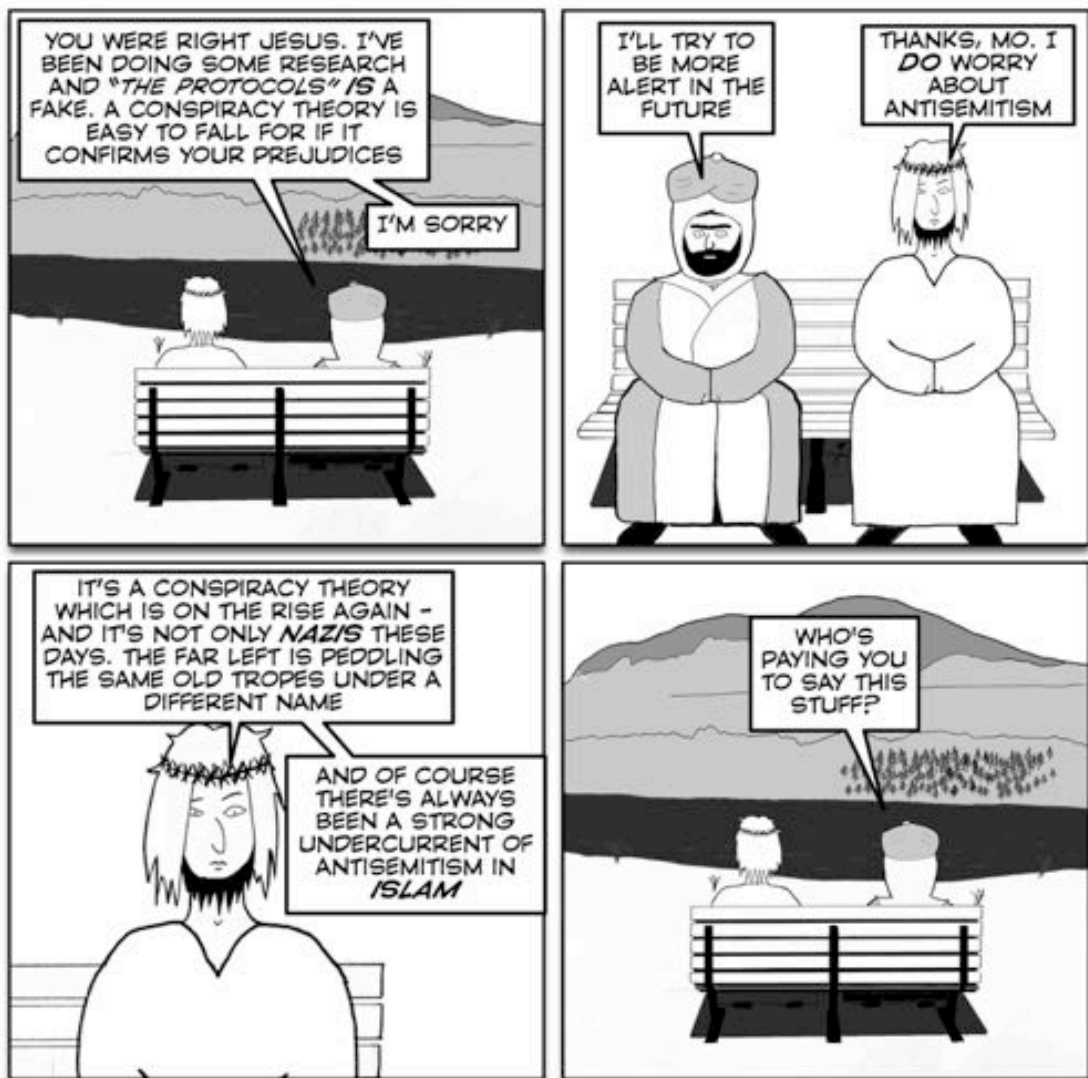
fits



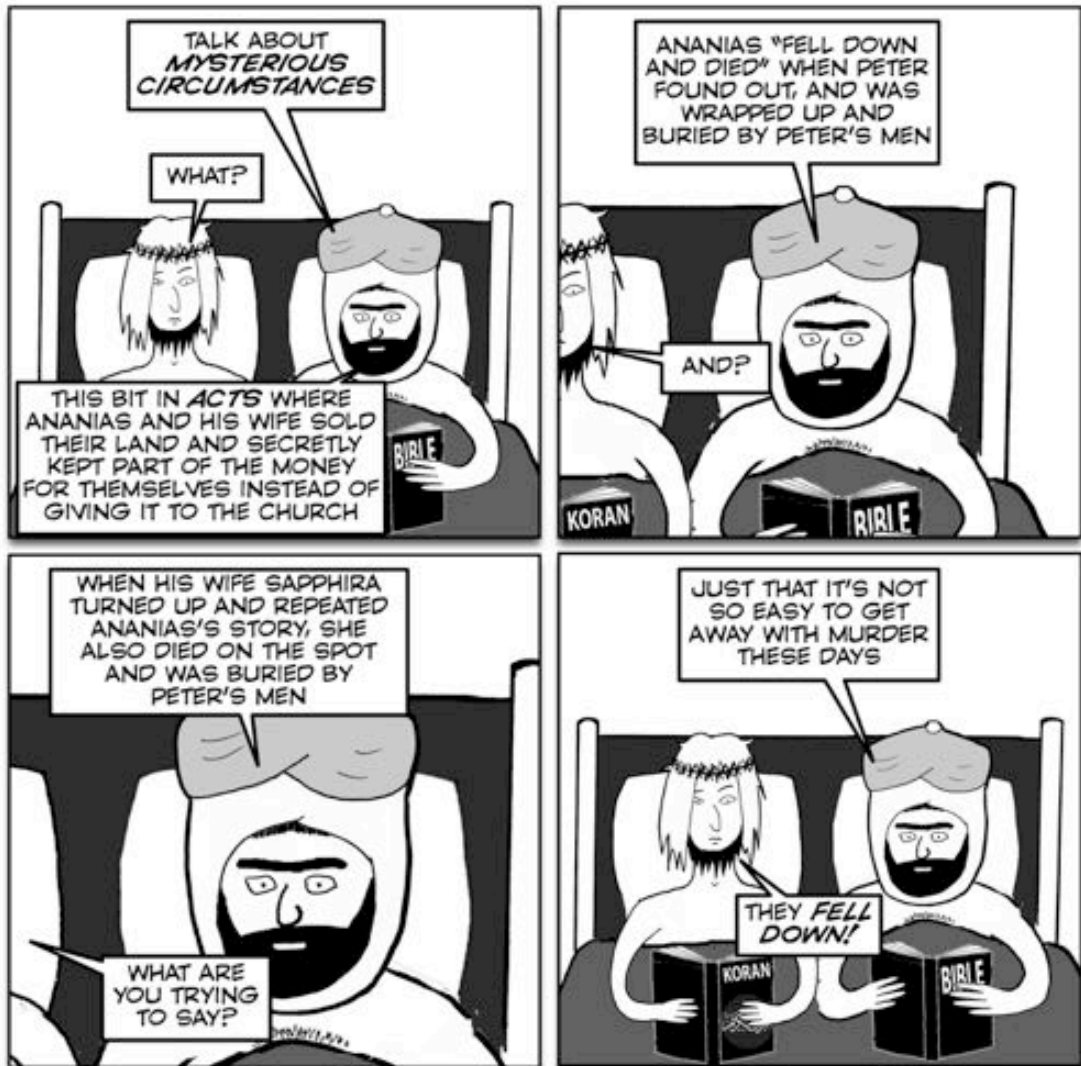
play



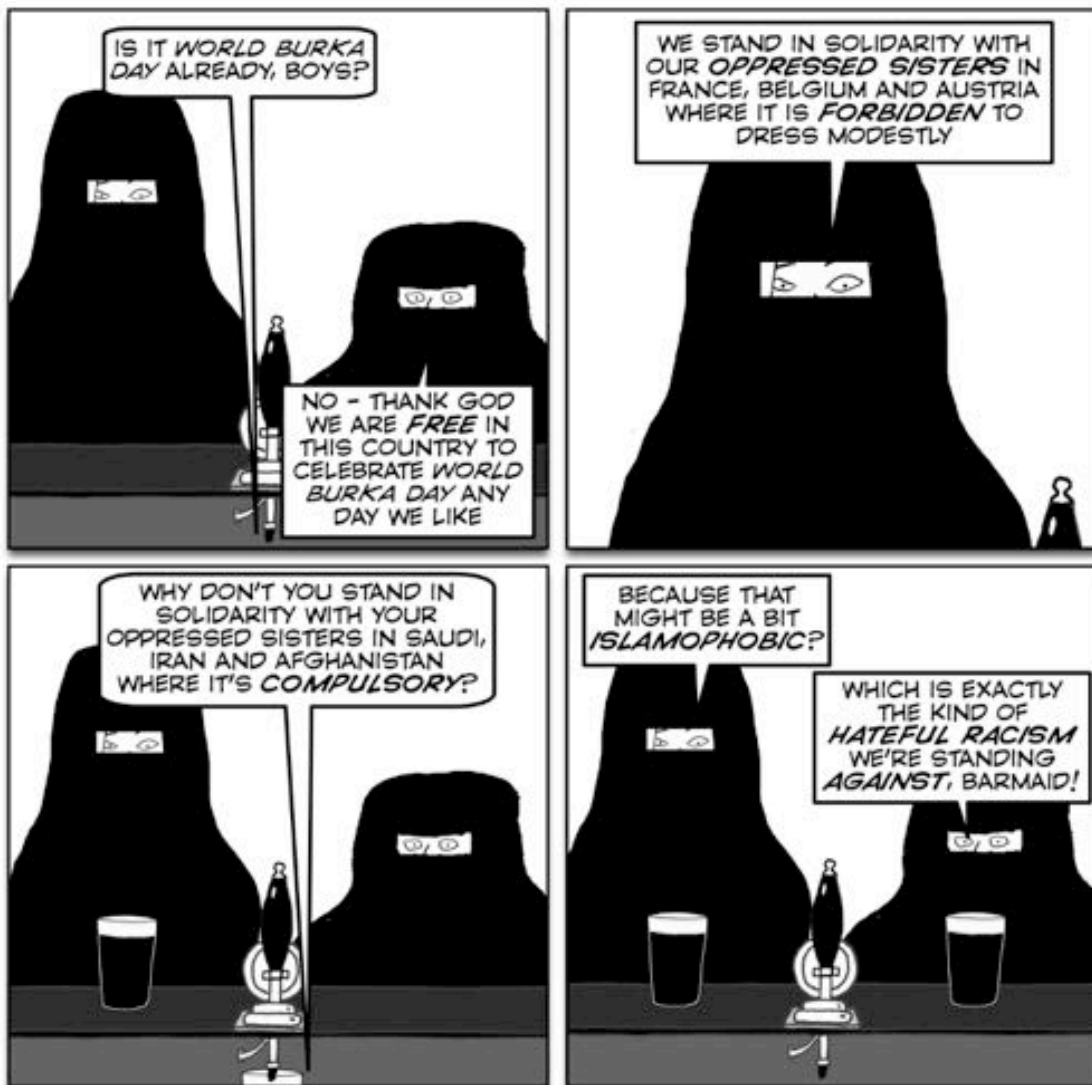
alert



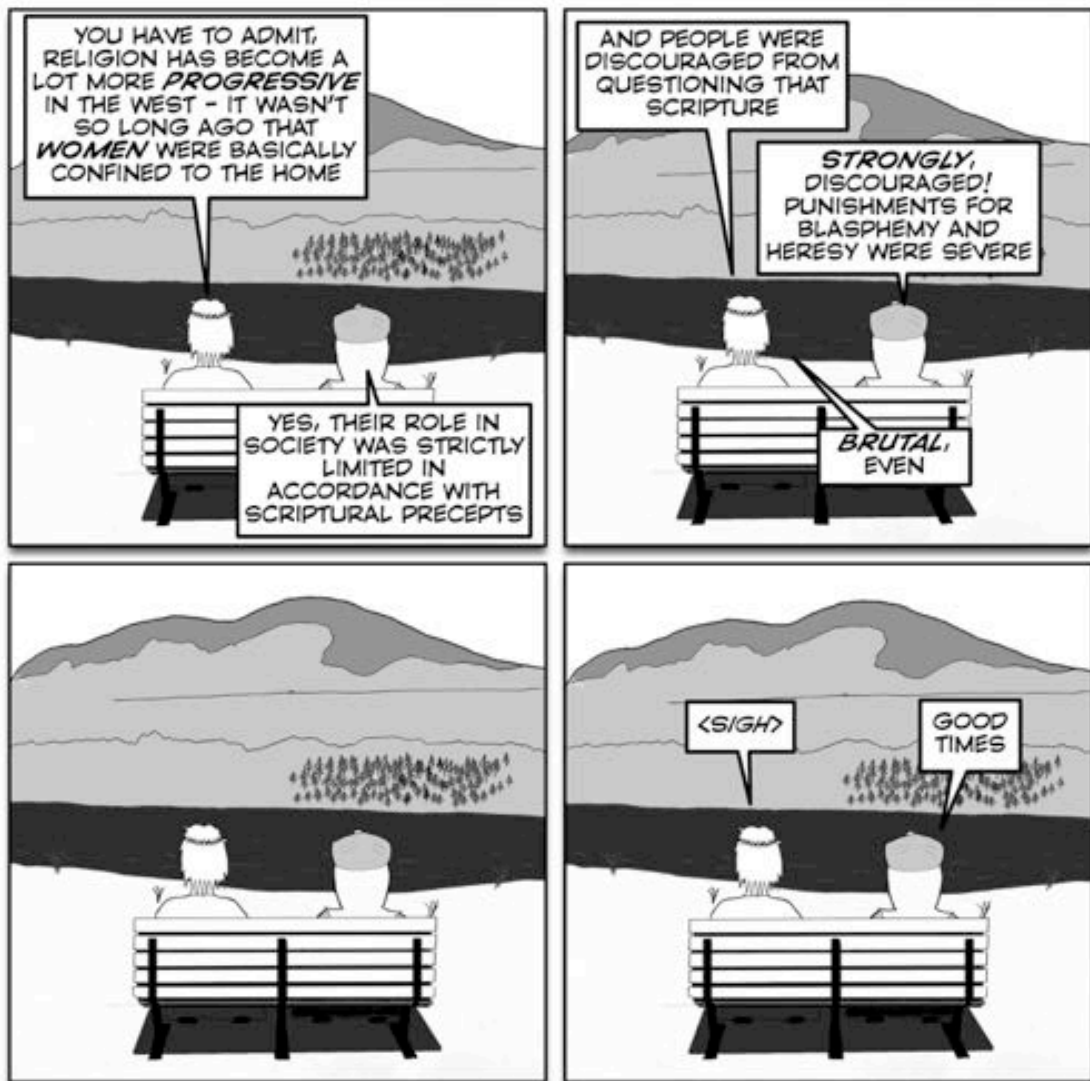
fell



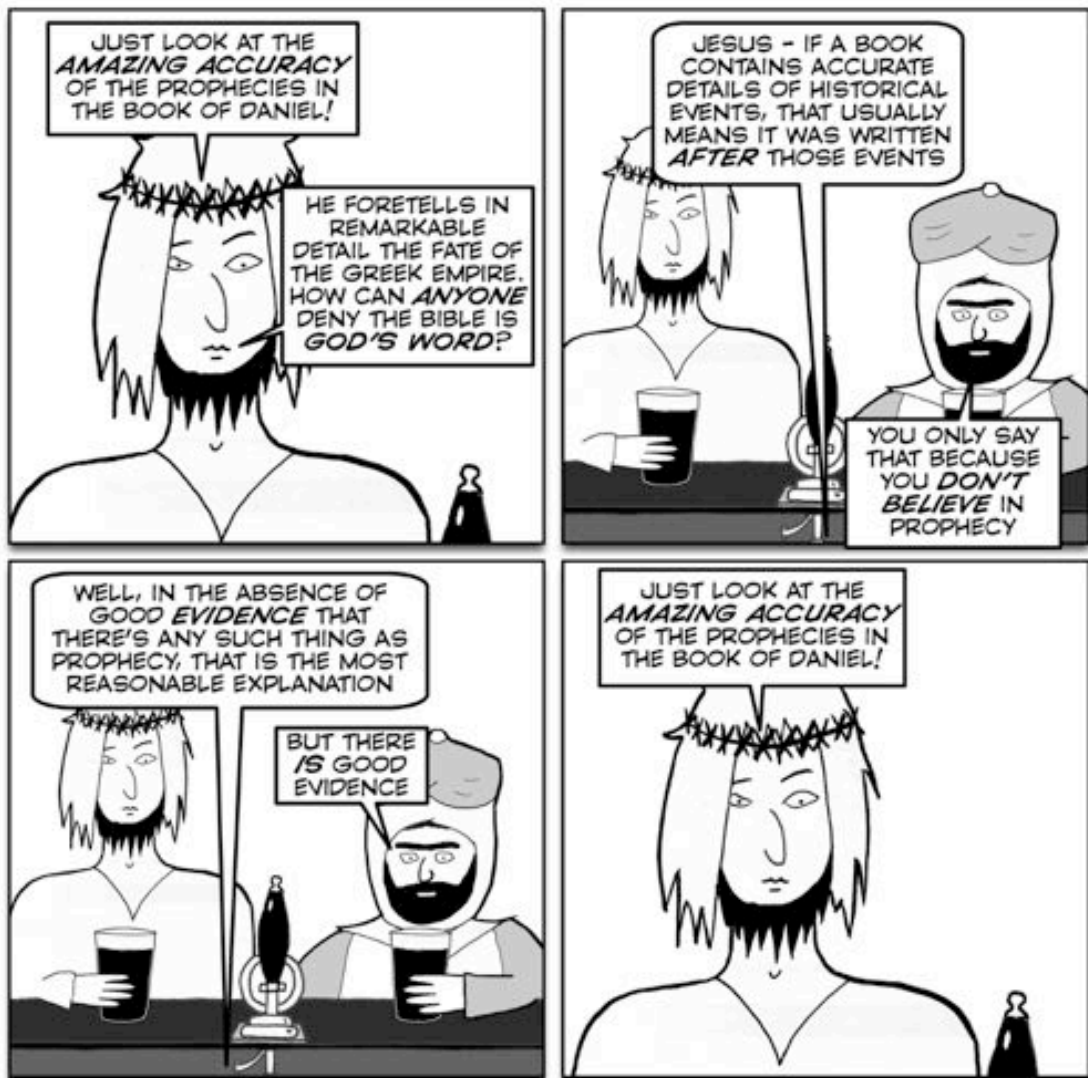
## burka



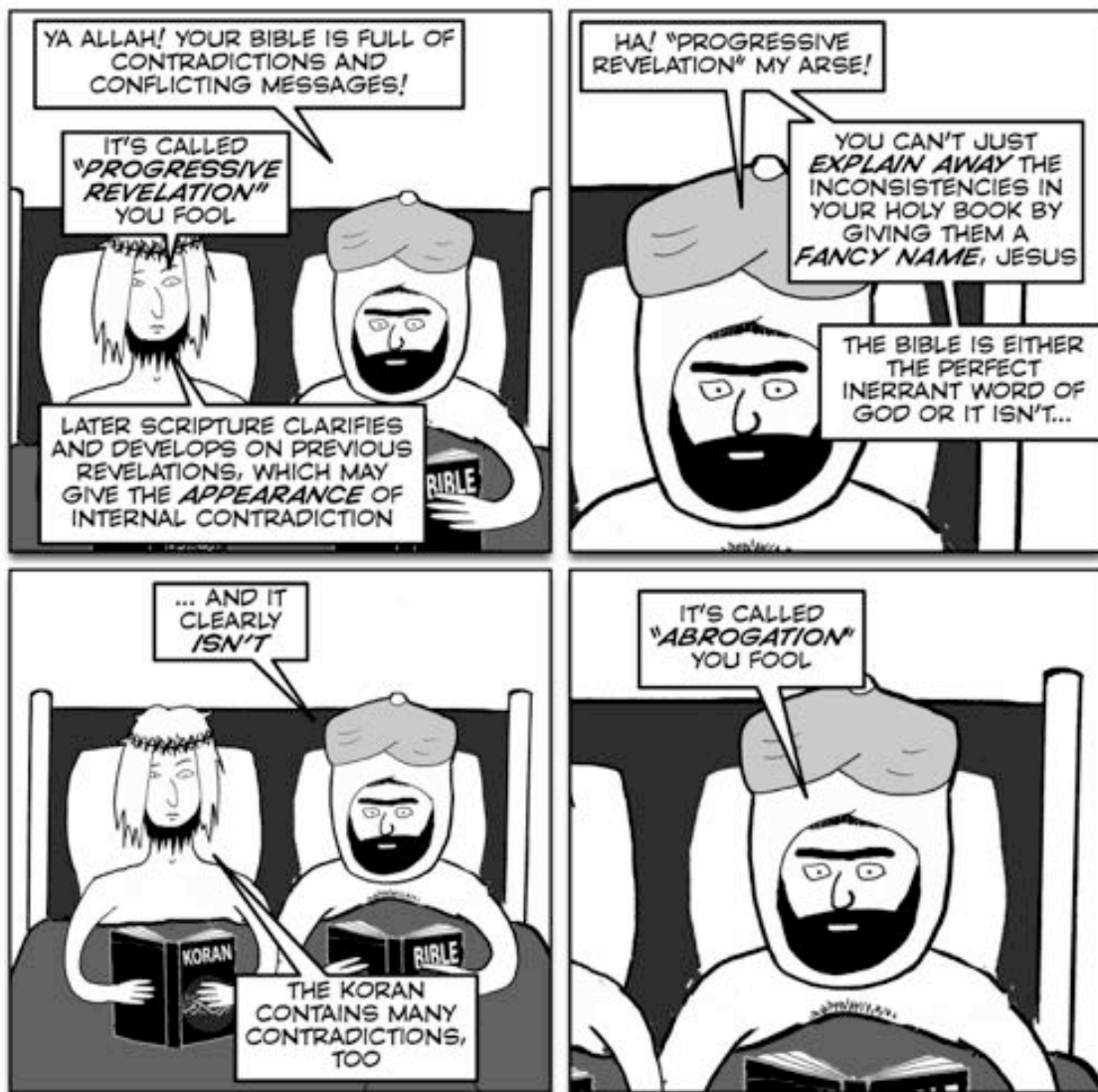
brutal



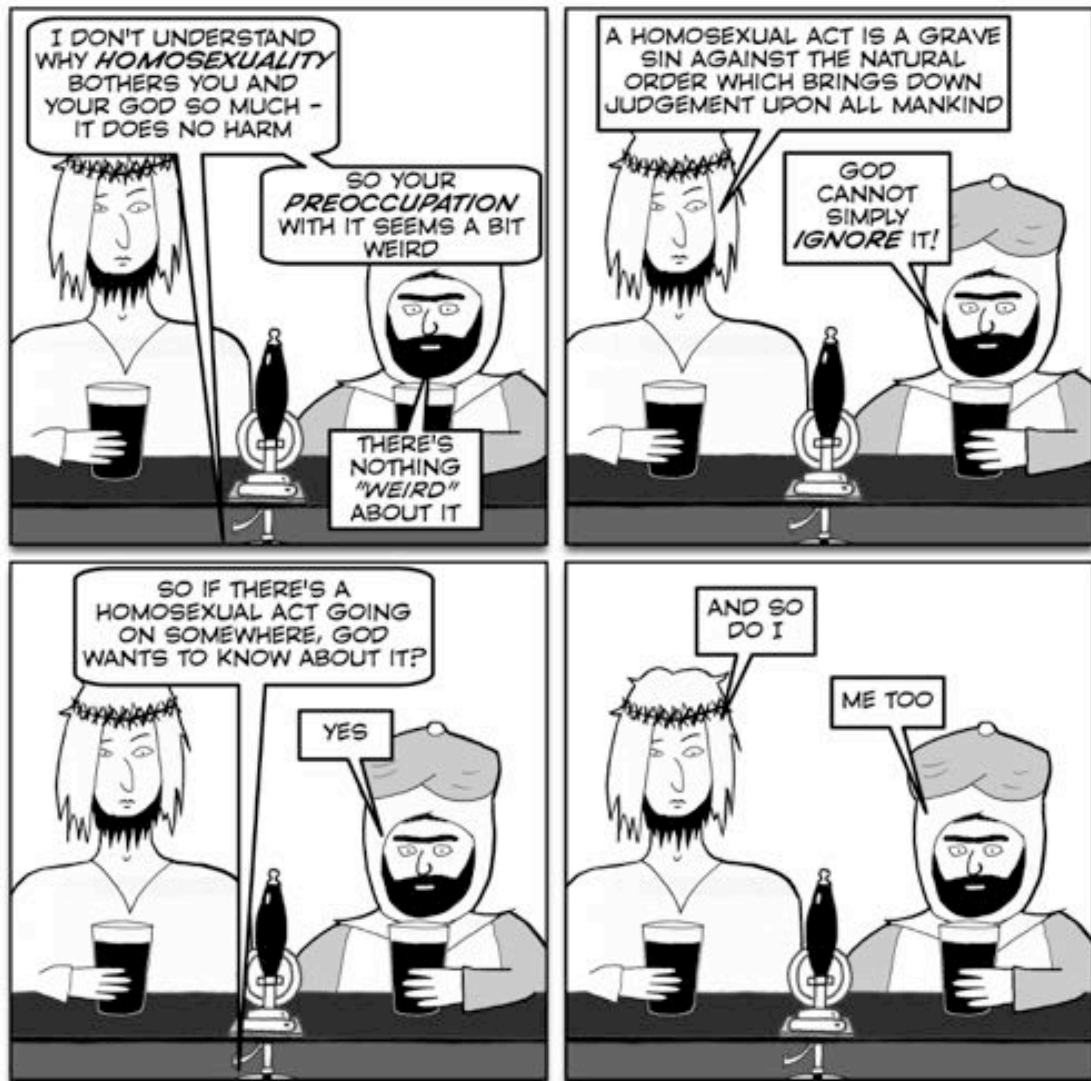
after



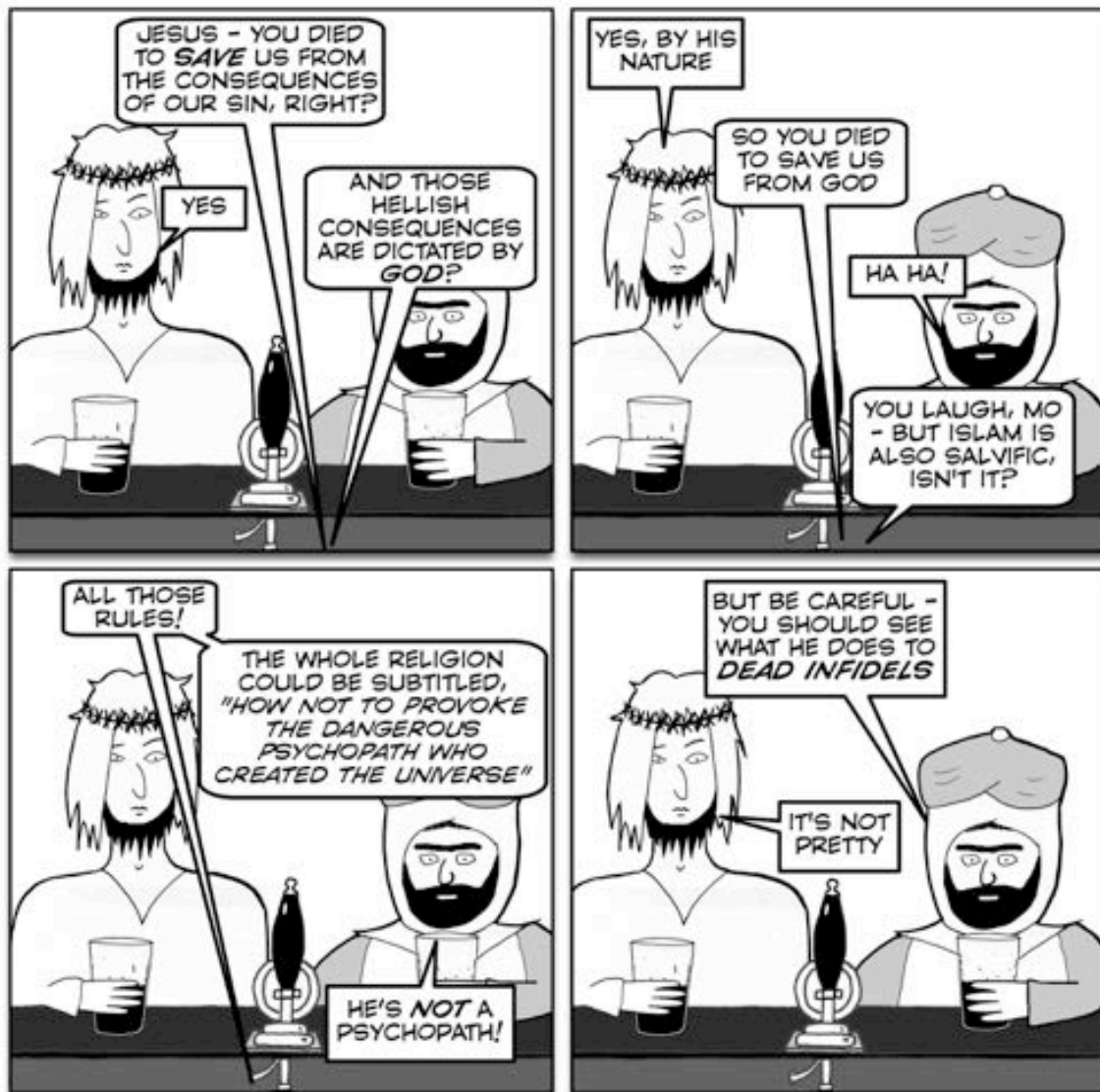
fancy



## grave



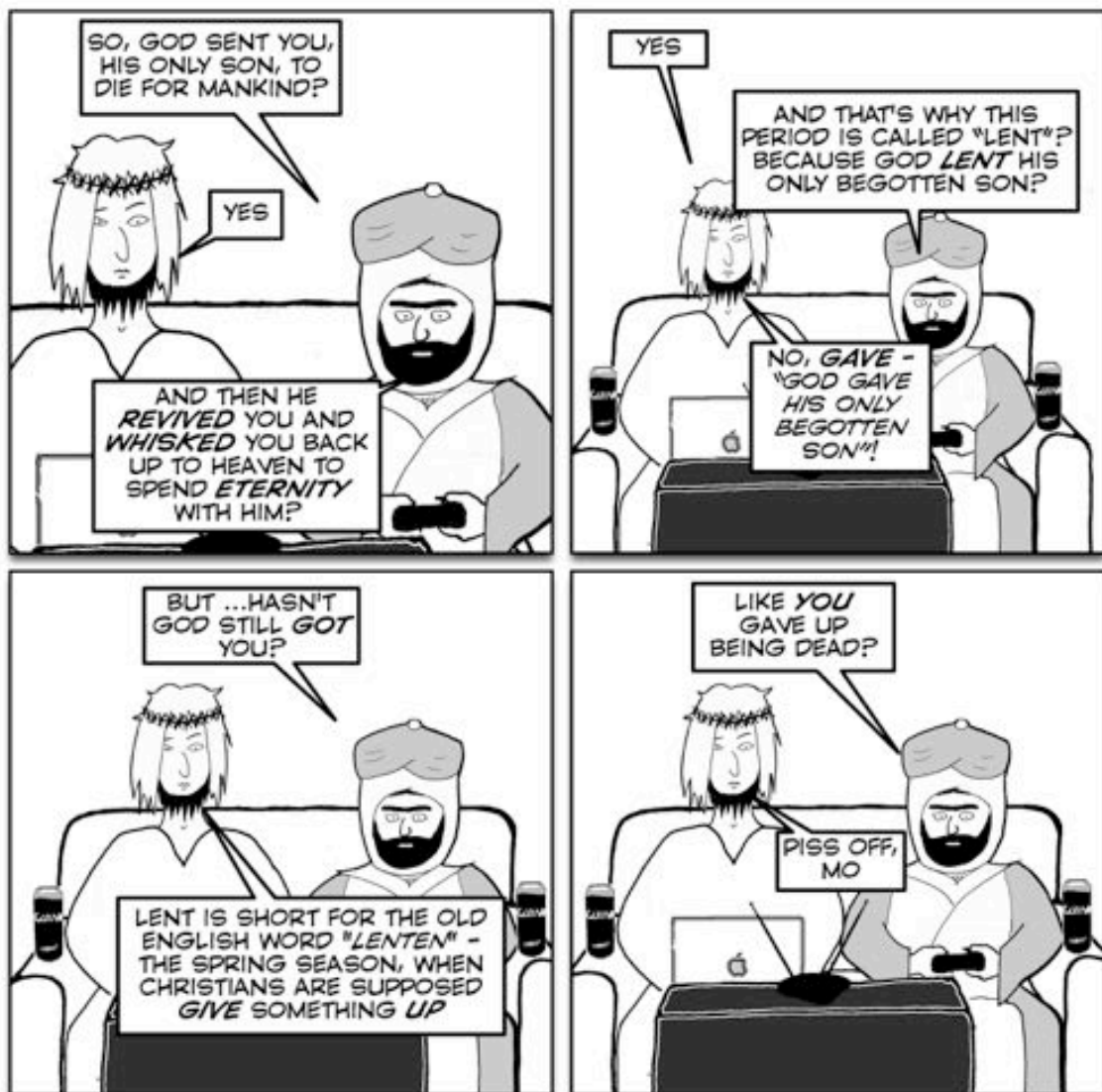
save



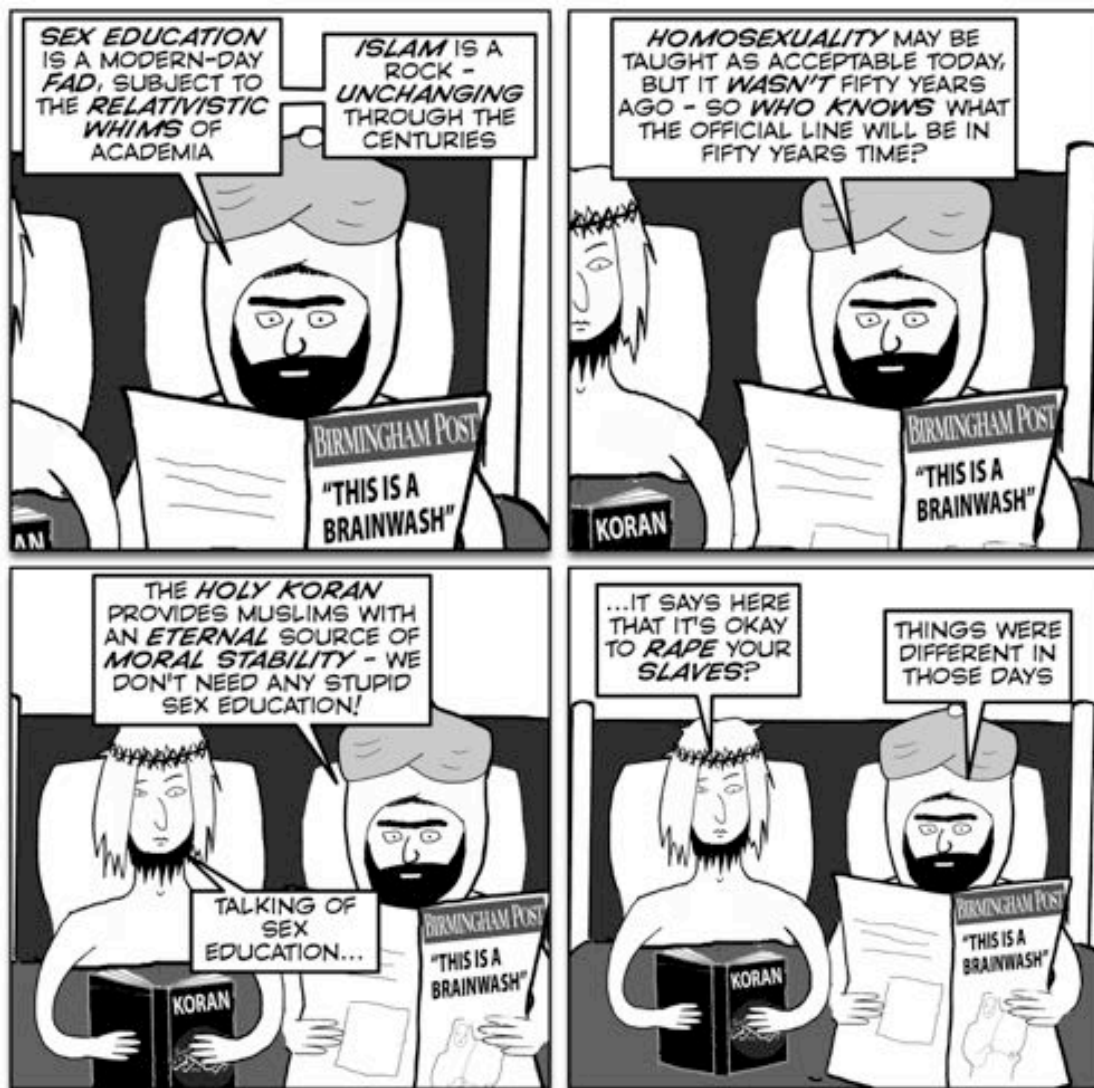
cost



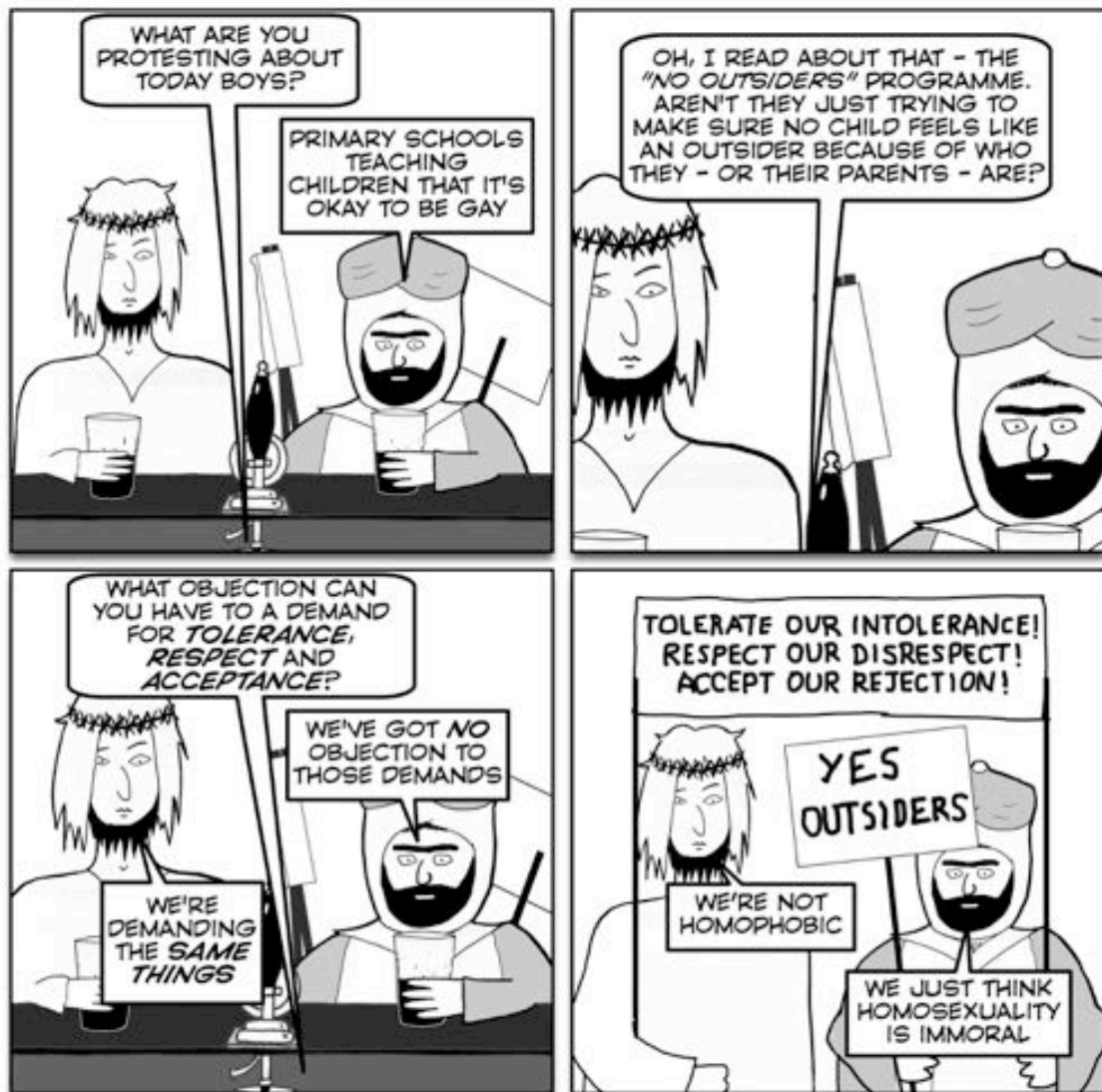
## lenten



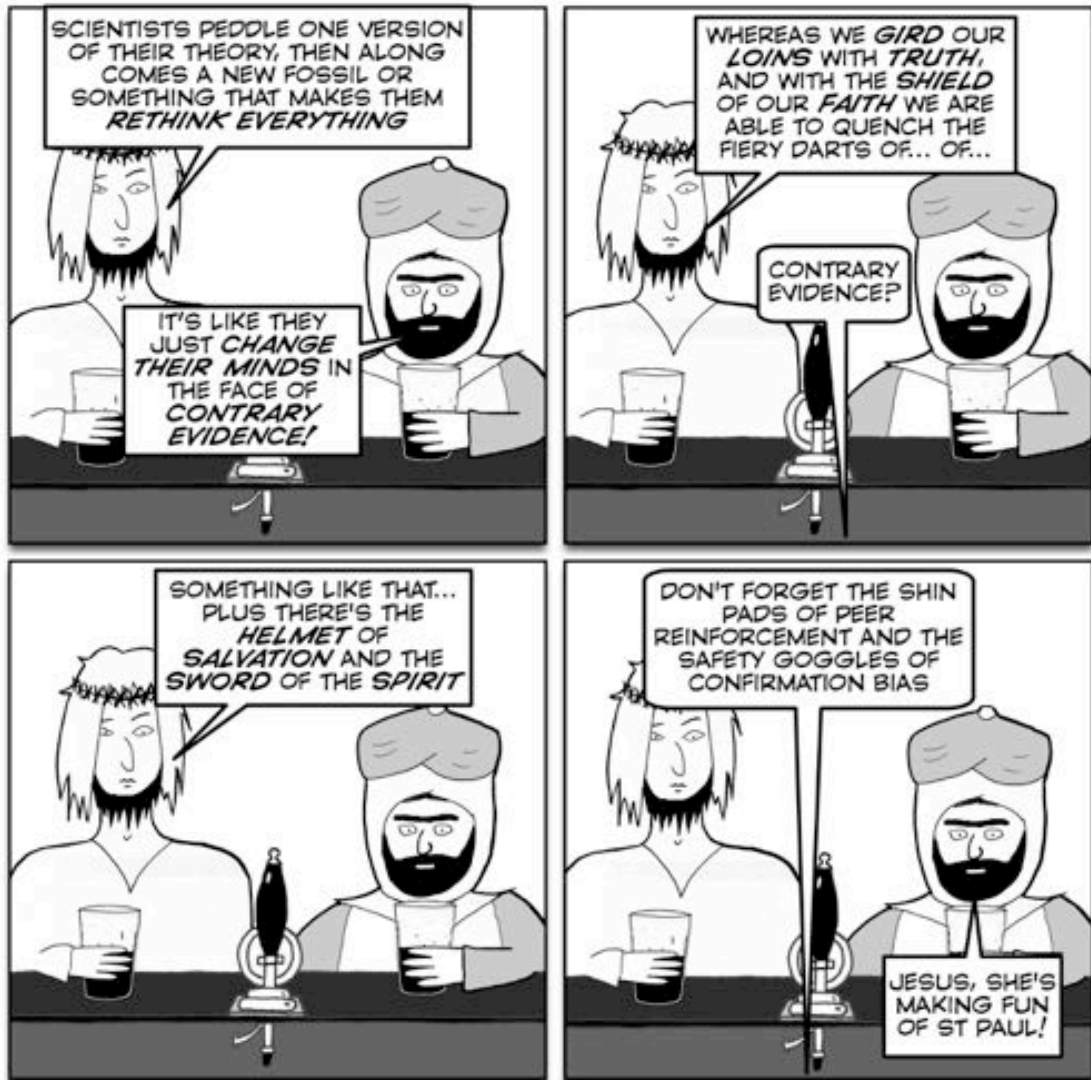
## whims



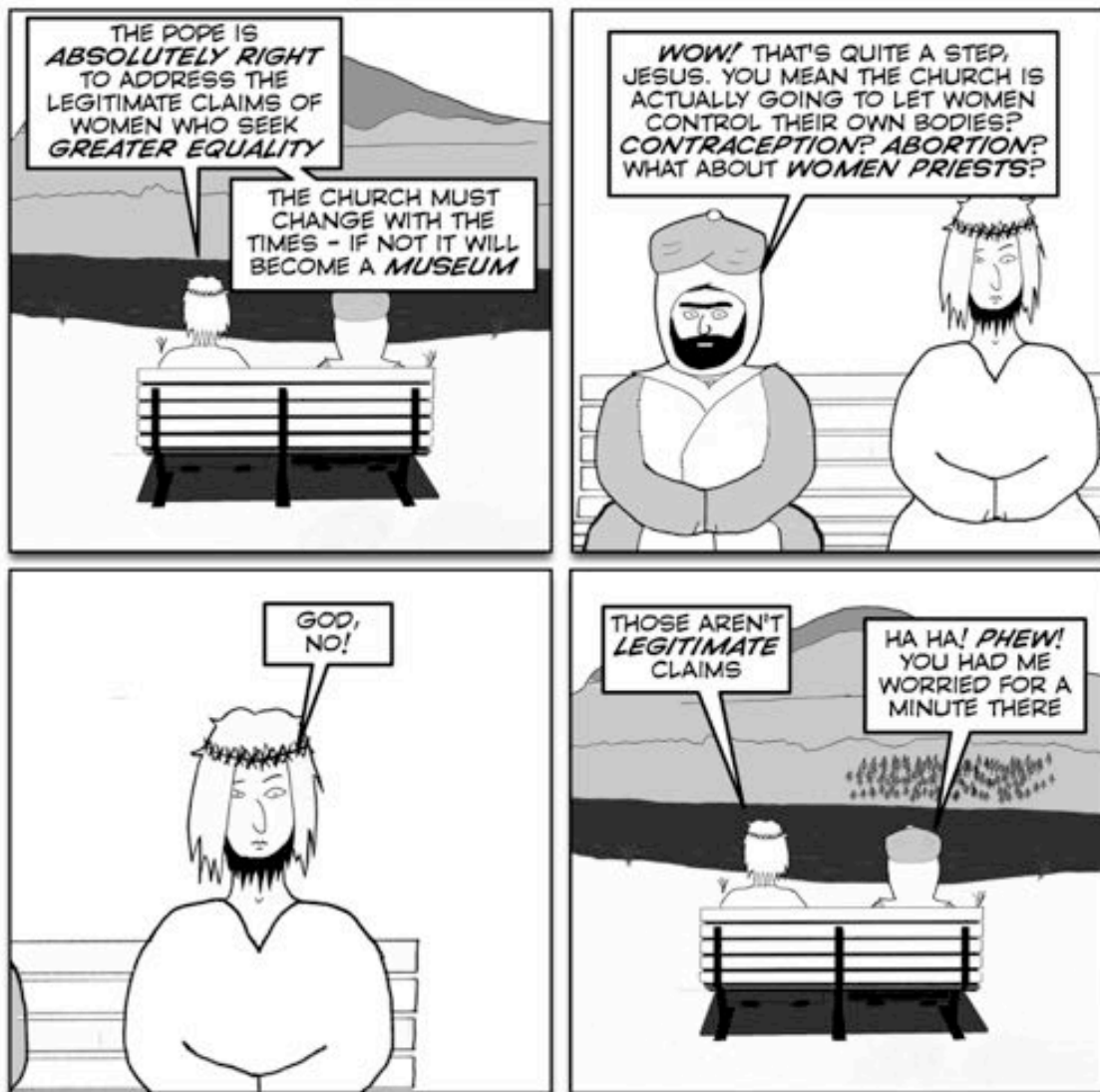
okay



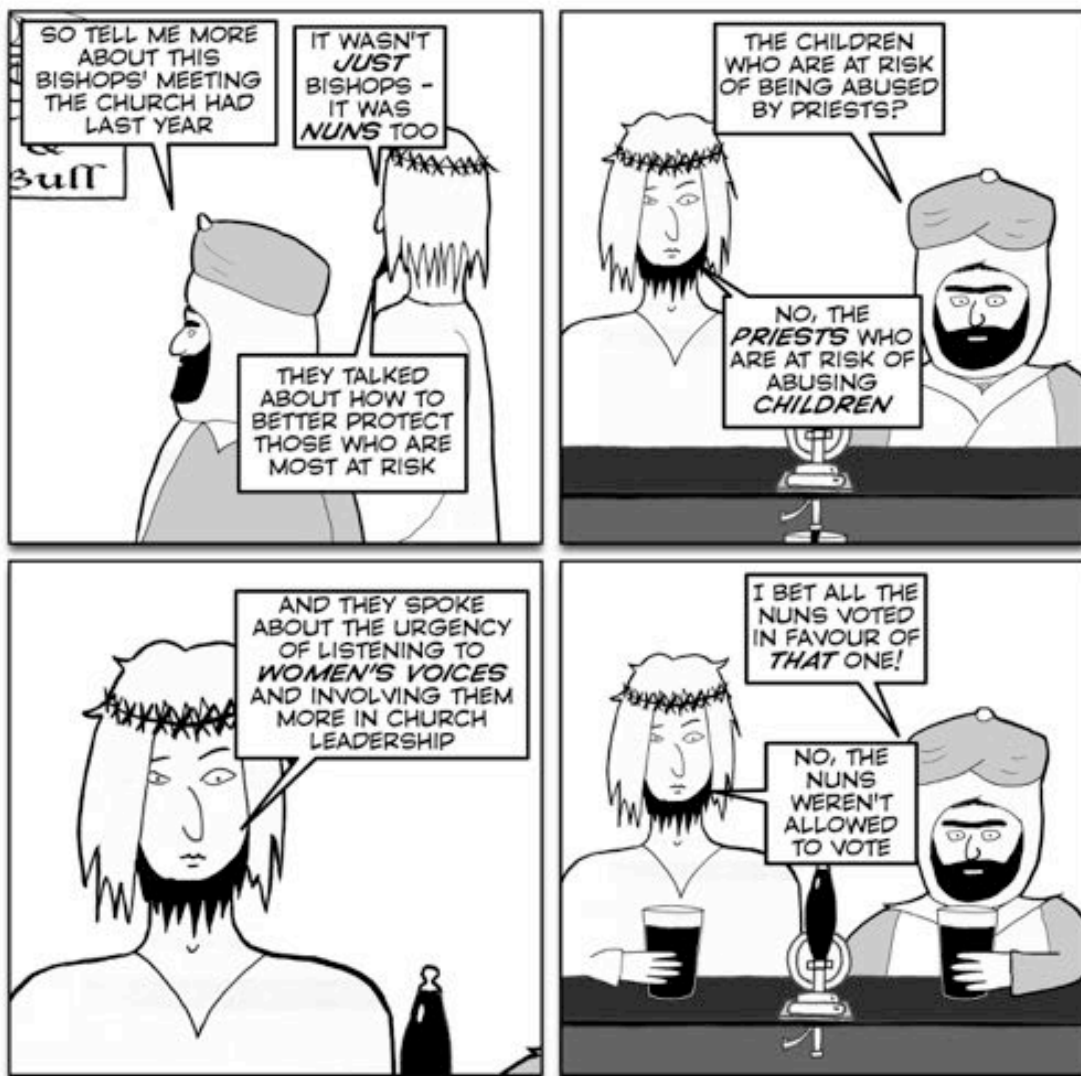
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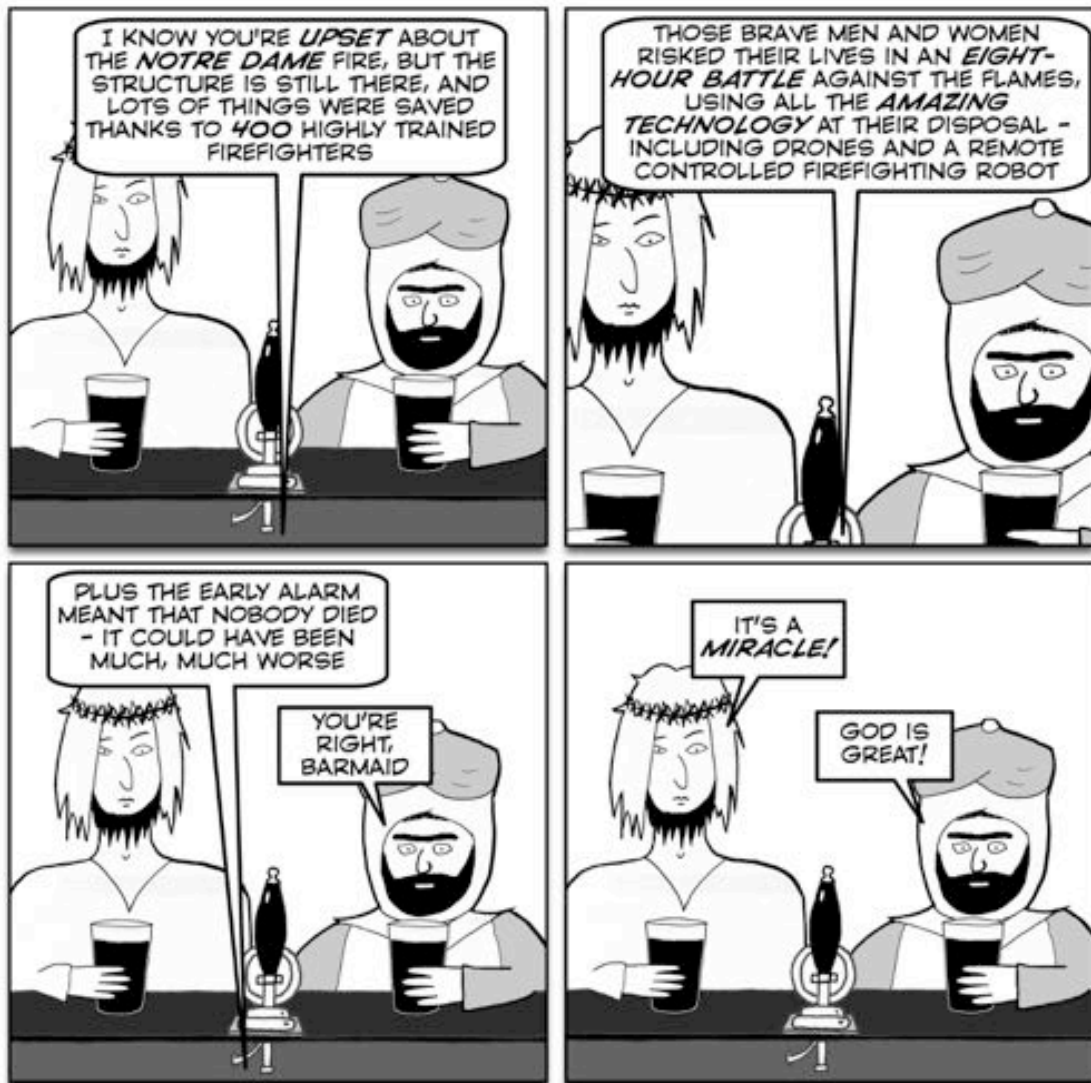
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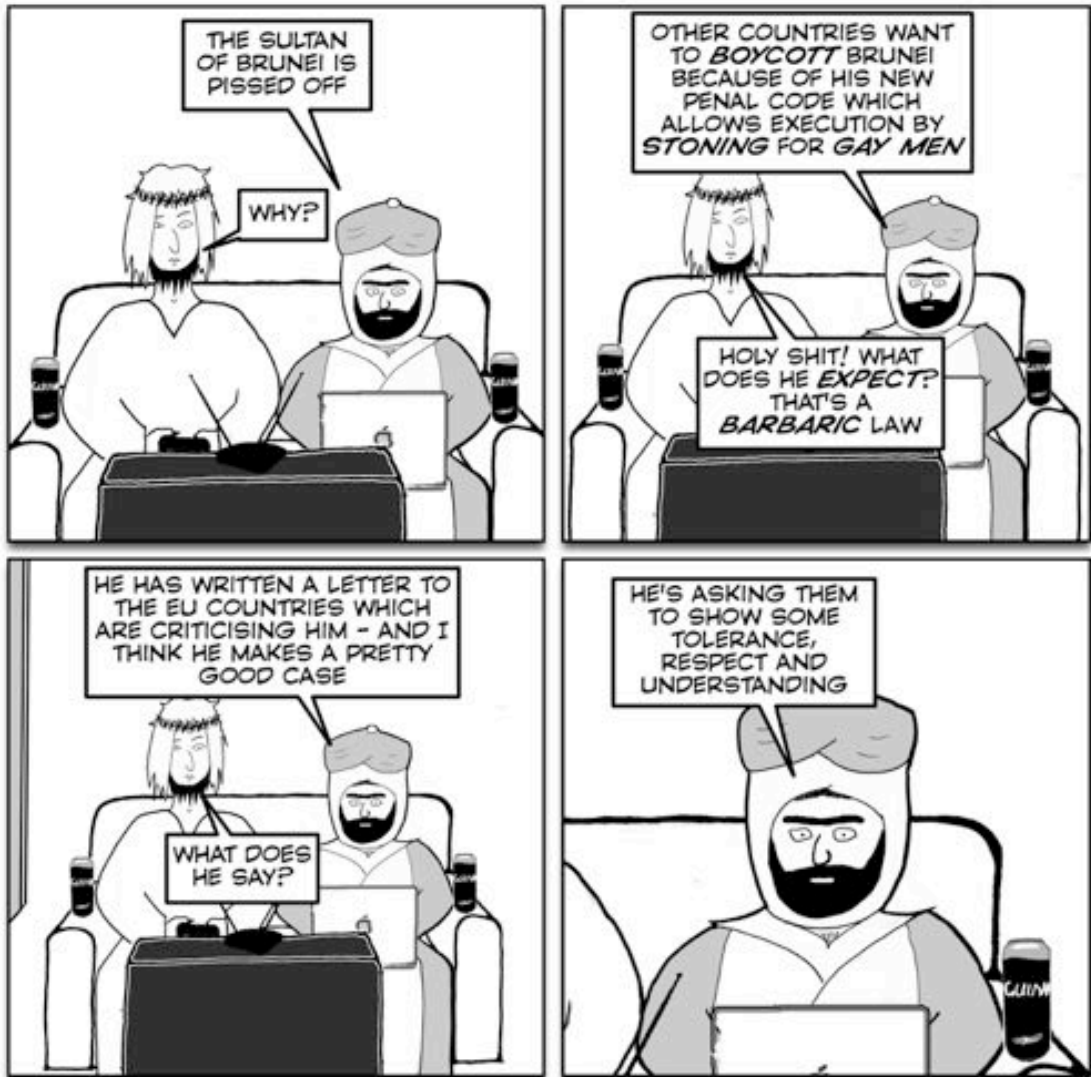
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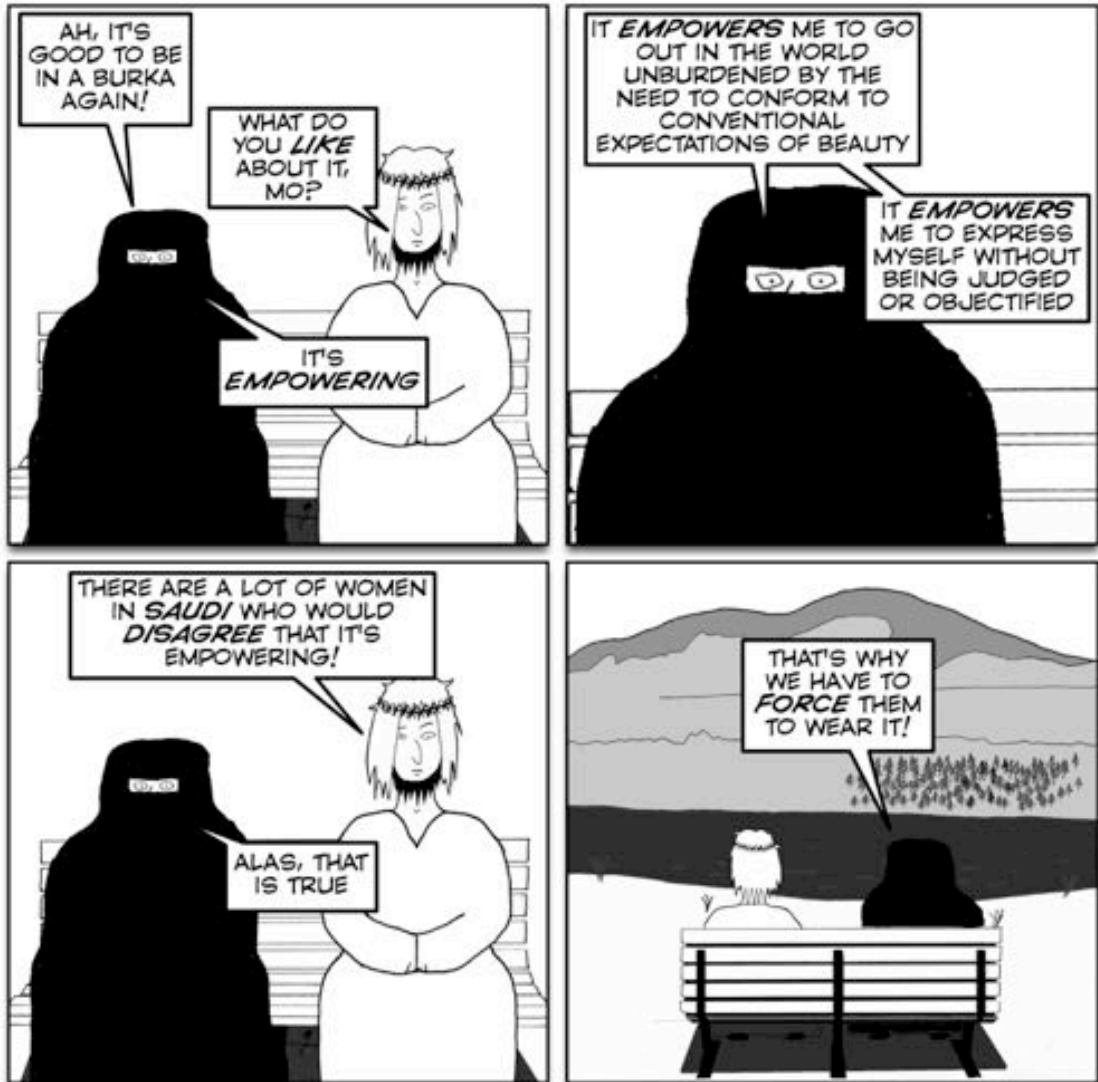
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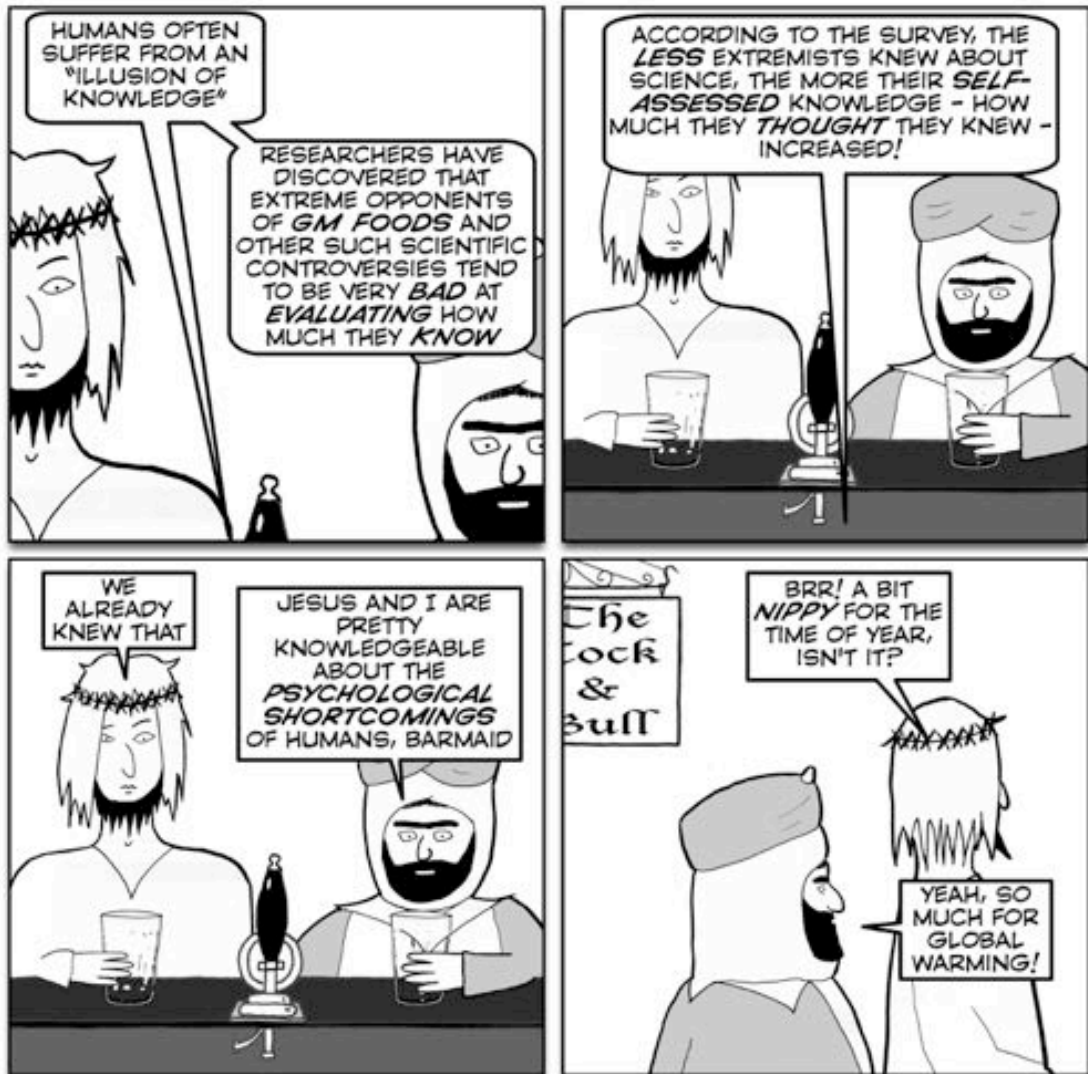
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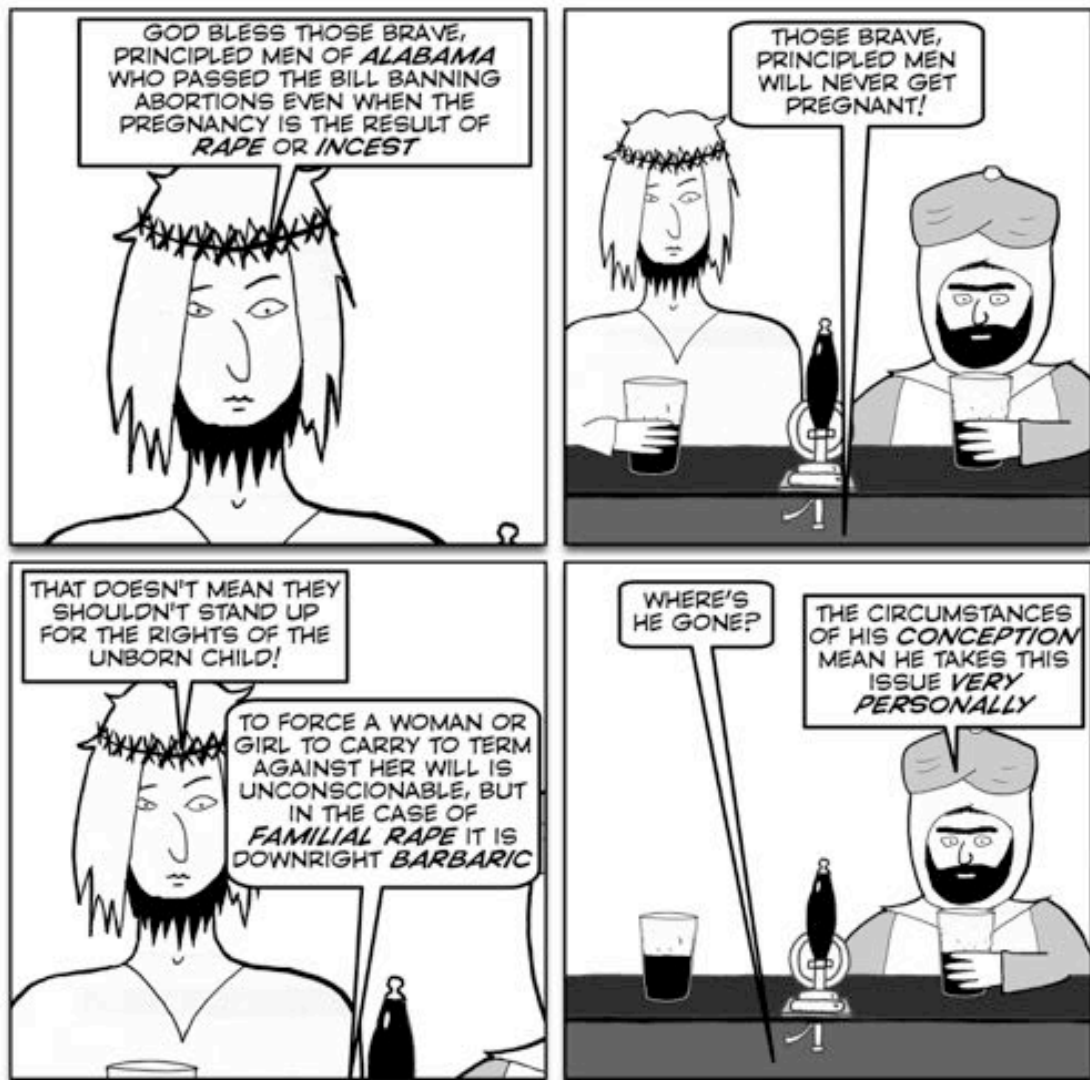
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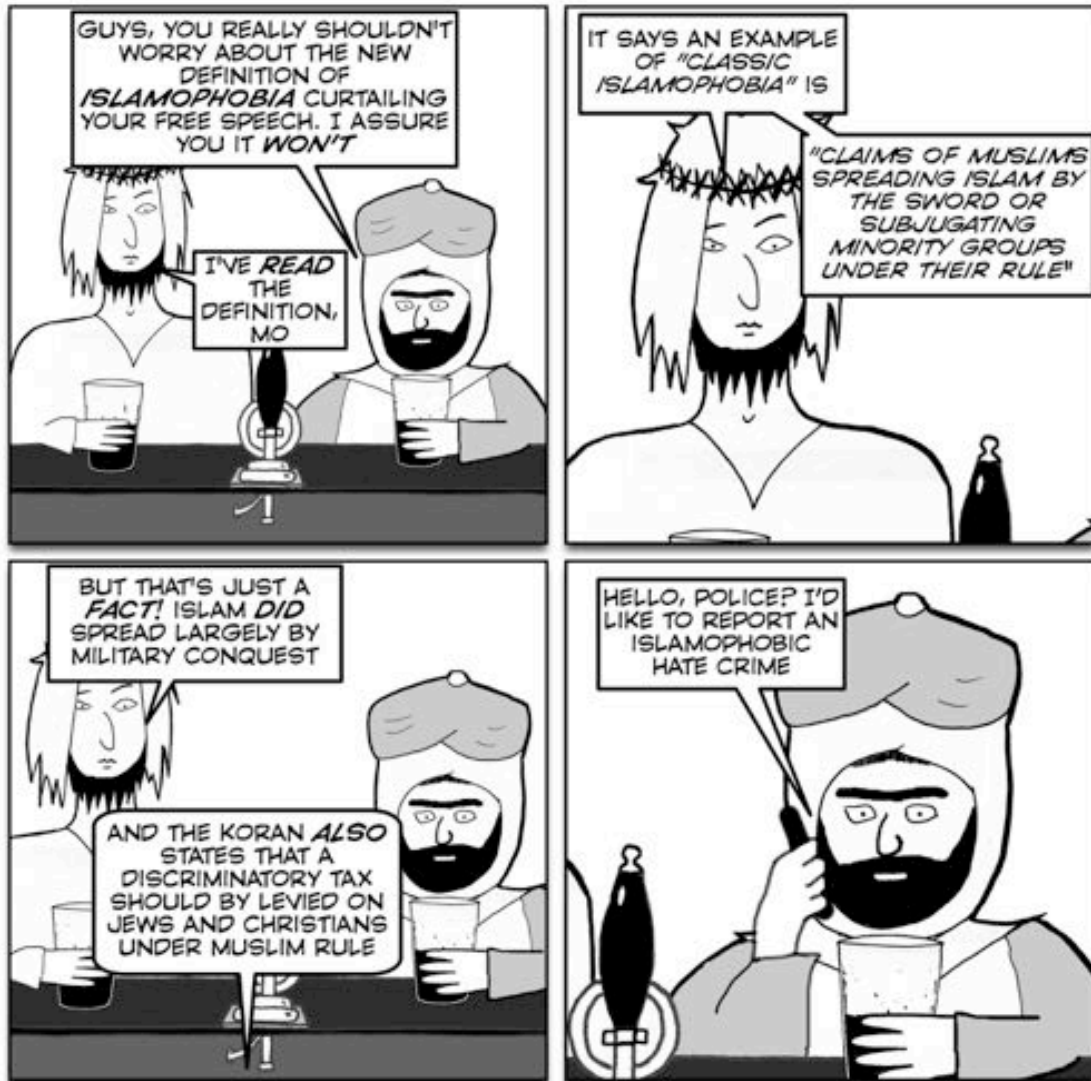
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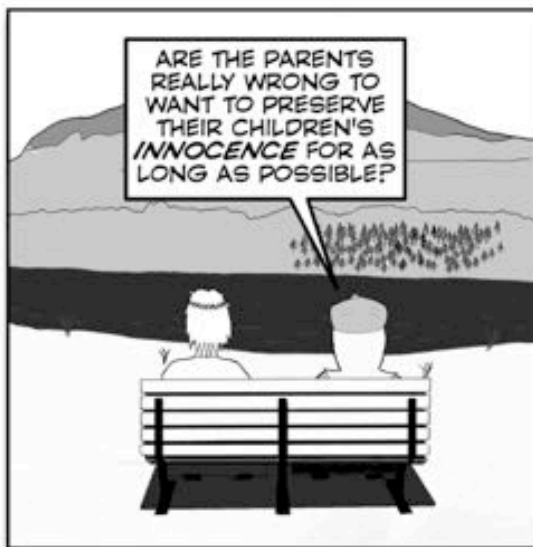
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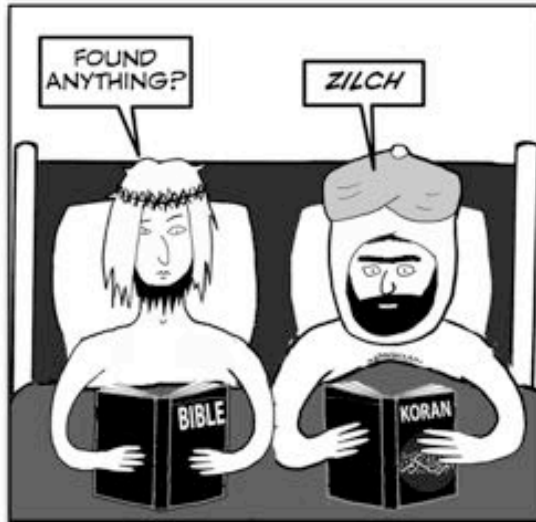
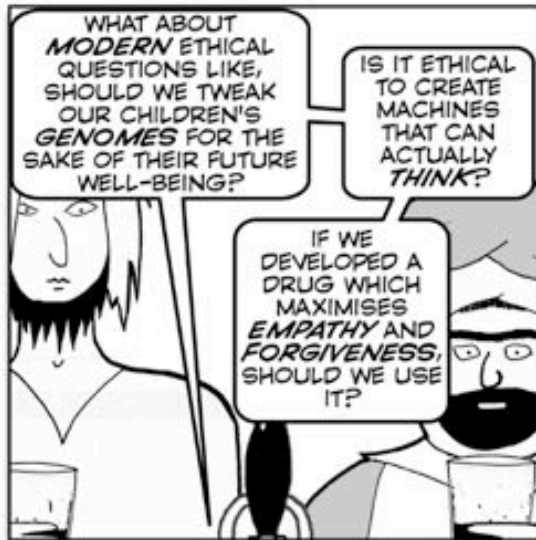


## tax

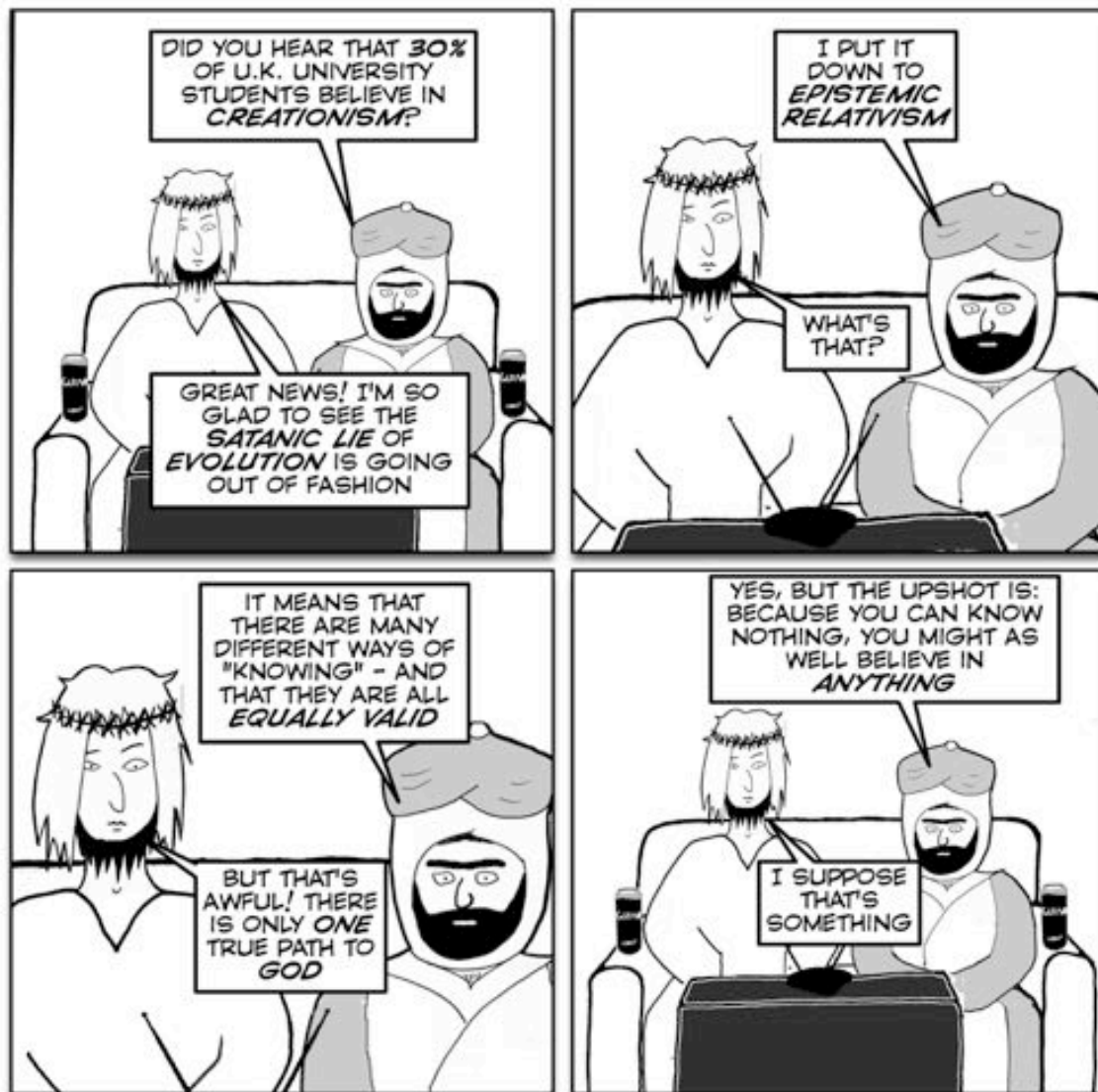


eight

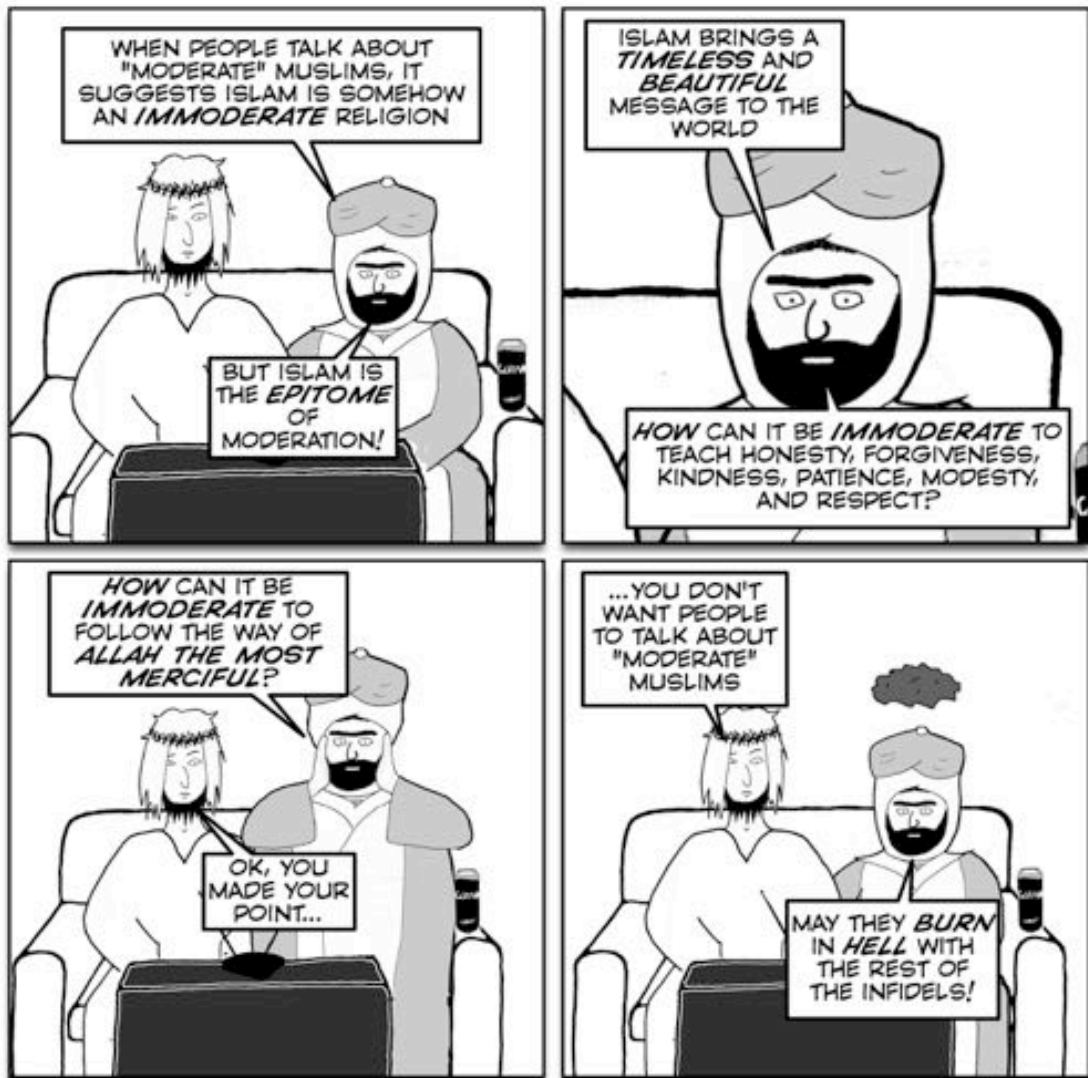




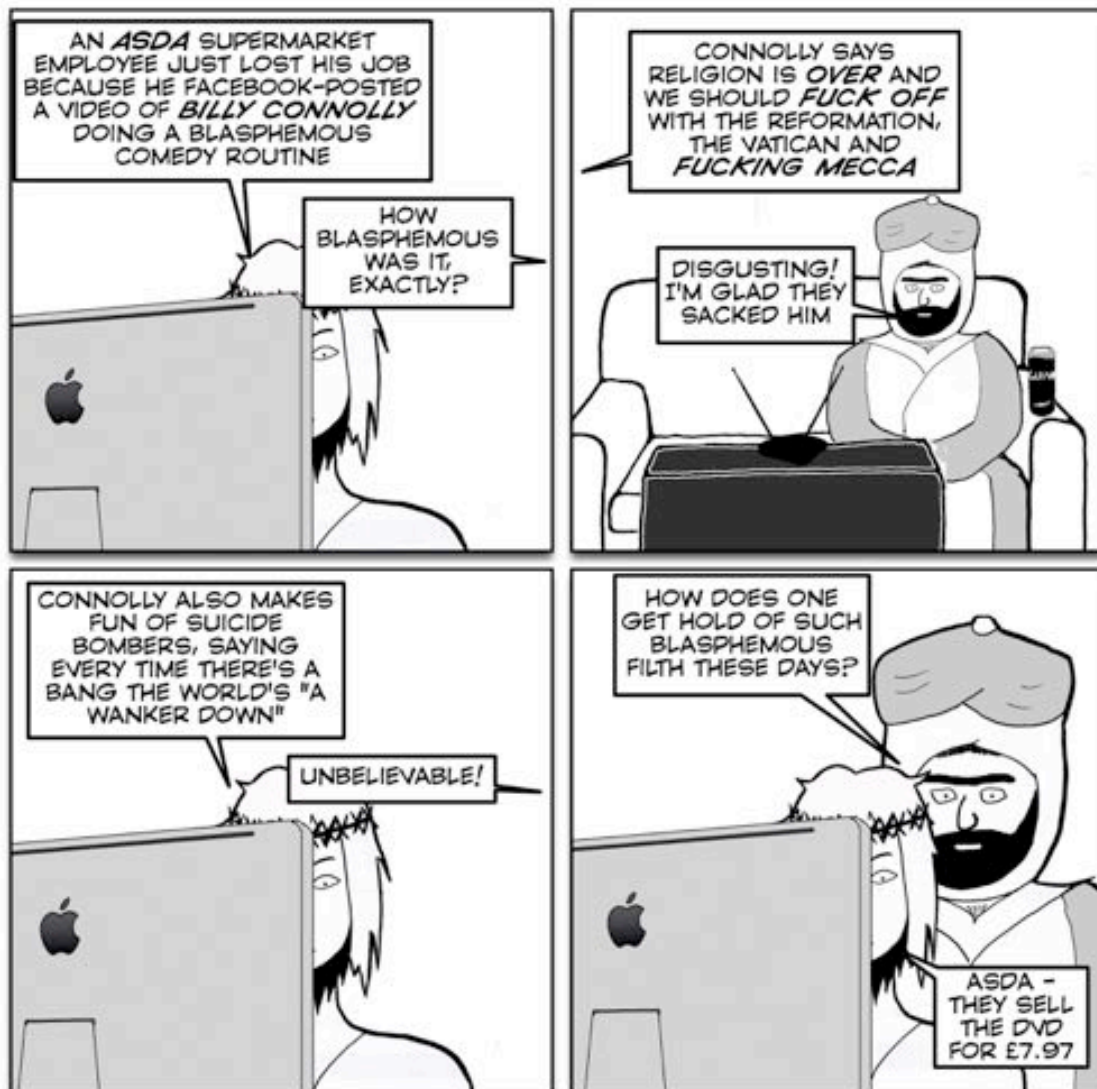
know



way



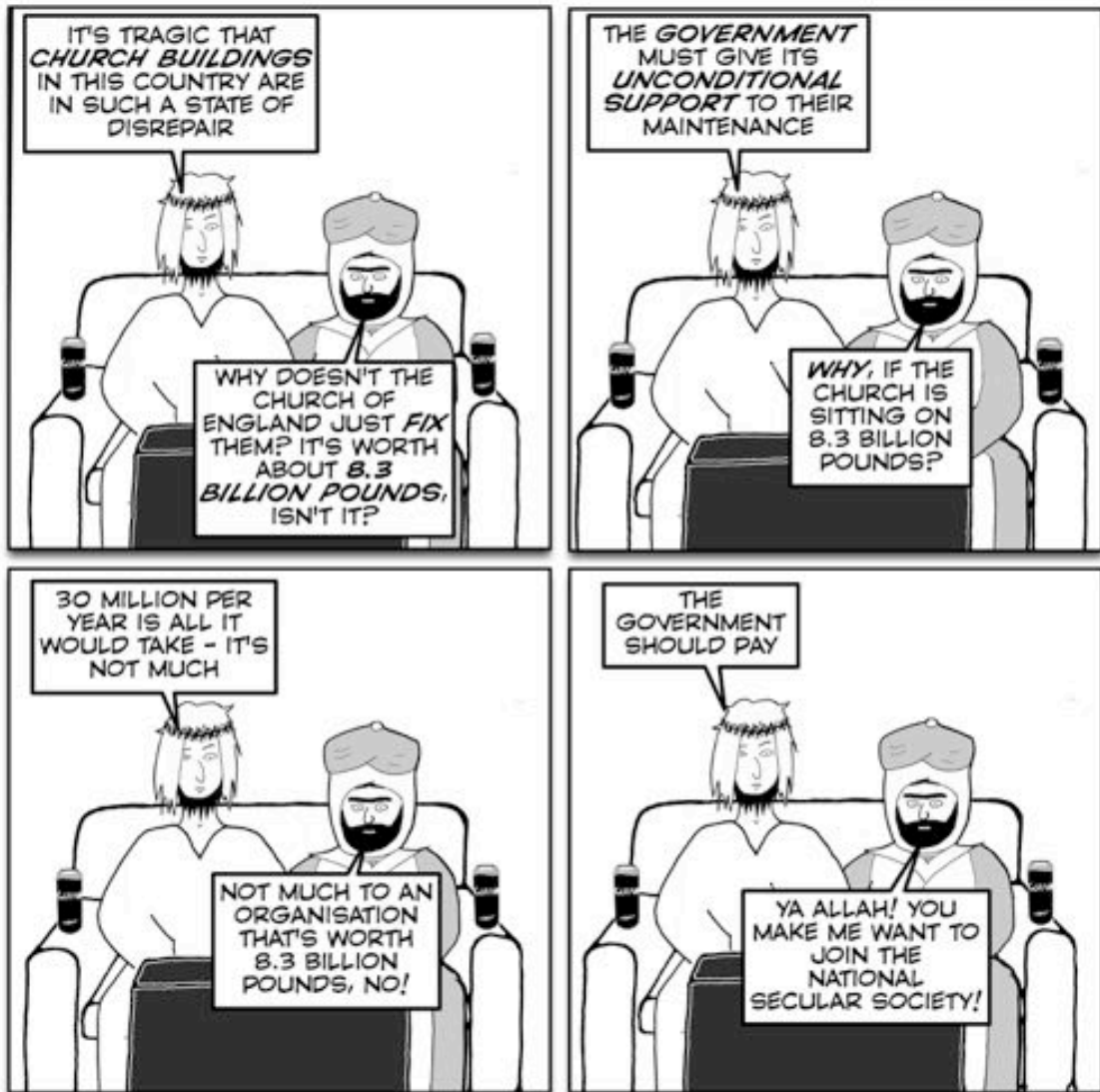
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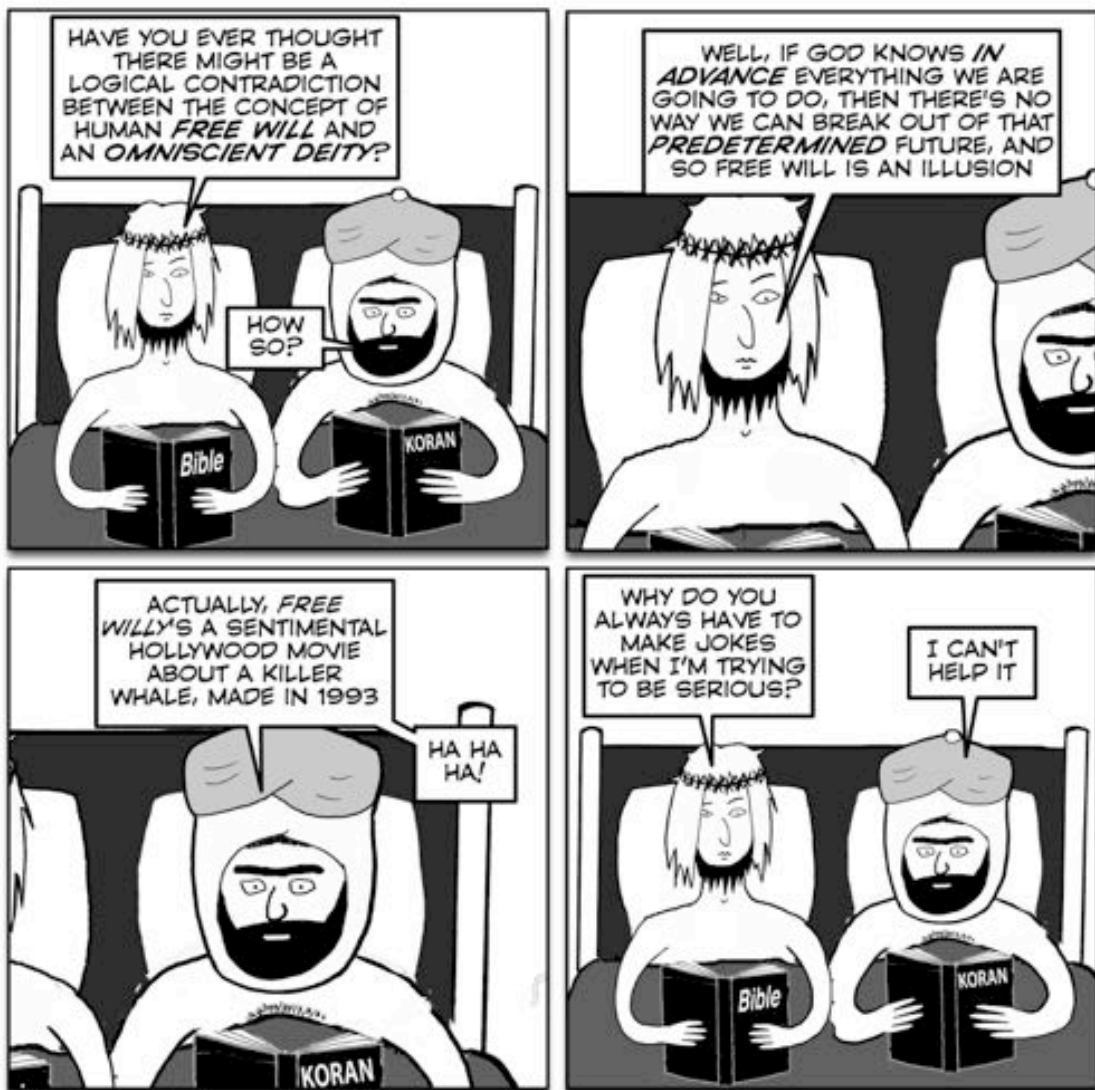
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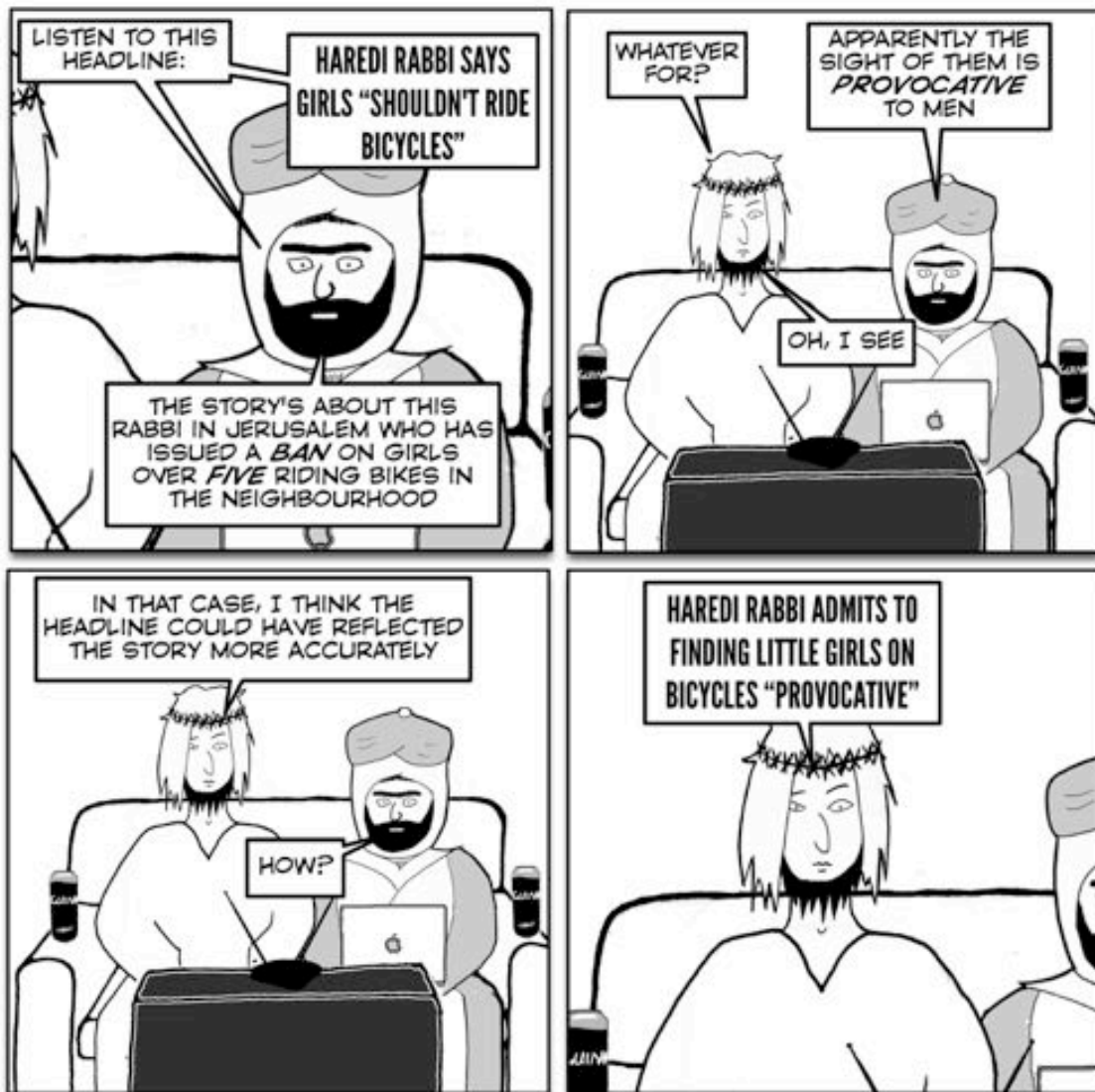
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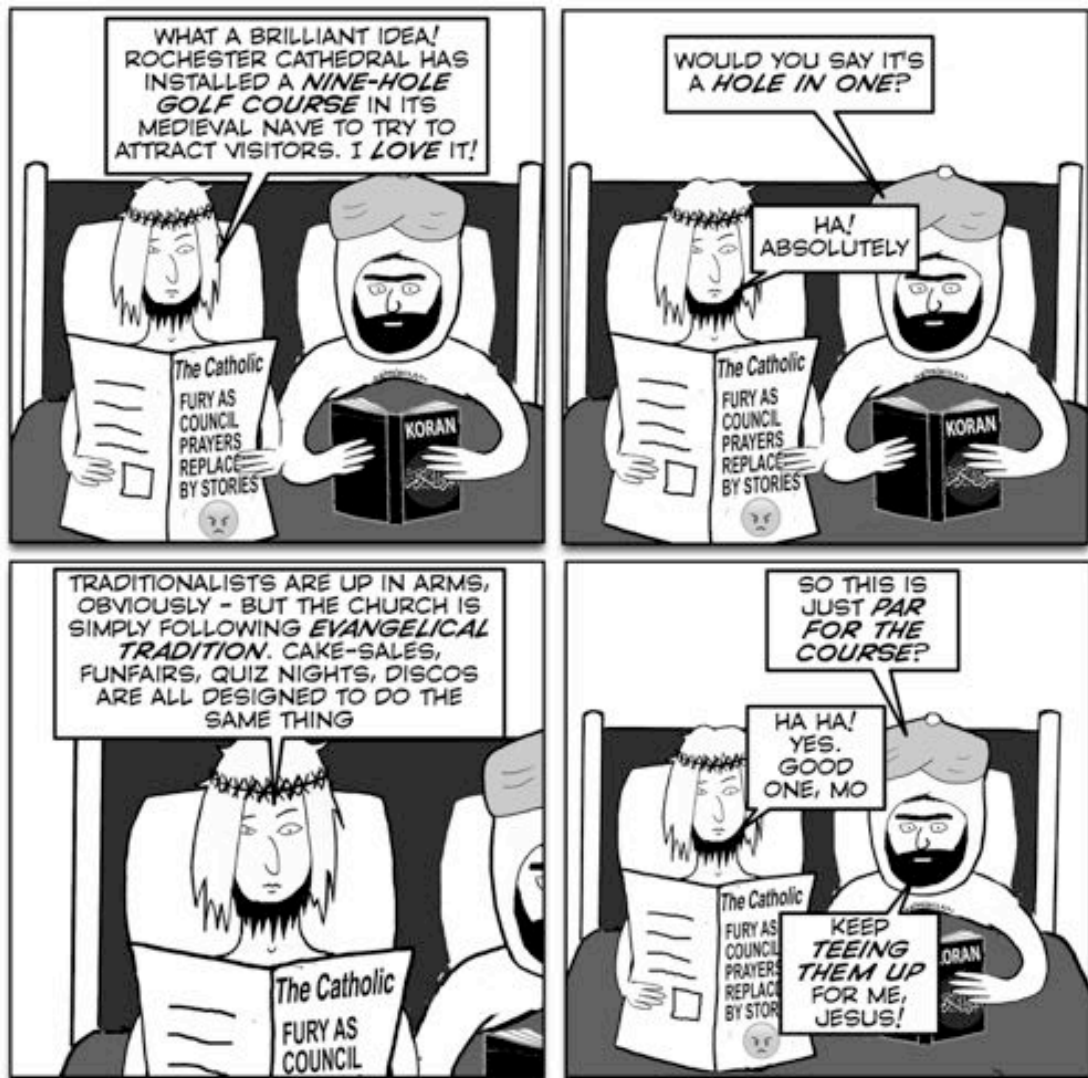


will

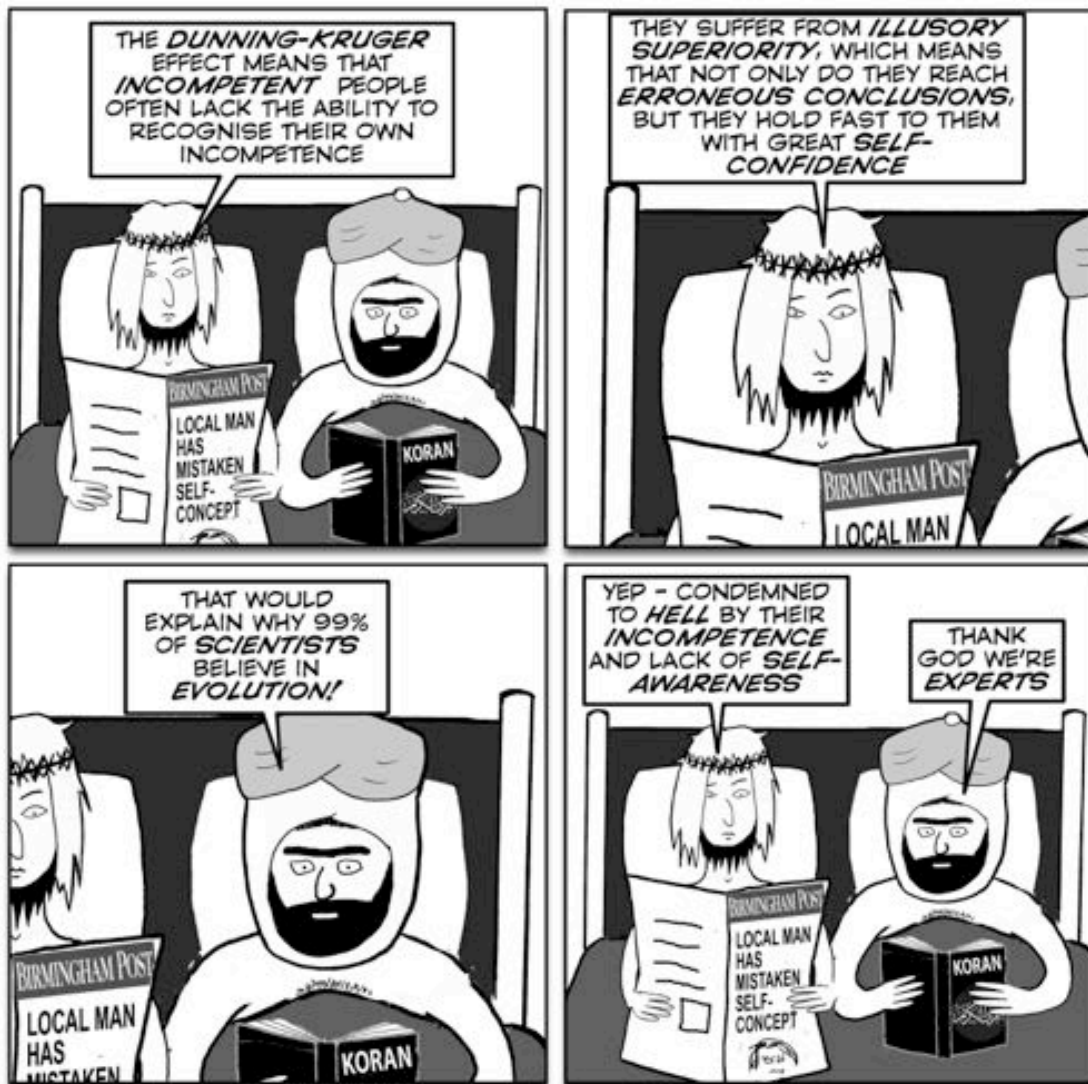


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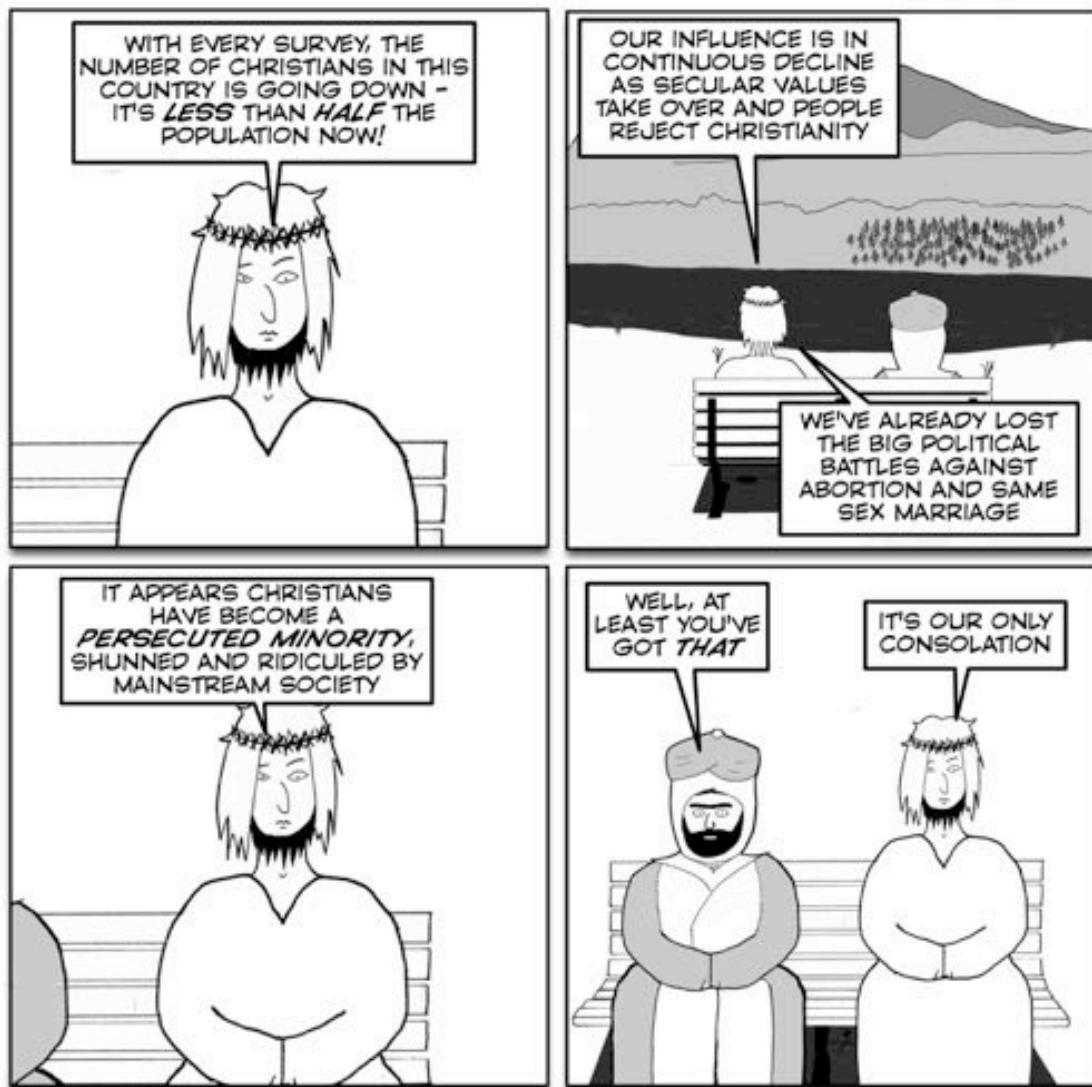




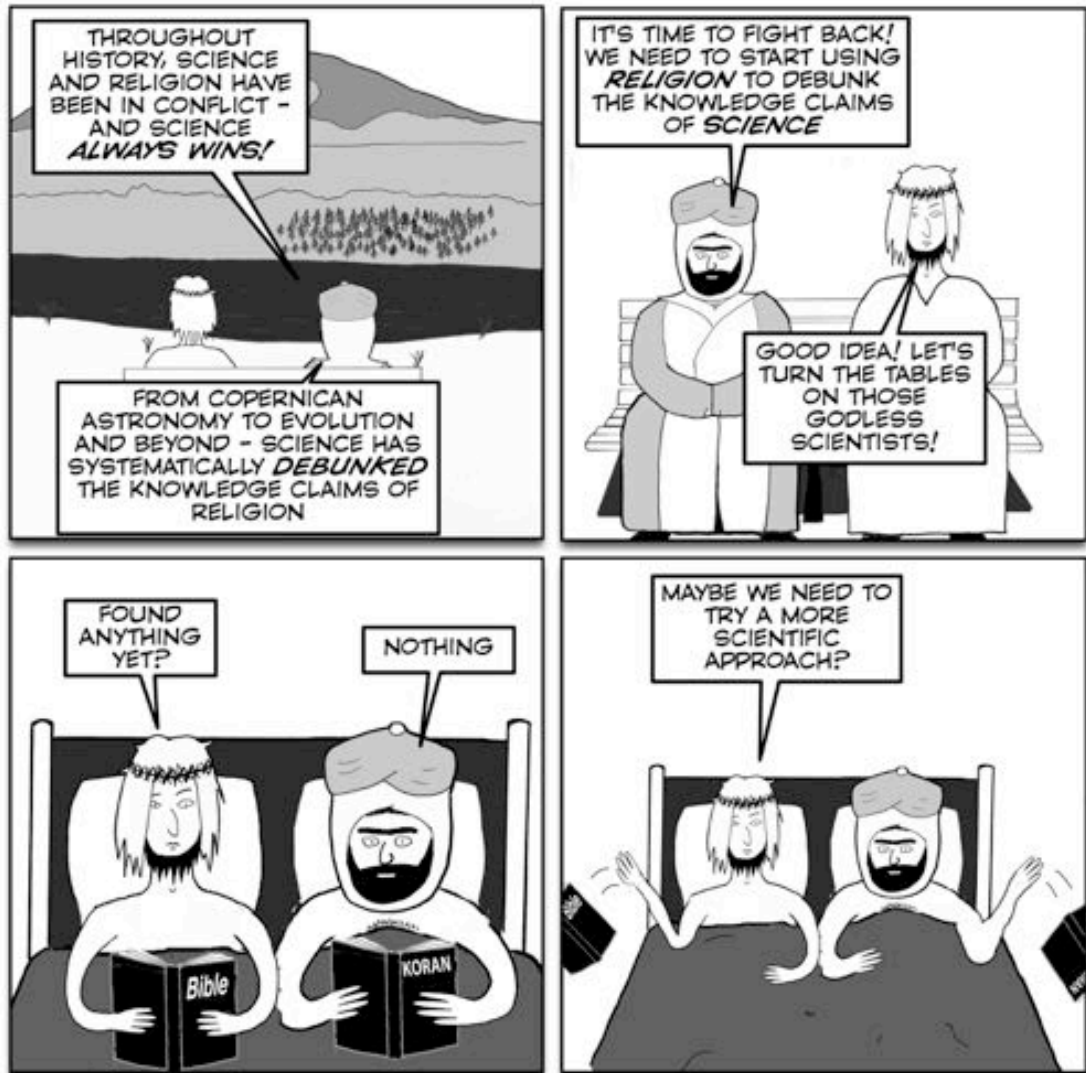
hold



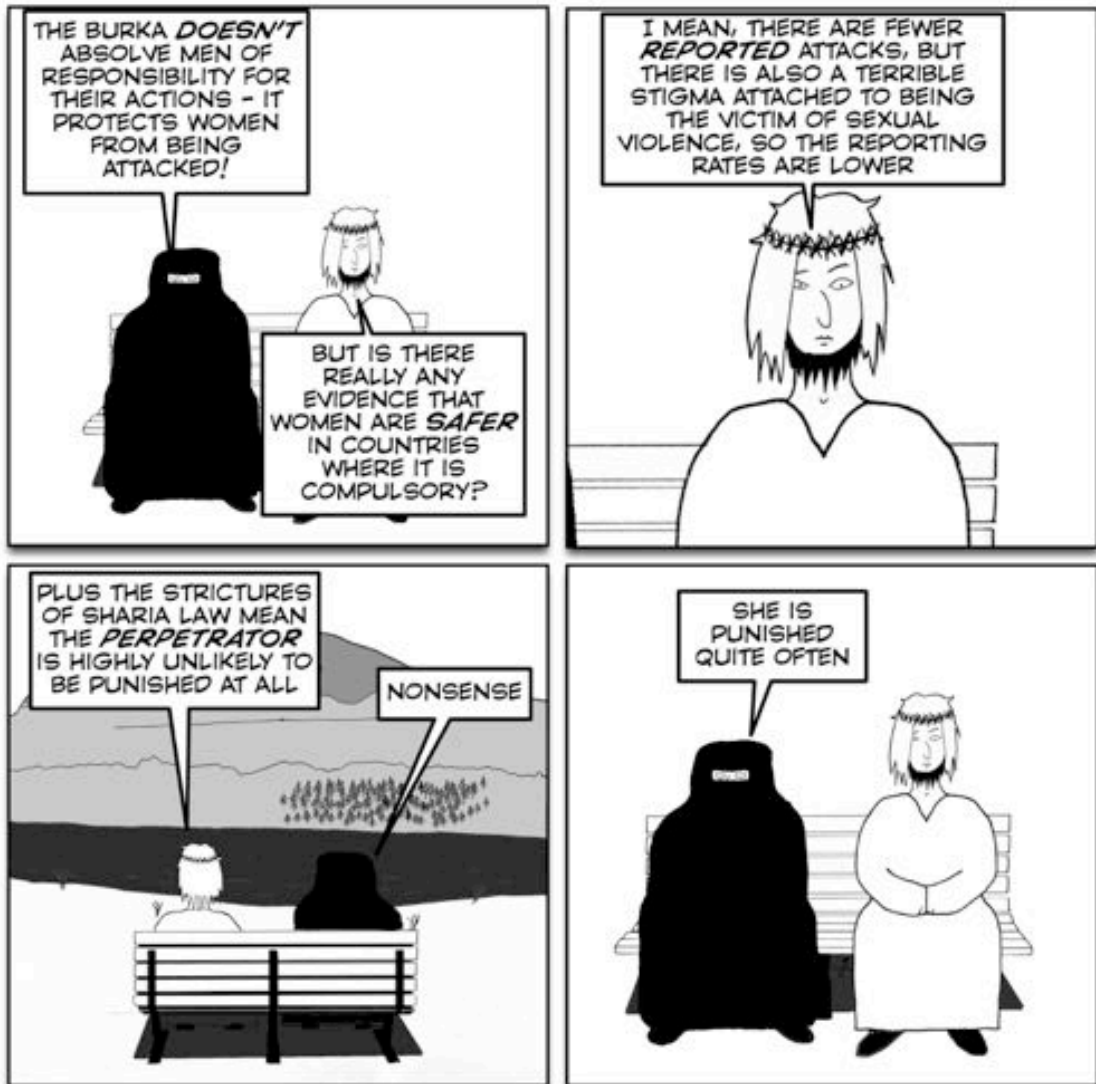
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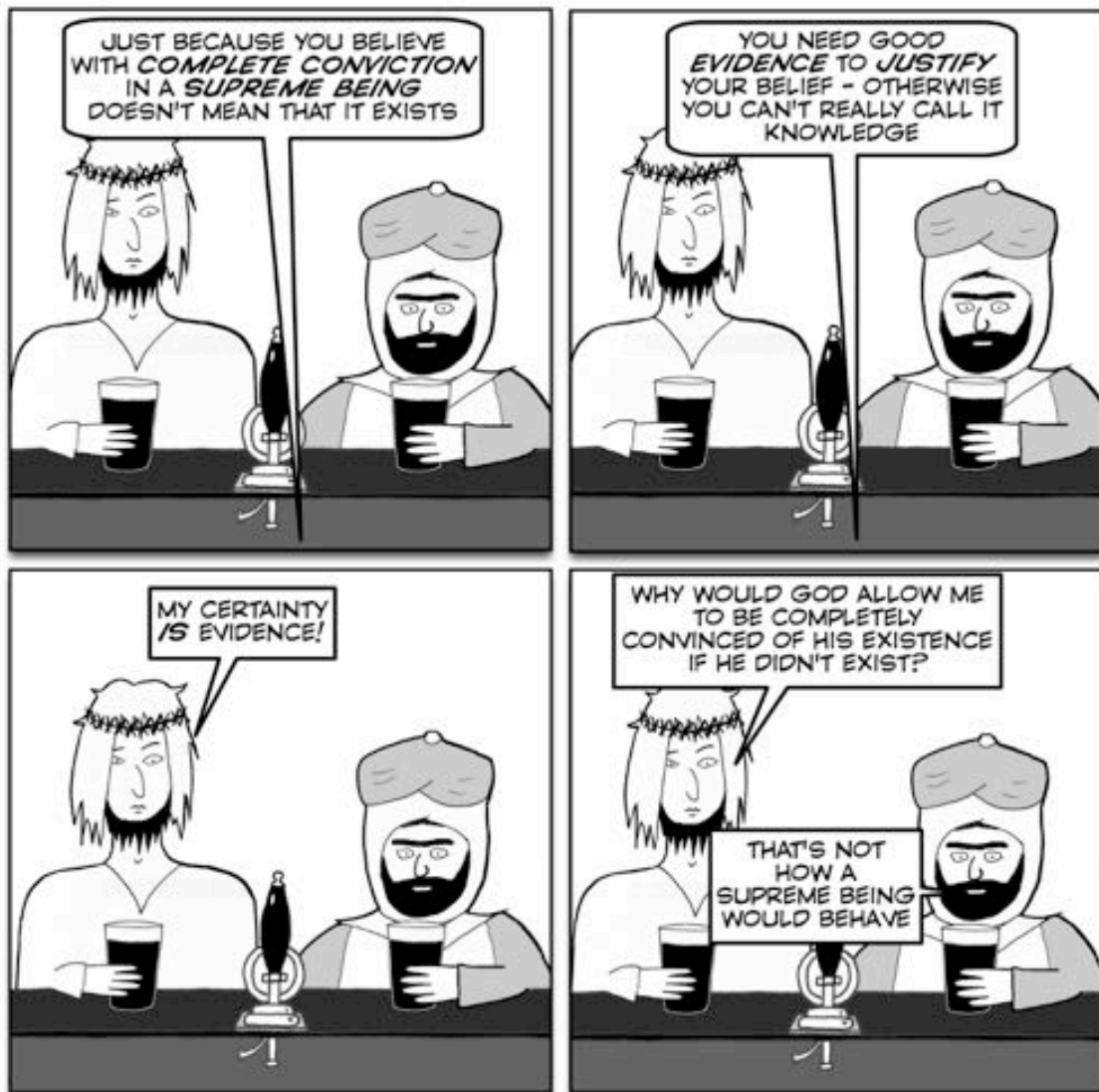
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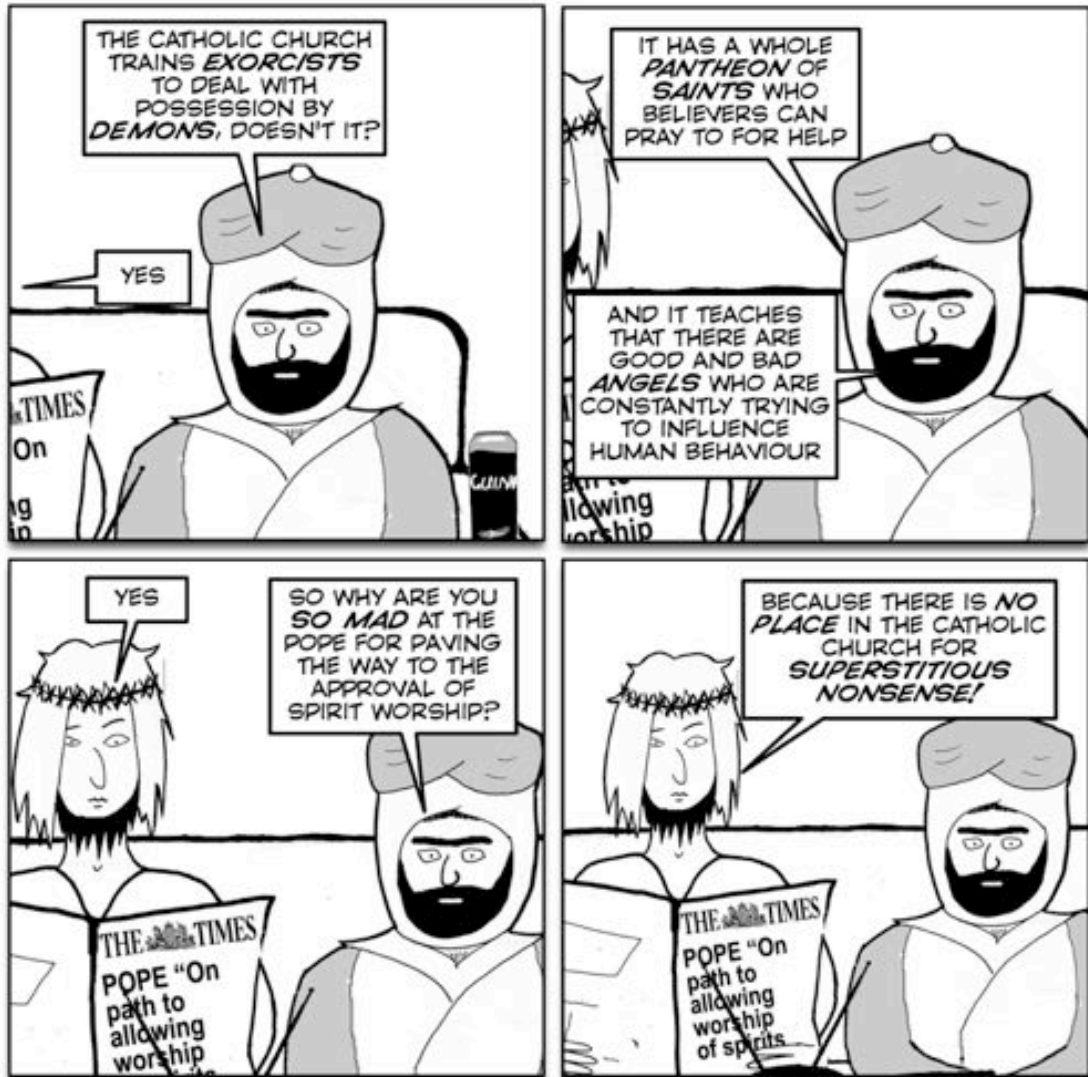
safer



being

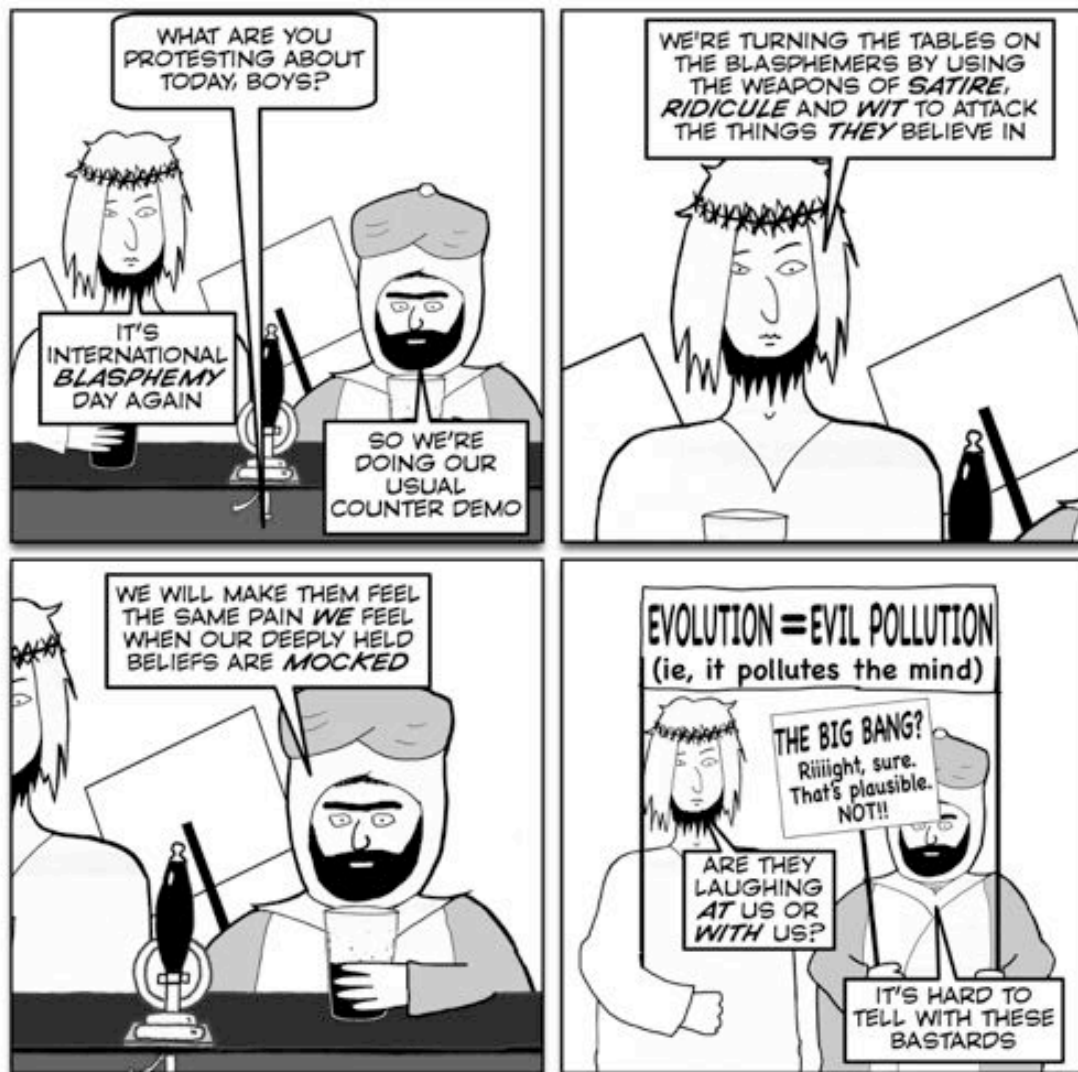


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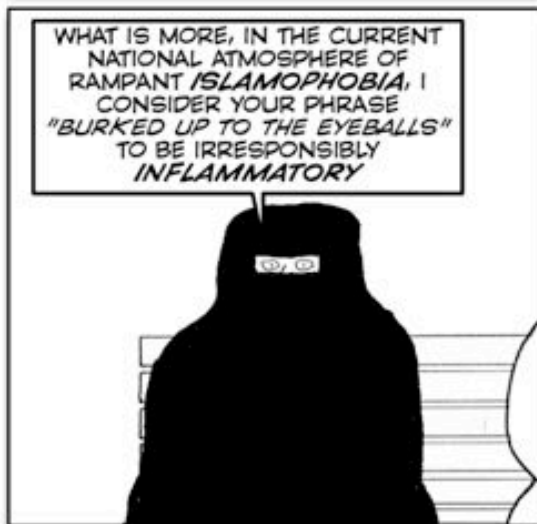
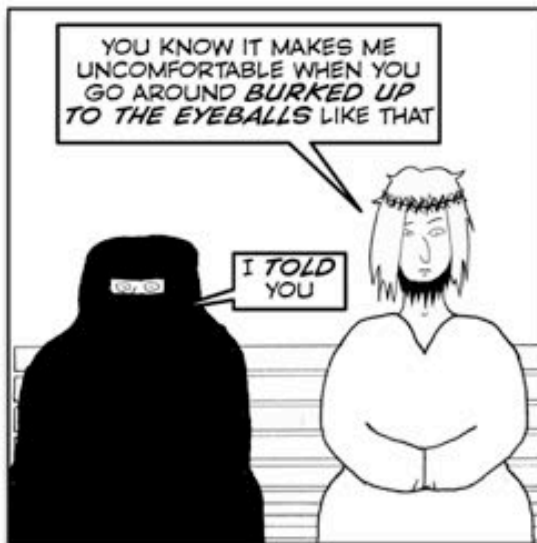


night

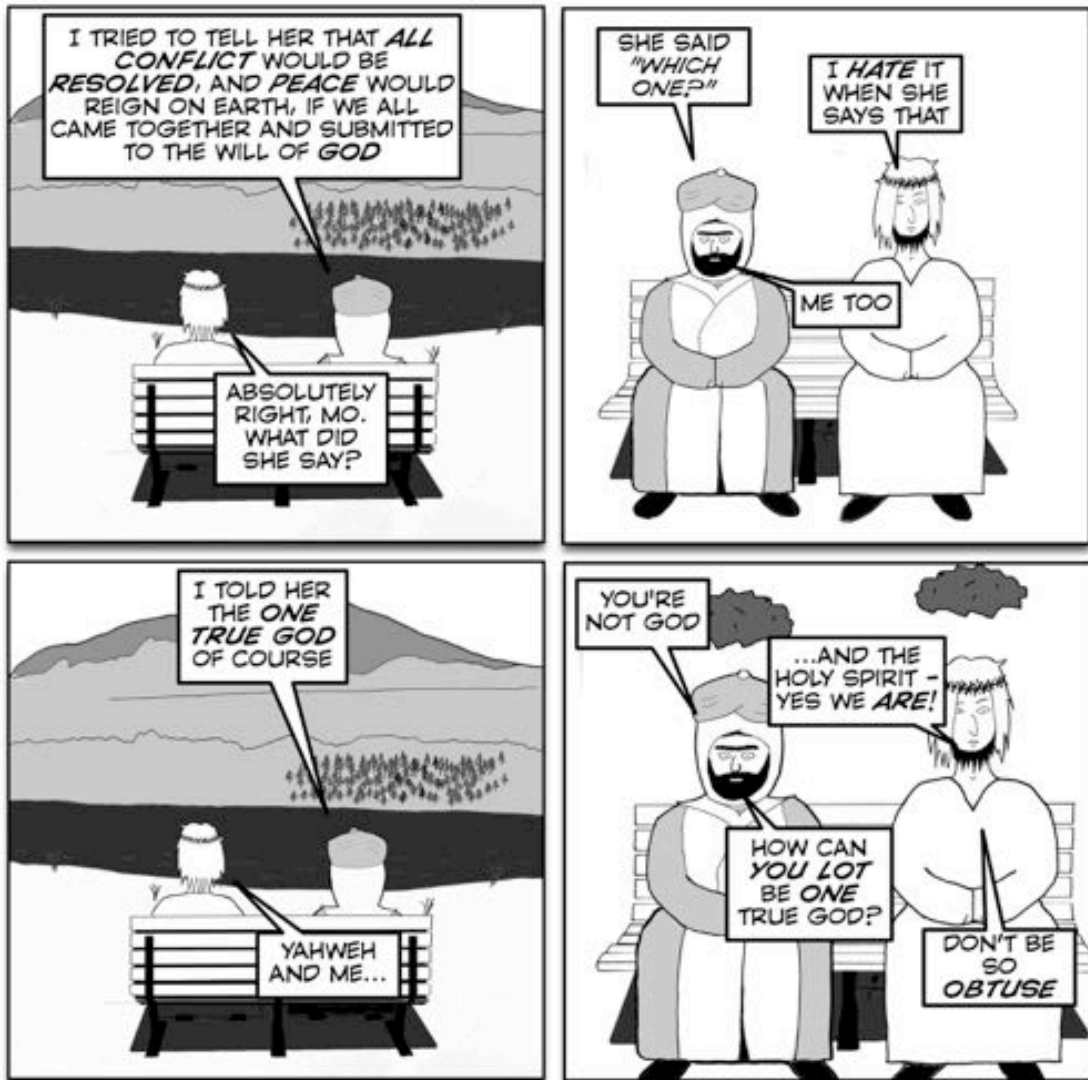




phrase



## obtuse



# flood

