

The Atheist Voice

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OF THE METROPLEX ATHEISTS

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ATHEIST-BAPTIST DIALOGUE



On Feb 15, 2011 Metroplex Atheist member Julio Rosario and Pastor Marty Akins hosted an atheist/Christian dialogue at the First Baptist Church in Bedford, Texas. The purpose of the event was to bring atheists and Christians together in an informal setting where a discussion could take place between the two groups and hopefully increase the understanding between them. There were about 20 atheists present and about 30 Christians.

They were divided up into groups of 5 to 8 persons per table with a balanced mix of the two groups at each table. However, a couple of tables ended up with only one or two atheists. Refreshments were available.

After Julio and Marty laid down the rules of conduct and passed out printed discussion points the dialogue began. The discussions began by going around the table, in-

roducing yourself and telling why you were either an Atheist or a Christian. This was followed by why you believe in god or not.

The feedback indicated that the points of discussion were followed for the most part. The interaction lasted for about 2 hours. Then feedback and comments were taken. The feedback was all positive with

(Dialog on page 11)

IS IT OKAY TO MOCK RELIGION?

By Greta Christina



Is it okay to mock religion? And if so, is it ever *not* okay to mock religion?

I got an interesting question from Ola the other day. She asked:

"I have a question for you that arose in one of my disputes with a religious person, and it really bothers me. The question is about the use of humor in our arguments. Not just humor -- irony. Sarcasm. Snark, if you wish. Things like the Flying Spaghetti Monster and Kissing Hank's Ass. People say that it is mean and disrespectful to mock their beliefs. No, I know what you're about to say! You wrote: "Atheists see religion as just another hypothesis about how the world works. We decline to treat it with more respect than any other opinions, theories, philosophies. We decline to treat its writings with more respect than any other books, its leaders with more respect than any other political or community figures..." but that's not quite it. The people who make this argument actually sound like they mean it to include not just *religious* beliefs, as an exception -- but all beliefs

and opinions. What they say is that humor and sarcasm are not arguments -- they are cheap tricks to bias people emotionally, and they have no place in a meaningful debate. If you really want to discuss something, you should be deadly serious. Or so I understand.

What do you think?"

Well, let's see.

Is it ever okay to use humor and sarcasm when discussing an important topic?

My answer to that particular question is a completely unequivocal "Yes." Of course it is. From Aristophanes to Jon Stewart, from Mark Twain to Molly Ivins, from Jonathan Swift to Monty Python, from Chaucer to The Onion, satire is a powerful, time-honored form of social and political criticism. Humor and mockery can be used to point out the pretensions and deceptions of the greedy, the pompous, the self-important, the hypocritical, the corrupt, the willfully ignorant... often far more effectively than any other device. Humor shakes you out of your usual way of looking at things and gives a different perspective on it -- and when you're subverting the dominant paradigm or whatnot, that's absolutely crucial. When the emperor has no clothes, sometimes the only appropriate response is to **p o i n t a n d l a u g h .**

And if nothing else, humor keeps people paying attention. People will keep watching your TV show, listening to your radio

program, reading your book or your blog post, if you're entertaining them. It's not just that humor is often more effective than sober commentary. It's that it goes down easier. It keeps people listening... and it keeps people coming back. Plus it's often more memorable.

I think this one is pretty much a no-brainer. Humor and sarcasm as legitimate social commentary? You bet! But I do want to address the question it brings up. Namely: Is it acceptable -- and is it useful -- to use humor and mockery to critique religion? First, just to be clear: I'm not talking about whether it's legally okay. Of course it is -- and in parts of the world where it isn't, it should be. I'm not talking about whether people have the right to mock religion. I'm talking about whether it's right to mock religion: whether mocking religion is ethical, or kind, or effective.

And surprising as it may seem, given the above rant about the power of satire as political and social commentary, I actually don't think that's a question with a single, simple "yes or no" answer. I think it's a question whose answer depends on at least four other questions that I can think of.

1: What's the context?

Are we talking about mocking

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GET OFF THE BUS!

Originally published in the American Atheist magazine.

Black Ministers tell Dallas /Fort Worth Atheist, their kind not wanted

By Alix Jules - Assistant coordinator of DFWCoR

The article started "Christians are outraged by local Dallas Atheists' bus ads stating Millions of Americans are good without God. Local Pastors threaten boycott of Fort Worth Public Transportation surface transit - if the Transportation Authority does not change its policy on allowing such advertisement. Public hearing scheduled for December 15, 2010.

It was evident by the ministers that attended the hearing from the Southern Christian Leadership Conference that the article should have read "Black Ministers" are outraged by local Dallas Atheist Ads.

As one of the many colored faces on the new bus ad, I wondered how the new reflection of diversity in the ad would be accepted by my African-American counterparts. After all, much of the public discourse on Atheism and non-belief has traditionally been relegated to white academia. It is taboo in most black communities to talk about god negatively, let alone question the existence. In fact, the Black persona in America seems to be fully enmeshed with religious identity and learned piety. Somehow race and hyper-religiosity in Black America have

become indistinguishable. As many of my Jewish colleagues consider themselves racially or culturally Jewish but non-practicing, no such divide exist for many black Americans today. They are religious - because they are black and apostasy is cultural suicide.

Religion has played varied roles in the Black community. Initially it was a way to justify the means and the ends of enslavement. Accepting one's fate becomes easier when you're guaranteed a spot in heaven if you behaved and acquiesced peacefully (a true opiate). This may have seemed like a fair trade for those that had little hope of ever finding freedom. The promise of a finite mortal life of pain and servitude, exchanged for an eternity of serenity must have held great solace to the hopeless. Through this collective misery, black people forged their identity in faith. This shared experience in the church facilitated marriages, courtship, childcare, education (if only in the form of reading the bible), and important fellowship. Things aren't so bad when you're not alone and the black church flourished, entrenching itself in black culture. Black America built its societies around many of these centers, providing hope for the downtrodden and promise of the land of milk and honey if one only believed.

Then in the late fifties and sixties it became the tool for freedom and salvation in the form of civil rights liberation. One can not ignore the importance of the

black church during this era as it delivered on its promise of hope, validating itself to the faithful. It became the beacon, a central point of dissemination and organization. Marches on the South would not have happened without the organization of the church. This is where I think most African Americans continue to hang their hats and get stuck in a culturally influenced version of mass Stockholm syndrome. In the melee for freedom, Black America co-opted the tool that was often used to quite literally beat them into submission.

Merely go into a black Southern Baptist Church and you'll see much of the teachings of an era long gone, with constant references to their master, reinforced self loathing, pity and piety. How it pains me to hear any person, let alone children, refer to themselves as unworthy -dirty rags. Spend the two or more hours in one of these churches and the rational person will find that this goes beyond typical prostration. So it was not unexpected that the black church would have something to say about Atheists (some of them black) making a claim of goodness without their god.

Here I was now at this public hearing, listening to Black ministers in their righteous indignation bash those who merely *believe* in a different type of liberation – thought liberation. I sat and listened to them question the moral fiber of non-believers and state that they didn't want that

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METROPLEX ATHEISTS

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About

Metroplex Atheists is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organized for the purpose of education, maintaining Constitutional separation of government and religion, protection of atheists' rights and to provide social meetings for those of similar worldviews. We are affiliated with American Atheists, Atheists Alliance International and the Dallas Fort Worth Coalition of Reason.

President's Proclamations

Recently Metroplex Atheists changed its by-laws. Some of the changes were relatively minor but there were three significant changes.

The titles of the two chief executive officers were somewhat misleading and most people didn't use them anyway so we changed those titles to President and Vice-President from Chairman and Vice-Chairman. Randy said he didn't mind the change since it still left him in charge of vice.

We also changed the term of officers and made it more specific when they will be elected. The new terms are as follows "Officers shall be elected for two year terms and will serve from January 1st to December 31st of the following year. Elections will be held during the last quarter of odd numbered years." We don't change officers all that much and two year terms mean we don't have to have elections every year.

The other significant change was to increase dues to one dollar per month from one dollar per year. The method of collection of dues is not specified in the bylaws so we will use the "honor system" as we have in the past. Greg Cox has created a beautiful new, more portable, "pickle jar" which will be on display on Wednesday evenings for those who want to be dues paying members and those who want to contribute their spare change...or more.

Why do we need money? We are beginning to help support student atheist groups and would like to do more in the future. For example we recently contributed \$300 to the Secular Student Alliance group at Fossil Ridge High School. We'd also like to help some college groups and we need money to do that. We're certainly not going to be able to compete with Campus Crusade for Christ whose U. S. donations were over half a billion dollars last year but we think a few bucks in the right place at the right time can help atheist school groups succeed.

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Atheists are Coming to a Restaurant Near You

Since you can't come to a Metroplex Atheist event, why not have Metroplex Atheist events come to you?

We now have a Metroplex Atheists Meet-up Group on www.meetup.com. Over the years we've had many folks lament that they couldn't come to a MA social event because of time/location of our normal Wednesday get together.



Why not start one of your own?

If you have a good meeting place and you're willing to show up to be somewhat of a host, then just contact Metroplex Atheists and we can put an announcement out on the web.

All it takes is for you to say, "Hey, why don't we meet at X?" and show up!

We'd like to have a number of social groups that meet informally (because, let's face it, the business meetings are only just so much fun). The real fun lies in meeting other like minded people.

Where do YOU want to meet up?

UPCOMING EVENTS

Business Meeting

REGULAR MONTHLY MEETING:

What: Meeting to decide general business of the group and to discuss current events

Date: Third Sunday of the month

Time: 1:00 PM – 3:00 PM

Place: The Heritage Bldg, 217 Main St, Irving, Tx—Heritage Park.

Social Meetings

DALLAS / PLANO ATHEIST MEETUP DAY:

What: Meet with other local Atheists to talk about your beliefs

Date: Every Tuesday

Time: 7:00 PM

Place: TBA; For locations near you visit: atheists.meetup.com

MA ATHEIST MEETUP:

What: 'My dinner with Atheists,' social time with a bunch of heathens

Date: 2nd, 3rd, 4th, (& 5th) Wednesday

Time: 6:00 PM – 9:00 PM

Place: J. Gilligan's Bar & Grill (Meet on the grill side)
400 E. Abram Street, Arlington, TX

NOTE: Location can vary on 3rd Wed of each month - check [meetup site](http://meetup.com) for details

MA ATHEIST MEETUP:

What: 'My dinner with Atheists,' social time with a bunch of heathens

Date: 1st Wednesday of the Month

Time: 6:00 PM – 9:00 PM

Place: Blue Danube, 2230 West Park Row, Pantego, TX

Adopt-A-Highway:

What: Highway clean up volunteering

Date: Once a month-check website

Time: Check website

Place: Hwy 157, Arlington-check website

To have your events listed email:

The Atheist Voice Editor at
editor@metroplexatheists.org

THE ATHEIST VOICE is a quarterly publication of Metroplex Atheists.

For more information, please visit our website: www.metroplexatheists.org

To submit an article or letter to the editor, please email us.

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ARGUMENTS 21-24 OF 36 FOR GOD

"This article has been reprinted from the **Huffington Post** with permission from the author. Landon Ross is a contributor to the **Huffington Post**, principal founder of www.RationalApe.com, and Los Angeles based artist."

21. The Argument from the Consensus of Humanity

1. Every culture in every epoch has had theistic beliefs.
2. When peoples, widely separated by both space and time, hold similar beliefs, the best explanation is that those beliefs are true.
3. The best explanation for why every culture has had theistic beliefs is that those beliefs are true.
4. God exists.

FLAW: 2 is false. Widely separated people could very well come up with the same *false* beliefs. Human nature is universal, and thus prone to universal illusions and shortcomings of perception, memory, reasoning, and objectivity. Also, many of the needs and terrors and dependencies of the human condition (such as the knowledge of our own mortality, and the attendant desire not to die) are universal. Our beliefs don't arise only from well-evaluated reasoning, but from wishful thinking, self-deception, self-aggrandizement, gullibility, false memories, visual illusions, and other mental glitches. Well-grounded beliefs may be the exception rather than the rule when it comes to psychologically fraught beliefs, which tend to bypass rational grounding and spring instead from unexamined emotions. The fallacy of arguing that if an idea is univer-

sally held then it must be true was labeled by the ancient logicians *consensus gentium*.

22. The Argument from the Consensus of Mystics

1. Mystics go into a special state in which they seem to see aspects of reality that elude every-

See Q1 2010 issue for arguments 1-3

See Q2 2010 issue for arguments 4-7

See Q3 2010 issue for arguments 8-11

See Q4 2010 issue for arguments 12-16

See Q1 2011 issue for arguments 17-20

To view go to www.metroplexatheists.org

day experience.

2. We cannot evaluate the truth of their experiences from the viewpoint of everyday experience (from 1)

3. There is a unanimity among mystics as to what they experience.

4. When there is unanimity among observers as to what they experience, then unless they are all deluded in the same way, the best explanation for their unanimity is that their experiences are true.

5. There is no reason to think that mystics are all deluded in the same way.

6. The best explanation for the unanimity of mystical experience is that what mystics perceive is true (from 4 & 5).

7. Mystical experiences unanimously testify to the transcendent presence of God.

8. God exists.

FLAW 1: Premise 5 is disputable. There is indeed reason to think mystics might be deluded in similar ways. The universal human nature that refuted the Argument from the Consensus of Humanity entails that the human brain can be stimulated in unusual ways that give rise to universal (but not objectively correct) experiences. The fact that we can stimulate the temporal lobes of non-mystics and induce mystical experiences in them is evidence that mystics might indeed all be deluded in similar ways. Certain drugs can also induce feelings of transcendence, such as an enlargement

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(Arguments from page 6)

of perception beyond the bounds of effability, a melting of the boundaries of the self, a joyful expansion out into an existence that seems to be all One, with all that Oneness pronouncing Yes upon us. Such experiences, which, as William James points out, are most easily attained by getting drunk, are of the same kind as the mystical: "The drunken consciousness is one bit of the mystic consciousness." Of course, we do not exalt the stupor and delusions of drunkenness because we *know* what caused them. The fact that the same effects can overcome a person when we know what caused them (and hence don't call the experience "mystical") — is reason to suspect that the causes of mystical experiences also lie within internal excitations of the brain having nothing to do with perception.

FLAW 2: The struggle to put the ineffable contents of abnormal experiences into language inclines the struggler toward pre-existing religious language, which is the only language that most of us have been exposed to which overlaps with the unusual sensations of an altered state of consciousness. This observation casts doubt on Premise 7. See also The Argument from Sublimity, #34 below.

23. The Argument from Holy Books

1. There are holy books that reveal the word of God.
2. The word of God is necessarily true.
3. The word of God reveals the existence of God.
4. God exists.

FLAW 1: This is a circular argument if ever there was one. The first three premises cannot be maintained unless one independently knows the very conclusion to be proved, namely that God exists.

FLAW 2: A glance at the world's religions shows that there are numerous books and scrolls and doctrines and revelations that all claim to reveal the word of God. But they are mutually incompatible. Should I believe that Jesus is my personal savior? Or should I believe that God made a covenant with the Jews requiring every Jew to keep the commandments of the Torah? Should I believe that Mohammad was Allah's last prophet and that Ali, the prophet's cousin and husband of his daughter Fatima, ought to have been the first caliph, or that Mohammad was Allah's last prophet and that Ali was the fourth and last caliph? Should I believe that the resurrected prophet Moroni dictated the Book of Mormon to Joseph Smith? Or that Ahura Mazda, the benevolent Creator, is at cosmic war with the malevolent Angra Mainyu? And on and on it

goes. Only the most arrogant provincialism could allow someone to believe that the holy documents that happen to be held sacred by the clan he was born into are true, while all the documents held sacred by the clans he wasn't born into are false.

24. The Argument from Perfect Justice

1. This world provides numerous instances of imperfect justice — bad things happening to good people and good things happening to bad people.
2. It violates our sense of justice that imperfect justice may prevail.
3. There must be a transcendent realm in which perfect justice prevails (from 1 and 2).
4. A transcendent realm in which perfect justice prevails entails the Perfect Judge.
5. The Perfect Judge is God.
6. God exists.

FLAW: This is a good example of the Fallacy of Wishful Thinking. Our wishes for how the world should be need not be true; just because we want there to be some realm in which perfect justice applies does not mean that there is such a realm. In other words, there is no way to pass from Premise 2 to Premise 3 without the Fallacy of Wishful Thinking.

(President from page 4)

We would also like to be in a position to assist groups that are helping people escape the clutches of religion. The transition can be difficult and it helps

to have people who have been through it to answer questions and provide support. We would like to aid in the growth by providing publicity and that, too, costs money.

We're not asking anyone to "give 'till it hurts" we're just trying to raise enough funds to help support budding atheists when they need it.

Terry McDonald

(Bus from page 3)

“kind” - advertising in their neighborhoods, even quoting Ronald Reagan to emphasize their point.

I could almost feel the reverberation of the whip as it cracked the air's silence when I stepped forward. How dare I, a black man, stand in opposition of their black Christian solidarity. I spent my allotted three minutes speaking, defending a statement that should have gone unchallenged – a mere assertion that millions of people are good without god. Not one iota of defamation.

I could feel their eyes searing the back of my neck. As my words fell on seemingly deaf ears, I prepared to challenge the ministers' defense of their own values and continued segregation in their own churches, their continued persecution of anyone else who was different, but three minutes isn't a lot of time.

As the transportation board members moved into a closed executive session for discussion, the dubious smiles on those pastors' lips (accented by polished gold teeth) – reinforced what many of us already knew. The decision to get us off the bus was already made. After their time in deliberation, we were allowed into the meeting room again. It didn't take long until one particular black board member (Reby Cary) proceeded to give us his rendition of American history, citing that the founding founders in their infinite greatness, created this country as a Christian nation, backed by its history, legislature, and tradition. Unfortunately, we did not get to address Mr. Cary's allega-

tions or remind him that many of the founding fathers he so quickly defended were slave owners themselves that didn't see it fit to ban slavery in the articles of confederation or the bill of rights.

The meeting adjourned with a vote to change to the Transit Authorities policy, disallowing any religious or non-religious, political, tobacco, and alcohol related ads. The ministers would rather see “no message” rather than someone else's message in lights. The experience as a whole was fascinating.

When the Coalition of Reason decided to put up the ads in the first place, it never could have imagined this much coverage, including a Christian group paying for a signage truck to follow one of the buses refuting the ad, the Ft. Worth mayor chiming in inadvertently keeping the story in the news cycle, etc... Outside of the news however, what has come of it is more conversation at a local level. Non-believers and believers are engaging in a new level of public discourse and minorities of all sorts are getting into the discussion.

The challenge facing the African American churches goes beyond seeing a few black faces on a bus ad. There have always been African American free-thinkers. What brings this fight closer to home for those ministers is what is happening right in front of their pulpits represented by vanishing seats. The Black church still caters to single mothers hoping to raise their children christianly, singles looking for the right type of godly man or woman, older couples, and a closeted gay population

that tends to seek the healing touch of heterosexuality through prayer. Look closer and what you won't find are the 18-30 somethings? It's the same demographic of a population that we see vanishing from non-black churches. This ad was targeted at them too, and some are beginning to pop up, although slowly to defy their defined roles. But asserting one's self-identity can be hard when everyone around you keeps telling you who you are. Try asserting yourself to a black minister and you'll find yourself in a fairly tight corner quickly – and the same power of dissemination that moved masses during the civil rights era, now work at the speed of the internet when you cross your life long congregation - made up of your community members, leaders, teachers, potential mates, etc... It is cult like.

But if we're going to move African Americans out of the shadows of this lingering period of enslavement or indoctrination, we've got to either replace the false hope that they get from stand-in overseers in polyester suits, with reason based role models and educators. We've got to stop paying lip service to diversity and implement real programs of targeted inclusion, fund unbiased outreach, mentoring programs, and find what's important to them because it's important to us. We've got to find a way to supplant some of the services they have become beholden to the church for - with services of our own. Ministers, regardless of truthfulness and the price, give people hope – what are we in the secular community going to offer?

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(Mock Religion from page 2)

religion on your blog... or are we talking about mocking religion at Thanksgiving dinner? Are we mocking it in a book or a magazine article or a letter to the editor... or are we mocking it in a personal conversation with a friend about their beliefs?

I think the rules about public conversation are very different from the rules about private conversation. In public conversation, a much higher degree of criticism, both serious and sarcastic, is considered acceptable. (This is a point Richard Dawkins has made: the kind of language that's decried as intolerant and insulting in atheist critique of religion is accepted with barely a blink in political commentary or restaurant reviews.)

In public discourse, ideas and information take precedence. That's the whole idea of the marketplace of ideas. People speak loudly and passionately in favor of their ideas and against ones they disagree with, so that -- ideally, at least -- the most convincing ideas will be the ones that eventually sell. People do this using every rhetorical tool they have... including sarcasm. Dramatic irony, metaphor, bathos, puns, parody, litotes and satire. They use all the tricks. And if you participate in public discourse, you're expected to have a thick skin. If you dish it out, you should be able to take it. (See above, re: satire as a respectable, time-honored form of political and social discourse.)



And to this end, I think mockery of religion isn't just acceptable. It can be a positive good. It can be a way of saying, "We decline to treat religion with kid gloves anymore. We see religion as just another idea about the world... and when it's a silly idea, we're going to make fun of it, just like we would with any other silly idea." The expectation that religion should be treated with extra respect is one of the main ways that religion protects itself from legitimate criticism... and mocking religion can be an important part of stripping that protection from it and making it defend itself just like any other idea.

But in private discourse, ideas and information don't necessarily take precedence. In private discourse, personal relationships between people often take precedence. Kindness to the people you love and care about often takes precedence. If you're writing a magazine article or a fashion blog, you might say, "Gaucho pants are a crime against humanity"... but you presumably wouldn't say it to your cousin Cindy who shows up at dinner wearing them. And I think a similar principle applies to religion.

What's more, in public conversation, it's much easier for someone who doesn't like what you're saying to turn away: turn the page of the newspaper, change the channel on the TV, click to another blog. That's a lot harder

to do at Thanksgiving dinner. In a situation where there's a strong social expectation that people not just walk out, I think it's rude and unkind to put them in a position where their only choices are to walk out, to get into a big argument, or to sit there and let themselves be made fun of.

I'm not saying that religion is off-limits in personal conversation. I'm just saying the tone we take should be different. Personally, unless I'm pretty sure that everyone else in the room is a non-believer, I rarely bring up religion in social situations (although if someone ask what I blog about, I will usually say "Atheism and sex"). And if someone else brings it up, I try to step lightly, speak tactfully, choose my words carefully... a lot more lightly and tactfully and carefully than I do in my blog. And even if my own beliefs aren't being treated respectfully, I still try to take the high road -- a lot more so than I would in a public conversation. I may still use humor... but I'll be a lot more gentle about it than I would in public writing or conversation.

2: Who or what, exactly, is the target of the mockery?

There's a line I try to draw when I'm being critical or mocking of religion. The line is this: I try to focus my criticism and mockery on beliefs and actions -- not on people. I try to remember to say things like, "Catholicism is stupid" -- not "Catholics are stupid." Partly I do this because I think saying "Catholics are stupid" veers dangerously close to religious bigotry. Because Catholics are so diverse, and vary so

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(Mock Religion from page 9)

greatly in how much they do or don't adhere to the tenets of Catholicism, saying "Catholics are stupid" is essentially deriding people on the basis of the group they belong to, instead of for what they themselves say and do. When we aim our mockery at religious ideas and actions, we're participating in a noble tradition of satire as social criticism. When we aim our mockery at religious people, we're participating in a much uglier tradition. But I also do this because I think saying "Catholics are stupid" is patently untrue. Catholics are no more stupid or smart than anyone else. They have, IMO, some mistaken ideas about the world... but so does everyone else in the human race. You don't have to be stupid to make mistakes. You don't even have to be stupid to stubbornly hold on to mistakes in the face of overwhelming evidence. The human tendency to rationalize mistakes can be an aggravating one... but it's also a universal one, one that every one of us shares. And the human ability to compartmentalize can be a deeply aggravating one... but it also gives room for people with some dumb ideas to still be smart and capable in other areas of their lives.

I do make a few exceptions. Public figures who deliberately make religion a big part of their public image, I think, are fair game... especially when they're big old hypocrites. But on the whole, I try to aim my criticism of religion -- mocking and otherwise -- at ideas and actions, not at people or groups.

3: What kind of mockery are we talking about, anyway?

There's mockery, and there's mockery.

There's mockery that has a point. There's mockery that shines a spotlight on inconsistency, hypocrisy, stupidity, greed, arrogance, close-mindedness, sloppy thinking, and flat-out evil. (The kind of mockery than Jon Stewart is king of.)

And then there's mockery of the "Janie is a doo-doo-head" variety. The kind of mockery that calls names and makes fun without any real content or point. The kind of mockery that essentially substitutes invective for analysis. (The kind of mockery that, alas, Keith Olberman is all too prone to.)

The latter, I think, is a whole lot less useful. It has its place, to be sure: it can be entertaining in the right context, and it can do a lot to relieve tension and forge bonds within a movement. And I certainly won't deny that I've indulged in it myself. But I don't have nearly the same "this is a powerful and venerated form of social commentary that dates back to ancient times, yada yada yada" respect for it that I do for the other kind.

Finally, and maybe most importantly:

4: What are you trying to accomplish?

Are you trying to rally the troops? Are you trying to lift the spirits of non-believers who already agree with you, and to forge stronger bonds between you? Are you trying to inspire other atheists to get more involved, to take a further step into visibility and action? Are you trying to draw attention to

atheism in the media and the public eye? Are you trying to shift the public perception of religion: to shake it off its pedestal, and get people to see it as just another institution, and just another view of the world, which we can debate and make fun of just like any other?

Or are you trying to engage in fruitful debate with people who disagree with you? Are you trying to persuade believers to reconsider their religious beliefs... or at least, to reconsider their attitude towards atheists?

Both of these are useful, valid goals. But they require a different approach. And in my experience, mockery is more useful in the first set of goals than the second. Very, very few people in this world will be persuaded that they're wrong by being made fun of. Generally speaking, making fun of people makes them defensive, entrenches them more stubbornly in their beliefs. And this is especially true when it comes to beliefs that are deeply held, and deeply precious and important to people.

It's not that humor can never be used in a respectful, persuasive, one-on-one debate. But in my experience, it has to be used more sparingly, and more lightly: with less of a mocking, sarcastic, "don't you see what an idiot you're being?" tone, and more of a gentle, "we are all fools together" tone.

If that makes sense.

Oh, and by the way, Ola: Thanks for the "Kissing Hank's Ass" thing. I hadn't heard that meme before. That is fracking hilarious.

(Bus from page 8)

Atheist can say they are good without god, but we have yet to show it outside of our Freethinking suburbs. What made it so easy for those ministers to fight the ads wasn't the lack of understanding that some "might be good without god", it was the

lack of demonstrable proof, that we can be— or at least a concerted effort to argue that fact.

In civil rights history we had one pivotal moment where we see a picture of a defiant woman refusing to give up her seat. Tens then eventually thousands rallied behind that iconography that helped reshape the nation. Our

problem as humanist, secularist, atheist, continues to be a massive problem of public imagery, because when they came for our seat in Ft. Worth – we didn't have the numbers to rally. So my questions to all my Atheist friends, is what are you going to do when they come for your seat?

(Dialog from page 1)

one Christian stating "I'm not afraid of atheists anymore". So it appears we were successful in putting a human face on non-belief. A show of hands was unanimous in wanting to have a second dialogue. Julio is now working with Marty to put together another event. Stay tuned.

This Baptist church was more liberal than most. There was a Jew-

ish Rabbi present who actually has an office in the church and conducts Torah studies. They also host a boy scout troop which traditionally has not been done by Baptists. One Baptist lady at my table stated that she did not believe in hell and everyone was going to heaven. WOW. But it seems from my experience we only get invited to the more liberal Christian churches. It seems to be that as you migrate from liberal to conser-

vative in the world of Christian sects that the wall of intolerance gets thicker and thicker. The thicker the wall, the less likely that these Christian sects would have a dialogue with atheists, and probably wouldn't even tolerate their more liberal brothers and sisters.

By Randy Word

FAMOUS QUOTES

“Reason should be destroyed in all Christians”

Martin Luther

Metroplex Atheists Business Meeting Location

METROPLEX ATHEISTS MEETS AT 1:00 P.M. THE MEETINGS ARE HELD ON THE THIRD SUNDAY OF EACH MONTH.

**THIS MEETING WILL BE CONDUCTED AT:
The Heritage Bldg, 217 Main St,
Irving, Tx—Heritage Park.**



TEMPTED?

Go to www.metroplexatheists.org

WHY DO WE FIGHT?

‘Because we must. Because we have the call. Because it is nobler to fight for rationality without winning than to give up in the face of continued defeats. Because whatever true progress humanity makes is through the rationality of the occasional individual and because any one individual we may win for the cause may do more for humanity than a hundred thousand who hug superstition to their breasts.’

– Isaac Asimov, when asked why he fights religion with no hope for victory



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Atheists.org
NO STRINGS ATTACHED.