

X27 – EXchanging Worldviews, 27:
EXploring Prospects for Peace & Prosperity, 19:
EXtricating Humanity from EXcruciating Problems by, 13:
EXpediting Cultural Change, via 9:
EXterminating the God Meme, through 1:
EXcoriating Theism

Dear: I wouldn't be surprised if the previous chapter, dealing with extrapolating laws, "turned you off." I agree that it was "kinda far out", but again, I maintain that there's value in "looking at the limits" – even in just glancing at them. Again: if you have some idea about where you want to go, you increase your chance of getting there!

Meanwhile, though, there's reality. In reality, unless the people of the world were wise enough to make me their dictator (☺), the probability that laws such as those suggested in the previous chapter will be promulgated anytime soon (e.g., during the next century) is essentially "zilch". Further, although it's tempting to try to expedite cultural change with new laws (e.g., to extinguish violence), evidence from the past ~5,000 years suggests that such a method is rife with problems, such as: disagreements about goals (and therefore disagreements about desirable laws), the resulting difficulty of promulgating "just" laws (written by partisans, e.g., those promoted and funded by various factions), and the need to enforce laws with threats and acts of violence (thereby undermining, for example, the goal of extinguishing violence). In this chapter, therefore, I want to begin suggesting an alternative approach – one that I guarantee will work! – eventually (☺).

My guarantee is based on a "truism" that's probably been known ever since the first humans knew anything. In **Yx**, I'll show you some examples from more than 4,000 years ago in Mesopotamia and Egypt; in **P7** (dealing with "Problems Religions Cause Individuals"), I showed you the summary of this "truism" from Ancient Greece by Pindar (c. 518–438 BCE), "Convention is ruler over all", as well as Herodotus' translation of Pindar's statement, "Law is the king over all." For what follows, I'll use the following version of Pindar's truism: "Custom is king."

Thus, my thesis for this chapter (and in fact, for the all of the remaining X-chapters) is that, rather than trying to force people to obey new laws with which the majority of the people disagrees (at best, almost always a fruitless effort, and at worst, achieved only by dictators), a wiser procedure is to try to change customs – because, when all is said and done, “Custom is king.” That is, the best way to change people’s behavior is not by enacting laws but by changing customs – because, eventually, appropriate laws will follow.

For these final X-chapters, therefore, I want to explore possible ways to expedite cultural change to exterminate the god meme (“the mental equivalent of a computer virus”). Stated differently, the overarching question for these final X-chapters is: How can more progress be made, expediting cultural change by exterminating the god meme?

To exterminate the god meme is (obviously!) an extremely difficult task. As Daniel Dennett wrote in his recent book *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon*: “What a fine protective screen this virus [the god meme] provides... permitting it to shed the antibodies of skepticism effortlessly!” In the past many chapters I’ve been suggesting many different ways that progress might be made, including improving education in evaluative-thinking skills, curtailing child abuse, and expanding women’s (and men’s!) liberation. In each case, however, religions interfere, leading to what I’ve frequently referred to as a Catch-22.

Let me remind you of some of the many ways that the god idea inhibits progress toward peace and prosperity. Thus, although most organized religions have finally stopped advocating slavery and only in some Muslim countries are people still executed for abandoning their religion, yet the clerics of the world commonly constrain progress toward peace and prosperity by:

1. Opposing population planning
2. Ignoring the need for environmental protection
3. Disregarding the imperative of resource conservation
4. Preventing definitions of reasonable goals
5. Relying on archaic concepts of ‘morality’
6. Inhibiting rational discussion of ‘justice’
7. Opposing open exchange of ideas
8. Interfering with development of critical-thinking skills
9. Opposing other educational improvements (e.g., teaching evolution)

* Go to other chapters *via*

10. Promoting “belief” and “faith” without evaluations
11. Promoting delusions
12. Opposing free scientific-inquiry
13. Blocking pursuit of human rights
14. “Sanctifying” mental and physical abuses of children
15. “Sanctifying” patriarchal abuses of women
16. “Sanctifying” violence in defense of their religion
17. Supporting extremism in defense of their religion
18. Promoting their versions of tribalism
19. Inhibiting democracies
20. Stifling open discussion with their ignorance and arrogance, and
21. “Sanctifying” what they choose to call “holy wars”.

Consequently, the obvious question that I want to address is: How can humanity exterminate the god meme, or break free from the clerics’ Catch-22, or to change the analogy still again, how can humanity cut the clerics’ Gordian Knot?

Now, Dear, I don’t know if you’ve heard the story about Alexander (356 – 323 BCE) and the Gordian Knot. True or not, the story is as follows.¹

In Greek legend, the Gordian Knot was the name given to an intricate knot used by Gordius to secure his oxcart. Gordius, who was a poor peasant, arrived with his wife in a public square of Phrygia in an oxcart. An oracle had informed the populace that their future king would come riding in a wagon. Seeing Gordius, the people made him king. In gratitude, Gordius dedicated his oxcart to Zeus, tying it up with a peculiar knot. An oracle foretold that he who untied the knot would rule all of Asia.

Many people tried to undo the knot but all to no avail. [Dear: it could have been a loop of rope, with no ends, tied in a complicated manner!]

In 333 B.C. [BCE] Alexander the Great had invaded Asia Minor and arrived in the central mountains at the town of Gordium; he was 23. Undefeated, but without a decisive victory either, he was in need of an omen to prove to his troops and his enemies that the outcome of his mission – to conquer the known world – was possible.

¹ Copied from http://www.alexander-the-great.co.uk/gordian_knot.htm. And by the way, Dear, I don’t identify him as “Alexander the Great”, because it’s not clear to me if he was much more than another of history’s egotistical megalomaniacs: he expanded Greece’s influence across the Persian Empire to India, but as far as I know, he never made such a lasting contribution as did, for example, the Persian Emperor Cyrus “the Great”, who produced what’s commonly called “the first Bill of Rights”.

In Gordium, by the Temple of the Zeus Basilica, was the ox cart, which had been put there by the King of Phrygia over 100 years before. The staves of the cart were tied together in a complex knot with the ends tucked away inside.

Having arrived at Gordium it was inconceivable that the young, impetuous King would not tackle the legendary “Gordian Knot”.

Alexander climbed the hill and approached the cart as a crowd of curious Macedonians and Phrygians gathered around. They watched intently as Alexander struggled with the knot and became frustrated.

Alexander, stepping back, called out, “What does it matter how I loose it?” With that, he drew his sword, and in one powerful stroke severed the knot.

That night there was a huge electrical storm, which the seers conveniently interpreted to mean the gods were pleased with the actions of this so-called Son of Zeus who had cut the Gordian Knot.

Well, Dear, in these past several chapters, you might have noticed a similar Gordian Knot. For example, the best way to exterminate the god meme would seem to be to try to teach kids evaluative-thinking skills, but education can’t be improved without improving the schools (the curriculum, the teachers, the administration, and school funding), but those changes can’t be implemented without parental approval, especially approval from mothers, but most mothers won’t give their approval without their husband’s approval or until they’re liberated from their husbands, and men won’t approve the changes until they’re liberated from the clerics – most of whom don’t want their paying customers to be able to think for themselves!

As for how to expedite cultural change, how to break free from the clerics’ Catch-22, how to exterminate the God meme, how to cut the Gordian Knot: Ha! By which I mean, Dear, that it’s obviously an absolutely humongous task – as the historical record so brutally shows. Here, though, I don’t want to provide additional details to support that statement. I showed you some details in earlier chapters [including chapters in the “excursion” **Ix** (dealing with “Exploring the Origin of Ideas about God and Souls”)] and I’ll show you more in **Yx** (dealing with “Your Indoctrination in the Mountainous God Lie”). Instead, for these final **X**-chapters, I want to proceed directly to suggest methods that can be applied (and, I think, should be applied) now.

In particular, because the Gordian Knot seems to have been tied by the clerics and because most clerics won’t listen to reason or be swayed by

science, I think that there's need to take drastic measures – though not quite so drastic as Alexander's use of his sword. In the previous chapter, my suggestion for cutting the Gordian Knot was similar to Alexander's use of his sword: I proposed “draconian” laws (named after the 7th Century BCE Athenian legislator Draco, whose laws were severe, e.g., “the death penalty... even for trivial crimes”). In this chapter, I advocate, instead, cutting the clerics' Gordian Knot with ridicule: ridicule of all gods, all religions, all clerics, and everyone who buys into the clerics' con games.

And yes, Dear, certainly I'd agree, in principle, that rather than try to influence people's ideas by ridiculing them, a better way is through serious, respectful dialogue. Such a method was advocated well by Slavoj Zizek in the following 12 March 2006 Op-Ed article in the *New York Times*.

Defenders of the Faith

By SLAVOJ ZIZEK, London

FOR centuries, we have been told that without religion we are no more than egotistic animals fighting for our share, our only morality that of a pack of wolves; only religion, it is said, can elevate us to a higher spiritual level. Today, when religion is emerging as the wellspring of murderous violence around the world, assurances that Christian or Muslim or Hindu fundamentalists are only abusing and perverting the noble spiritual messages of their creeds ring increasingly hollow. What about restoring the dignity of atheism, one of Europe's greatest legacies and perhaps our only chance for peace?

More than a century ago, in *The Brothers Karamazov* and other works, Dostoyevsky warned against the dangers of godless moral nihilism, arguing in essence that if God doesn't exist, then everything is permitted. The French philosopher André Glucksmann even applied Dostoyevsky's critique of godless nihilism to 9/11, as the title of his book, *Dostoyevsky in Manhattan*, suggests.

This argument couldn't have been more wrong: the lesson of today's terrorism is that if God exists, then everything, including blowing up thousands of innocent bystanders, is permitted – at least to those who claim to act directly on behalf of God, since, clearly, a direct link to God justifies the violation of any merely human constraints and considerations. In short, fundamentalists have become no different than the “godless” Stalinist Communists, to whom everything was permitted since they perceived themselves as direct instruments of their divinity, the Historical Necessity of Progress Toward Communism.

During the Seventh Crusade, led by St. Louis, Yves le Breton reported how he once encountered an old woman who wandered down the street with a dish full of fire in her right hand and a bowl full of water in her left hand. Asked why she carried the

two bowls, she answered that with the fire she would burn up Paradise until nothing remained of it, and with the water she would put out the fires of Hell until nothing remained of them: “Because I want no one to do good in order to receive the reward of Paradise, or from fear of Hell; but solely out of love for God.” Today, this properly Christian ethical stance survives mostly in atheism.

Fundamentalists do what they perceive as good deeds in order to fulfill God’s will and to earn salvation; atheists do them simply because it is the right thing to do. Is this also not our most elementary experience of morality? When I do a good deed, I do so not with an eye toward gaining God’s favor; I do it because if I did not, I could not look at myself in the mirror. A moral deed is by definition its own reward. David Hume... made this point in a very poignant way, when he wrote that the only way to show true respect for God is to act morally while ignoring God’s existence...

While a true atheist has no need to boost his own stance by provoking believers with blasphemy, he also refuses to reduce the problem of the Muhammad caricatures to one of respect for other’s beliefs. Respect for other’s beliefs as the highest value can mean only one of two things: either we treat the other in a patronizing way and avoid hurting him in order not to ruin his illusions, or we adopt the relativist stance of multiple “regimes of truth,” disqualifying as violent imposition any clear insistence on truth.

What, however, about submitting Islam – together with all other religions – to a respectful, but for that reason no less ruthless, critical analysis? This and only this, is the way to show a true respect for Muslims: to treat them as serious adults.

Therefore, Dear, I’d certainly understand if you objected to my suggestion to try to influence people by ridiculing their ideas. Such techniques aren’t considered to be “politically correct” (PC) – and even ‘unkind’ or ‘rude’ or ‘cruel.’ Instead, the recommended “PC method” is to explain to them what they’re doing wrong and, more importantly, to set a better example – and I’ll address those two possible approaches in the next two X-chapters. But immediately I must add, Dear, that my experiences with your parents and with fundamentalist Christians and Muslims (e.g., on various internet forums in which, of late, I have participated extensively) have been that such PC methods don’t work: you can try to communicate with them as serious adults, but that’s not how they respond or behave!

That is, Dear, I agree that a better way than ridiculing the ideas of “true believers” (or “theists”) is to try to communicate with them by listening to them, gaining understanding of them, treating them with compassion, and by

setting a better example. That's the way advocated by most Buddhists.² But again, my experiences have been that it doesn't work. You try it: try listening, try to understand and feel compassion for your mother and your other grandmother. Compassionately seek to experience their feelings for their god; try to understand why they have such feelings; try to see how they might see some way for them to shed their delusions. Maybe you'll have more success than I had with my mother and your parents, but my conclusion is that Bertrand Russell saw the problem perfectly: "The trouble with the world is that the stupid are cocksure and the intelligent are full of doubt."

You might think, further, that the criticism of theists should be left to "the professionals", e.g. the hundreds of thousands of "professional critics" in this country whose columns fill every op-ed newspaper in this country and the "talking heads" who appear on so many television programs. But again, although there are some exceptional cases, experiences show that leaving criticism to such "professionals" doesn't work (or at least, it's not yet working in this country). As Wendy Kaminer mentioned:³

I suspect that media elites offer virtually no analysis of the religious impulse or majoritarian religious beliefs mainly because they fear appearing impious or giving offense... What's striking about journalists and intellectuals today, liberal and conservative alike, is not their mythic Voltairian skepticism but their deference to belief and utter failure to criticize, much less satirize, America's romance with God.

And, it seems reasonable to add, this "fear" displayed by "media elites" is probably derived from their fear of losing advertising revenue.

Consequently, given that "we the people" will probably need to rely on ourselves to solve the problems caused by theists and given that the clerics and their faithful followers behave like little children (short on reasoning while big on imagining; oblivious to data while wallowing in their delusions), then insofar as they refuse to behave as adults, I'm sorry to say that (through experiences with trying alternatives), the best way to deal with them (at least initially) is the same as one deals with little children.

² For example, see <http://www.caduceus.info/archive/54/osama.htm> for a Buddhist's view of compassion – derived from listening and understanding – even for dealing with Osama bin Laden.

³ In *Sleeping with Extra-Terrestrials: The Rise of Irrationalism and Perils of Piety*.

Let me put it this way: when you were younger, Dear, how did you “handle” kids who were “real brats”? By “real brats” I means kids who refuse to be reasonable (or don’t know how) and who either refuse to learn or are “just plain dumb”. From my experiences, the best way to get “real brats” to “smarten up” is to apply one or more (or all) of the following four techniques:

- 1) Ridicule their ideas and their ‘heroes’ (e.g., their clerics and their gods) [which is what I’ll advocate in this chapter, **X27**, and still more in **X31**],
- 2) Set a better example [which is what I’ll try to explain in **X28**, and some in later chapters],
- 3) Explain to them what they’re doing wrong and how to behave better [**X29**], and if none of those techniques work, then
- 4) Exclude them from cooperative activities [addressed in **X-30** and in the final **X**-chapters].

But let me add, Dear, that if you’ve found other methods to successfully deal with “real brats”, then I’d urge you to apply your method to try to exterminate the god meme – taking reasonable precautions for your own and your family’s safety.

Let me also add: if you think that still another way to handle brats is to bribe them, then experiences have shown not only that in many cases it doesn’t work but also, in some cases, it has “backfired”. For example, Western societies yielding to Muslim demands for “special treatment” has led to their demanding still more “privileges” (e.g., censoring even cartoons!), and inviting Christian clerics to participate in attempts to protect the environment has led to the clerics emerging even more strongly entrenched in the culture than before they were bribed. Therefore, since reasoning with theists (or in other ways trying to educating them) doesn’t seem to work, I’m stuck with only the four options already listed: 1) ridiculing their ideas, 2) setting a better example, 3) explaining to them what they’re doing wrong, and 4) excluding them.

Meanwhile, of course I agree that, in the long run, “just” expanding knowledge will exterminate any god meme. As Arthur C. Clarke (1917 – 2004) wrote:

* Go to other chapters *via*

Science can destroy religion by ignoring it as well as by disproving its tenets. No one ever demonstrated, so far as I am aware, the non-existence of Zeus or Thor – but they have few followers now.

The problem of relying on science, alone, however, is that history has shown that the clerics are so slow to accept change: witness that the stupid pope only recently agreed that Galileo was right, witness the stupid Islamic leader in Saudi Arabia who recently issued a fatwa for the death of anyone who said that the world wasn't a flat plate, witness the stupid Mormon leaders who still maintain that Native Americans are descendants of the "lost tribes of Israel", and witness the stupid Evangelical Christians who promote "intelligent design", maintain that the Earth was created only 6,000 years ago, that Noah loaded dinosaurs on his ark, and that any-day-now, Christ will return to begin his reign on earth in "paradisiacal glory"! Thereby, as someone else wrote:⁴

It turns out, the myth of peaceful, easy change is just that: a myth. There is no polite way to tell people they are deluded hypocrites. And it's not like we have infinite time. It's not just selfishness that makes me want to bring about rationality in my lifetime: the planet is in danger. Faith in the sky-daddy will not reverse overpopulation or global warming. If we don't hurry up and get rational, there might not be a hundred years from now for atheists to finally, gently, convince everyone else to behave like adults.

The failure of so many "grownups" to behave as adults was recently illuminated well by Ole Wolf in a posting entitled *Imagine Santa*.⁵

Imagine that you know someone that believes in Santa Claus. We probably all do: little children often believe in Santa Claus. But imagine that this person you know is an adult person that honestly believes in Santa.

Now, I don't want you to think this person is stupid. I want you to imagine that this adult believer in Santa Claus is an intelligent person who is skilled at his job. He may even have attended university and graduated with high honors. He's easy-going and generally a nice person. Sure, he's not perfect, but on the overall you can't really

⁴ I'm sorry, Dear, but in spite of my searches on the internet, I was unable to identify the source of this quotation. I started to think that maybe I had written it in an earlier draft – but although I have written similar sentiments, I don't think I would have focused on "global warming", I don't usually use the word "sky-daddy", and the "dead give-away" was that the draft version (that I had) used only single spaces after colons and periods. So: my apologies to the author, but through my own carelessness, I didn't record the original source and then was unable to identify you! If you're out there and read this, please provide me with a reference!

⁵ Copied from <http://blog.blazingangles.net/whatsthis/2007/09/imagine-santa.html>.

point your finger at him. He's like most, except he believes that Santa Claus lives somewhere on the North Pole with his reindeer and little helpers, delivering your presents at Christmas, and he believes that he must behave nicely because Santa wants him to be a nice person.

It is easy to recognize that his good deeds are linked to his belief, because although he doesn't brag about them, he encourages others to note. It may be the little badge on his shirt stating that he donated to some charity, or the occasional mention that he is a board member at the local chapter of Santa-believers, who do good for the community.

In fact, I'd like you to think there's nothing wrong with this person. I think you'll agree with me... except for that Santa part, right?

Well, he's skilled and smart all right, and generally a trustworthy and nice person, and apparently his Santa belief makes him do good things, even if it seems a little quaint.

Yet, somehow you'd be a little hesitant to believing his judgment skills, wouldn't you? That is, after your initial surprise of learning that he believes in such superstitious drivel has worn off.

Perhaps you might secretly wonder if he's genuinely such a nice person, or whether the only thing preventing him from being nasty is his belief that Santa wants him to do good. After all, he would hardly believe that humans would do evil without a belief in Santa if he didn't think that he himself would do evil without this belief. You might also feel slightly offended because it means he views you as an evil person because of your disbelief. You would rightfully suspect him of not liking or trusting you, and you would rightfully suspect him of lying whenever he claimed otherwise.

He also maintains that morals and ethics are based on the belief in Santa, so in politics, negotiations, and human relations, you'll find him rejecting the values and opinions of other human beings and ignoring human rights, because he contributes more importance to opinions that are consistent with those that he believes are given by Santa than opinions differing from his belief voiced by mere humans. He is particularly skeptic against cultures that don't celebrate Christmas. The implication of his assertion that Santa's opinions matter more than human opinions is that human rights can be overruled by the belief in a supernatural, non-human entity.

All of a sudden, this person may not seem so nice. You should perhaps begin to seriously worry what might happen if your acquaintance doesn't get his presents for Christmas.

You realize that his nice behavior is motivated by an egoistic desire for the gift of Santa, that is, his actions are based on the assumption that Santa will give him presents for Christmas if he's behaved well. All of his good deeds are based on this

egoistic desire. He believes that Santa will also give presents to anyone else that behaves well according to Santa's wishes. In fact, those people that have been struck by misfortune probably had it coming somehow, since they don't acknowledge the gifts that Santa will provide if they believe in him and behave according to his demands. If they need help, your acquaintance would rather have them profess their belief in Santa than take action or provide tangible help. He genuinely believes that a letter to Santa Claus is better than real help, and he will be happy to show his "helpfulness" by writing such a letter.

Santa is capable of performing miracles, such as bringing your son back safe from Iraq or Afghanistan for Christmas, or in other ways making sure you're reunited with your loved ones. It is the belief in Santa, not personal involvement, that makes the change, according to your acquaintance. Getting your son back safe from the battle field is a matter of belief rather than social responsibility, because your acquaintance wants belief and shuns the thought of responsibility to the responsible. Show your belief in Santa, if you wish to be granted a miracle, and deny the profane methods of the non-believers. That is also how he would prefer that you be treated at the hospital, because he considers this medicine thing to be disgracefully distrustful of Santa's abilities.

You had better hope there are not too many of his kind.

This attitude of his is either a corollary of his belief or symbolized by his belief, but it is in no way caused by, or indicative of, some fundamentalist stance towards Santa. The attitude is the same no matter if he keeps his belief half-heartedly to himself or flaunts it openly. It is that he believes in a supernatural authority that reveals his social responsibility and perception of other human beings, not the intensity of his belief.

The belief in Santa that seems a little eccentric at first has major implications that affect the person's life and the person's interaction with other human beings. It indicates how badly this person thinks of other human beings, and how poorly this person treats other people.

Now imagine that you believe in the Christian God, the Muslim Allah, or some third metaphysical being. Maybe now you know what I think of you. I don't mind your specific belief, because belief systems come a dime a dozen. I mind you, the way you are, what you think of me and others, and the way you treat other people, which are revealed by the fact that you believe. You might strike me as skilled and smart, and generally a trust-worthy and nice person... except for that thing about your belief and its implications.

One of this country's most brilliant, current authors, Sam Harris, recently wrote similar in an article in *Newsweek*.⁶

A Dissent: The Case Against Faith

Religion does untold damage to our politics. An atheist's lament.

Religion is the one area of our discourse in which people are systematically protected from the demand to give good evidence and valid arguments in defense of their strongly held beliefs. And yet these beliefs regularly determine what they live for, what they will die for and – all too often – what they will kill for. Consequently, we are living in a world in which millions of grown men and women can rationalize the violent sacrifice of their own children by recourse to fairy tales. We are living in a world in which millions of Muslims believe that there is nothing better than to be killed in defense of Islam. We are living in a world in which millions of Christians hope to soon be raptured into the stratosphere by Jesus so that they can safely enjoy a sacred genocide that will inaugurate the end of human history. In a world brimming with increasingly destructive technology, our infatuation with religious myths now poses a tremendous danger. And it is not a danger for which more religious faith is a remedy...

In his brilliant book *The End of Faith – Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason*, Harris explains his position more completely – and cogently, forcefully, and I would even say “beautifully”, since I so admire his capabilities to express himself. Below are some examples from his book – and I urge you to do yourself a huge favor, Dear, by reading his book.⁷

“It seems that if our species ever eradicates itself through war, it will not be because it was written in the stars but because it was written in our books; it is what we do with words like “God” and “paradise” and “sin” in the present that will determine our future.” [p.12]

“Our technical advances in the art of war have finally rendered our religious differences – and hence our religious *beliefs* – antithetical to our survival. We can no longer ignore the fact that billions of our neighbors believe in the metaphysics of martyrdom, or in the literal truth of the book of Revelation, or any of the other fantastical notions that have lurked in the minds of the faithful for millennia – because our neighbors are now armed with chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons. There is no doubt that these developments mark the terminal phase of our credulity. Words like “God” and “Allah” must go the way of “Apollo” and “Baal,” or they will unmake our world.” [p.13]

⁶ Copied from <http://www.samharris.org/site/articles/>; the original article appeared at <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/15566391/site/newsweek/>.

⁷ Dear: the book is probably available at your school library (it should be!) and at your local city library; also, you can probably find it at a local bookstore; you can certainly find it at Amazon.com or by following links from his website www.samharris.org/.

“Tell a devout Christian that his wife is cheating on him, or that frozen yogurt can make a man invisible, and he is likely to require as much evidence as anyone else, and to be persuaded only to the extent that you give it. Tell him that the book he keeps by his bed was written by an invisible deity who will punish him with fire for eternity if he fails to accept its every incredible claim about the universe, and he seems to require no evidence whatsoever.” [p.19]

“Our world is fast succumbing to the activities of men and women who would stake the future of our species on beliefs that should not survive an elementary school education. That so many of us are still dying on account of ancient myths is as bewildering as it is horrible, and our own attachment to these myths, whether moderate or extreme, has kept us silent in the face of developments that could ultimately destroy us. Indeed, religion is as much a living spring of violence today as it was at any time in the past.” [p.25]

“We live in an age in which most people believe that mere words – ‘Jesus,’ ‘Allah,’ ‘Ram’ – can mean the difference between eternal torment and bliss everlasting. Considering the stakes here, it is not surprising that many of us occasionally find it necessary to murder other human beings for using the wrong magic words, or the right ones for the wrong reasons. How can any person presume to know that this is the way the universe works? Because it says so in our holy books. How do we know that our holy books are free from error? Because the books *themselves* say so. Epistemological black holes of this sort are fast draining the light from our world.” [p.35]

“We live in a world of unimaginable surprises – from the fusion energy that lights the sun to the genetic and evolutionary consequences of this light’s dancing for eons upon the earth – and yet paradise conforms to our most superficial concerns with all the fidelity of a Caribbean cruise. This is wondrously strange. If one didn’t know better, one would think that man, in his fear of losing all that he loves, had created heaven, along with its gatekeeper God, in his own image.” [p.36]

In his books and articles, Richard Dawkins has expressed similar thoughts, and again: cogently, forcefully, and I would even say “beautifully”. I very much urge you, Dear, to do yourself another huge favor, by reading his most recent book: *The God Delusion*. What follows are just a few examples of his writings.⁸

If death is final, a rational agent can be expected to value his life highly and be reluctant to risk it. This makes the world a safer place, just as a plane is safer if its hijacker wants to survive. At the other extreme, if a significant number of people convince themselves, or are convinced by their [clerics], that a martyr’s death is

⁸ Most of these quotes were taken from <http://www.positiveatheism.org/hist/quotes/dawkins.htm>.

equivalent to pressing the hyperspace button and zooming through a wormhole to another universe, it can make the world a very dangerous place. Especially if they also believe that that other universe is a paradisiacal escape from the tribulations of the real world. Top it off with sincerely believed, if ludicrous and degrading to women, sexual promises, and is it any wonder that naïve and frustrated young men are clamoring to be selected for suicide missions? [“Religion’s Misguide Missiles”, September 15, 2001]

My point is not that religion itself is the motivation for wars, murders and terrorist attacks, but that religion is the principal label, and the most dangerous one, by which a “they” as opposed to a “we” can be identified at all. [*The Devil’s Chaplain*, 2004]

My last vestige of “hands off religion” respect disappeared in the smoke and choking dust of September 11th 2001, followed by the “National Day of Prayer,” when prelates and pastors did their tremulous Martin Luther King impersonations and urged people of mutually incompatible faiths to hold hands, united in homage to the very force that caused the problem in the first place. [*The Devil’s Chaplain*, 2004]

Our Western politicians avoid mentioning the R word (religion), and instead characterize their battle as a war against ‘terror’, as though terror were a kind of spirit or force, with a will and a mind of its own. Or they characterize terrorists as motivated by pure ‘evil’. But they are not motivated by evil. However misguided we may think them, they are motivated, like the Christian murderers of abortion doctors, by what they perceive to be righteousness, faithfully pursuing what their religion tells them. They are not psychotic; they are religious idealists who, by their own lights, are rational. They perceive their acts to be good, not because of some warped personal idiosyncrasy, and not because they have been possessed by Satan, but because they have been brought up, from the cradle, to have total and unquestioning *faith*. [*The God Delusion*, 2006]

Both Harris and Dawkins agree that “faith” is the problem, that is, people clinging to beliefs far more strongly than relevant evidence warrants. Both authors rightfully blame “religious moderates” for “religious extremists” – in that the moderates (although their “beliefs” are more benign than those of the extremists) not only adopt their beliefs similarly (i.e., without evidence) but also unwittingly sanction the extremists (by the moderates’ refusal to consider evidence and to demand that “faith” be treated with “respect”).

Yet, although I heartily welcome the efforts and accomplishments of both Harris and Dawkins, both authors seem to have largely failed to make major progress toward their goal of diminishing baseless beliefs. And of course it pains me to thus criticize the huge contributions made by both authors; but actually, both authors are also critical of their own efforts, questioning if they can contribute significantly to exterminating the god meme.

* Go to other chapters *via*

For example, in the *Preface* to his most recent book, *The God Delusion*, Dawkins writes:

If this book works as I intend, religious readers who open it will be atheists when they put it down. What presumptuous optimism! Of course, dyed-in-the-wool faith-heads are immune to argument, their resistance built up over years of childhood indoctrination using methods that took centuries to mature (whether by evolution or design). Among the more effective immunological devices is a dire warning to avoid even opening a book like this, which is surely a work of Satan.

Similar despondency can be seen in the concluding two paragraphs of Harris' latest book, *Letter to a Christian Nation*:⁹

This letter is the product of failure – the failure of the many brilliant attacks upon religion that preceded it, the failure of our schools to announce the death of God in a way that each generation can understand, the failure of the media to criticize the abject religious certainties of our public figures – failures great and small that have kept almost every society on this earth muddling over God and despising those who muddle differently.

Nonbelievers like myself stand beside you, dumbstruck by the Muslim hordes who chant death to whole nations of the living. But we stand dumbstruck by *you* as well – by your denial of tangible reality, by the suffering you create in service to your religious myths, and by your attachment to an imaginary God. This letter has been an expression of that amazement – and, perhaps, of a little hope.

In sum, and though I'm extremely sorry to conclude, I expect that the recent books by Harris and Dawkins will, within a few years, simply be additions to the list of "brilliant attacks upon religion" – that failed. And, too, I think the reason is clear: childhood indoctrination, wishful thinking, "proof-by-pleasure" trump reason any day. As Goethe said, "Feeling is all."

Therefore, Dear, to exterminate the god meme, to break free from the clerics' Catch-22, to cut the Gordian Knot, I'm convinced that we need to "up the ante". I totally agree with Harris and Dawkins that "faith" is the problem (holding "beliefs" more strongly than relevant evidence warrants) and that "religious moderates" deserve much of the blame for the excesses of "religious extremists" (because the moderates "sanctify" such stupid methods of forming "beliefs"). But in my view, Harris and Dawkins (and

⁹ Dear: You should also read this (little!) book, which was published in 2006; it'll take you just a few hours; if you can't find it at your library, you can purchase it via www.samharris.org/.

other authors who have written similar, forceful indictments of religions) don't do enough: their arguments are rational (which of course I generally support!), but to exterminate the god meme, more must be done. As C.W. Dalton wrote in his 1990 book *The Right Brain and Religion*:

Believers are interested in fulfilling emotional and spiritual needs, not intellectual needs. In some cases, one might as well try to use reason on a dog. For many people God is primarily a warm feeling. How can one argue with a warm feeling? Arguing with someone who places reason below faith and biblical authority is blowing against the wind.

In my view, the most effective way to argue with a “warm feeling” (in fact, to argue against any emotionally held “belief”) is with other emotions. Thus, my view is that, to exterminate the god meme, emotions not only must be exposed but also the theists’ “feel-good” emotions associated with their religions must be replaced with their own, even more powerful emotions, namely, the “feel-bad” emotions of shame, of making fools of themselves, and of associated social ostracizing. The first part of my proposed four-part strategy, therefore, is to hit theist where it hurts: in their self-esteem. Ridicule them – ridicule their ideas.

My dictionary defines ‘ridicule’ as “mocking laughter, mimicry, or comments intended to make fun of somebody in a contemptuous way.” In my view, assessments (based on evidence) should be conveyed to all religious people that, at best, they’re a bunch of deluded, egotistical, hypocrites [claiming that they’re headed for heaven because their god approves of their selflessness (☺)], and more commonly, they’re a bunch of ignoramuses, too dumb to distinguish between reality and illusion and too stupid to see a con game even when they’re trapped in one.

And actually, the task of shaming religious people may not be so difficult as might be expected, not only because they’re deluded but also because of what the philosopher David Hume (1711–1776) noticed about the characteristics of all organized religions, particularly their apparently *desired* emphasis on absurdities! I saw an outline of Hume’s ideas in a paper (which you can find on the internet) entitled *Streminger: “Religion a Threat to Morality”* published in the journal *Hume Studies* (Vol. XV, No. 2, Nov. 1989, p. 295–300). The author, Joseph Ellin, Western Michigan University, listed 16 of Hume’s more fundamental indictments against all organized religions. The list follows, although to focus your attention on the last four

items on the list, I've moved his item #16 up in the list to #12 and I've put the three items in italics that I hope you'll consider especially carefully.

1. Because "fear of the unknown is the origin of religion," clergy have an incentive to limit knowledge.
2. Religious devotion arises from sorrow and terror ("terror is the primary principle of religion" ...), so clergy have an interest in increasing human misery.
3. Clergy are necessarily hypocrites, who sometime feign more devotion than they possess, and guard against the natural, cheerful sentiments.
4. The God of common religion is no moral authority, because among His other faults, He is malevolent, vengeful, and wicked.
5. Due to His omnipotence and omniscience, He is an object of fear, from whom nothing can be hidden.
6. This dominating God evokes flattery and adulation.
7. Because He is the product of human prejudices, God embodies discordant elements.
8. He unjustly inflicts excessive punishments and contradicts our natural human generosity.
9. ...religion leads to an unnatural life and threatens our natural moral sentiments, in that superstitious terror evokes the monkish virtues of mortification and humility.
10. Monotheism, especially, leads to intolerance, and to
11. the suppression of the love of knowledge and liberty.
- [12] By encouraging attention to eternal salvation, religion is likely to extinguish the benevolent affections, rendering its devotees untrustworthy.
- [13] *In order to produce amazement and wonder, and to give value to service to the deity [demonstrating that the clerics are important!] by provoking opposition and ridicule, religion deliberately promulgates absurdities.* [Dear: please read that again! I think it's amazingly perceptive! The clerics deliberately promote absurdities – to demonstrate their own importance!]
- [14] *The product of this is an obstinate, dogmatic spirit, guided by the rule that the greater the absurdity, the more zealous the advocacy.*
- [15] *Absurdities are also promulgated to assure that religious acts are done, not for morality, which since it is natural and rational cannot be done for God nor be an object of favor in God's eyes, but for God's sake alone.*
- [16] The consequence of this is that superstition, rites, and ceremonies, and not morality, are made the essence of religious observance.

Thereby, Dear, all organized religions have (purposefully!) exposed their vulnerability: any organization that promotes absurdities (such as Moses parting the Red Sea [correction: Reed Sea]; Jesus born of a virgin, walking on water, and sundry other miracles; Muhammad chatting with an angel; Joseph Smith similarly involved in communicating with angels (let alone carrying off a multi-ton golden bible) then invites and is a prime target for ridicule. And yes, no doubt the clerics will use such ridicule to encourage

the faithful followers to gather more tightly, running their wagons into an even tighter circle to defend against the ridiculers, claiming “persecution” (and using such “persecution” to strengthen their resolve), but if the slings and arrows of ridicule are relentless, eventually the clerics and their deluded followers will surrender.

And yes, Dear, I’m talking about war – but with the only weapons being words. And yes, Dear, I don’t lightly promote ridicule. But I hope you appreciate the reality that Voltaire (Francois-Marie Arouet; a contemporary of Hume) saw: “If you believe absurdities, then you’ll commit atrocities.” No doubt strongly influenced by both Hume and Voltaire, Thomas Jefferson wrote similar in a letter to Francis Adrian Van der Kemp on 30 July 1816:

Ridicule is the only weapon which can be used against unintelligible propositions. Ideas must be distinct before reason can act upon them...

In fact, as I’ve suggested before, I wouldn’t be surprised if Voltaire’s ridicule of religion is the primary reason why Europe is now so far ahead of America (both North and South) in accomplishing the task of exterminating the God meme.

Let me show you some of Voltaire’s ridicule, which (I’ve seen stated) became so popular that “the cabbies” (the drivers of horse-drawn carriages) on the streets of Paris were commonly heard to repeat his indictments. And of course it’s the case that Voltaire primarily ridiculed the religion (Christianity) and dominant church (the Catholic Church) of his native France, but I’m sure he would have ridiculed all organized religions similarly.

Christianity is the most ridiculous, the most absurd and bloody religion that has ever infected the world. [Although most Westerners probably agree that Islam now holds those “honors”.]

It is one of the superstitions of the human mind to have imagined that virginity could be a virtue.

Every sensible man, every honest man, must hold the Christian sect in horror. [And hold Islam in even more horror.]

It is difficult to free fools from the chains they revere.

There are no sects in geometry.

Doubt is not a pleasant condition, but certainty is absurd.

God is a comedian playing to an audience too afraid to laugh.

The truths of religion are never so well understood as by those who have lost their power of reasoning.

A cleric is one who feels himself called upon to live without working at the expense of the rascals who work to live.

The most genuine and efficacious charity is that which greases the paws of the [clerics]; such charity covers a multitude of sins.

I have never made but one prayer to God; it's a very short one: "O, Lord, make my enemies ridiculous." And God granted it.

...religion is the source of all imaginable follies and disturbances; it is the parent of fanaticism and civil discord; it is the enemy of mankind.

Which is more dangerous: fanaticism or atheism? Fanaticism is certainly a thousand times more deadly, for atheism inspires no bloody passion whereas fanaticism does; atheism is opposed to crime; fanaticism causes crimes to be committed.

Would that the modern world had someone as competent as Voltaire: someone who could make religious people ashamed to admit to their perverted delusions! Would that America had a great songwriter or movie director (such as Woody Allen, but even more competent) who not only could competently ridicule religion but also could make it a hit! Instead, we have foolish fanatics such as Mel Gibson, who made ~\$250 million depicting the massacre of Jesus, to the delight of Christian lunatics. And I'm sorry, Dear, but there's just "no way" that I can make any significant progress on the task of ridiculing religions. I don't have the competence. Nonetheless, let me mention a few concept that maybe someone might find useful – who knows, maybe someday, that someone will be you!

I would agree that such ridicule should generally start "gently", e.g., with "gentle" humor, not addressed directly at specific people. Relative to the general idea of using humor, I agree with the idea advanced by H.L. Mencken about 75 years ago:

The liberation of the human mind has never been furthered by dunderheads;¹⁰ it has been furthered by gay fellows who heaved dead cats into sanctuaries and then went roistering down the highways of the world, proving to all men that doubt, after all, was safe – that the god in the sanctuary was finite in his power and hence a fraud. One horse-laugh is worth ten thousand syllogisms. It is not only more effective; it is also vastly more intelligent.

Yet let me add that, for me, his “punch line” would have been more memorable if it had used a little more alliteration, e.g., “One horse-laugh is worth more than a hundred syllogisms.”

In any event, though, I thereby readily admit to feeling like a “dunderhead”, supplying only syllogisms to try to “liberate” the mind of a certain grandchild (and other children) from the chains of religious indoctrination. But, Dear, how am I to “heave dead cats” into your sanctuary? If, even just once, I could stimulate you to burst into laughter at the silliness, the stupidity, the absurdity of all organized religions, then I’m certain that, ever after, you would be free. If only once (say during some solemn church ceremony), you could see through all their stupidities and would break into such a glorious belly laugh that you couldn’t constrain yourself, then no longer would their chains constrain you.

So the question posed is: how can I stimulate you – or anyone – into a “good horse laugh”? I’m sorry, but I don’t know how; I don’t have the competence. Some people seem able to make others laugh – maybe there’s some “innate ability” to do so, but more likely, I suspect, is that they’ve trained themselves. I’m thinking, now, of the amazing abilities of Bill Cosby. In particular, maybe you remember his record when God talks to Noah, and Noah keeps responding “right” – but to emphasize how Bill Cosby would say it, maybe I should type it “riiiiight”! As another example, maybe you’d like to watch some George Carlin videos on religion¹¹ – although you might be well advised not to do so when your mother is around (not only because of the ideas they contain but also because the language is commonly a “bit raunchy”). As still another alternative, maybe you want to explore the internet for “religious humor”.

¹⁰ As far as I can make out from my dictionary, Dear, the word ‘dunderhead’ (meaning “a stupid person; dunce”) evolved because ‘dunder’ is “associated by rhyme with blunder”! Yet, surely there’s some connection between ‘dunder’ with ‘dunce’, which was derived from John Duns Scotus “whose followers, called Dunsmen, Dunses, or Dunces, were regarded as foes of Renaissance humanism”; thereby, a ‘dunce’ was used to describe “a dull ignorant person” or “one who learns more slowly than others”.

¹¹ At, e.g., <http://www.pistolwimp.com/media/49969/>.

As an illustration of ridiculing clerics using “gentle humor”, consider the following joke from the internet.

Arthritis (*submitted by SANA65*) ¹²

A drunk man who smelled like beer sat down on a subway seat next to a priest. The man’s tie was stained his face was plastered with red lipstick, and a half empty bottle of gin was sticking out of his torn coat pocket. He opened his newspaper and began reading. After a few minutes the man turned to the priest and asked, “Say, Father, what causes arthritis?”

“My Son, it’s caused by loose living, being with cheap, wicked women, too much alcohol and a contempt for your fellow man.”

“Well, I’ll be damned,” the drunk muttered, returning to his paper.

The priest, thinking about what he had said, nudged the man and apologized: “I’m very sorry. I didn’t mean to come on so strong. How long have you had arthritis?”

“I don’t have it, Father. I was just reading here that the Pope does.”

I like that joke: it’s realistic, it provides a gentle but stinging criticism of the pope, and reveals both clerical hypocrisy and stupidity. Another example that I like, this one ridiculing a “holy book” (the Bible) is the following.

Dear Dr. Laura,¹³

Thank you for doing so much to educate people regarding God’s Law. I have learned a great deal from your show, and I try to share that knowledge with as many people as I can. When someone tries to defend the homosexual lifestyle, for example, I simply remind him that *Leviticus 18:22* clearly states it to be an abomination. End of debate.

I do need some advice from you, however, regarding some of the specific laws and how to best follow them.

- When I burn a bull on the altar as a sacrifice, I know it creates a pleasing odor for the Lord (*Lev. 1:9*). The problem is my neighbors. They claim the odor is not pleasing to them. Should I smite them?

¹² Copied from <http://www.butlerwebs.com/jokes/religious.htm>.

¹³ Submitted by Ed Tyler; copied from http://atheistalliance.org/humor/dr_laura.php. As you may know, Dear, “Dr. Laura” (Schlesinger) was a radio-show host (and for all I know, maybe she still is). Actually, Dear, as you can find at <http://www.snopes.com/politics/religion/drlaura.asp>, there’s quite a long story associated with this letter, whose author is unknown but it may be “Kent Ashcraft”.

- I would like to sell my daughter into slavery, as sanctioned in *Exodus 21:7*. In this day and age, what do you think would be a fair price for her?
- I know that I am allowed no contact with a woman while she is in her period of menstrual uncleanness (*Lev. 15:19-24*). The problem is, how do I tell? I have tried asking, but most women take offense.
- *Lev. 25:44* states that I may indeed possess slaves, both male and female, provided they are purchased from neighboring nations. A friend of mine claims that this applies to Mexicans, but not Canadians. Can you clarify? Why can't I own Canadians?
- I have a neighbor who insists on working on the Sabbath. *Exodus 35:2* clearly states he should be put to death. Am I morally obligated to kill him myself?
- A friend of mine feels that even though eating shellfish is an abomination (*Lev. 11:10*), it is a lesser abomination than homosexuality. I don't agree. Can you settle this?
- *Lev. 21:20* states that I may not approach the altar of God if I have a defect in my sight. I have to admit that I wear reading glasses. Does my vision have to be 20/20, or is there some wiggle room here?
- Most of my male friends get their hair trimmed, including the hair around their temples, even though this is expressly forbidden by *Lev. 19:27*. How should they die?
- I know from *Lev. 11:6-8* that touching the skin of a dead pig makes me unclean, but may I still play football if I wear gloves?
- My uncle has a farm. He violates *Lev. 19:19* by planting two different crops in the same field, as does his wife by wearing garments made of two different kinds of thread (cotton/polyester blend). He also tends to curse and blaspheme a lot. Is it really necessary that we go to all the trouble of getting the whole town together to stone them? (*Lev. 24:10-16*) Couldn't we just burn them to death at a private family affair like we do with people who sleep with their in-laws? (*Lev. 20:14*)

I know you have studied these things extensively, so I am confident you can help.

Thank you again for reminding us that God's word is eternal and unchanging.
Your devoted disciple and adoring fan.

Similar humor can be applied to any "holy book" (for example, remember Mark Twain's comments on the book of Mormon that I showed you in **Qx**), but in the case of such ridicule of the Quran (or Koran), the critic would be

well advised to remain anonymous, because as you probably know from recent events, Muslim clerics are not beneath issuing a *fatwa* demanding the critic's death.

In ridiculing religious ideas, if “gentle humor” doesn't work (as it almost certainly won't), then more “biting” ridicule should be applied, but before showing you some examples, let me provide you with additional ideas from people who advocate such ridicule, since I suspect that most people (especially in this country) are not only very reluctant to engage in such ridicule, they're strongly opposed to the idea. For example, a statement by Jefferson Davis (1808 – 86), president of the Confederate States of America, is applicable to such ridicule:

Never be haughty to the humble; never be humble to the haughty.

The American journalist and author Benjamin De-Casseres (1873–1945) put it all in a nutshell:

Progress is nothing but the victory of laughter over dogma.

Consider, also, additional statements by H.L. Mencken (1880–1956), whom I quoted above (recall: one horse laugh is worth more than a hundred syllogisms):

The most curious social convention of the great age in which we live is the one to the effect that religious opinions should be respected... There is, in fact, nothing about religious opinions that entitles them to any more respect than other opinions get. On the contrary, they tend to be noticeably silly.

A more recent summary was given by Barry Duke, Editor of the *Freethinker* magazine, in a talk entitled “Defending Our Right to Ridicule Religion” given to the Brighton and Hove Humanist Group on Sunday, 2 February 2003 (a copy of which you can find on the internet).

My talk to you today begins with the premise that religion – all religion – is preposterous. It is, of course, many other things too. For some it is a source of comfort; for others, the cause of great conflict and misery. But, however we choose to view any of the main monotheistic religions – and all of the rest, for that matter – they are, in the final analysis, simply ridiculous: an illogical hangover from what Professor Richard Dawkins, the prominent Oxford biologist, describes as humankind's “crybaby” phase...

A sane, well-balanced society is one where people can laugh freely and openly at whatever they perceive to be amusing or ridiculous. Of course some argue that certain things should not be made the subject of ridicule, and would include religion in their list. It is a fair enough point. One would be very uncomfortable in the presence of someone who ridiculed the Holocaust, or genocide in general, or who poked fun at an individual because of his or her physical appearance, age, sexual preferences or whatever.

But religion is different. It's a matter of choice. One is not born a Christian or Hindu or Muslim (although Muslims insist we are ALL born Muslims). Wrong. All humans are born atheists. Of course, one's parents may be of this or that faith, and may choose to entangle their children in that faith. But in a society like ours in which education is supposed (at least in part) to enable individuals to stand outside their own narrow personal experience and be critical and analytical of it, the decision to remain within a particular faith becomes ever more a voluntary and conscious matter. Thus in mocking a person's religion we are NOT mocking something over which they have no control. We may be mocking some delusion of necessity that they may hold – but why should we be anxious about that?

Further, with the recent scourge of suicide bombings and other terrorist acts of religious fanatics, the need to go on the offensive against religions and the religious, using ridicule as a non-lethal but effective weapon, becomes imperative. This was well summarized recently by the ex-Muslim Ali Sina in the following article, written in response to the ludicrous behavior of Muslims reacting to cartoons that depicted their “profit” Muhammad.¹⁴

The Ultimate Insult

Ali Sina

Trying to discover just exactly what the “ultimate insult” to Islam really is.

Muslims committed the huge blunder of revealing their vulnerability [with their reaction to the cartoon flap]. Now the world knows what hurts them. When you find your opponent's weak spot, it is exactly where you want to hit him! If Islam is ridiculed publicly and systematically, it will be defeated.

“Muslim psychology” is all pomposity and bravado. I give you my word that if Islam is ridiculed publicly and systematically, it will be defeated. Shame is a great motivator as well as deterrent. Do not underestimate the power of ridicule. This is serious stuff, not a laughing matter!

How much ridicule is enough? Until it hurts. The pain of shame must become bigger than the comfort of clinging to this false fetish. When you see their eyes are popping

¹⁴ Available at, e.g., <http://ibloga.blogspot.com/2008/01/defeating-jihad-with-public-ridicule.html>.

out of their eyeballs, their veins bulging in their necks, foam forming at their mouths, and they are ready to explode, you know that the remedy is working. Give them more. They will either die of heart attacks or they will come to their senses and recover from this insanity.

Every one of us must become a cyber warrior and mock Muhammad, Islam, and the Muslims. Use your talent. Draw cartoons based on the Hadith and the Quran. You can find tons of ridiculous stuff in these books to lampoon: articles, lyrics, jokes, plays, do whatever you can to ridicule Muhammad the prophet pretender and Muslims. Don't heed their howls and cries.

As Ali Sina said: "This is serious stuff, not a laughing matter!" I'd put it this way. Tolerance be damned: there's a whole lot of crazies in this world (not all of whom are Muslims) who, if not stopped, would destroy western civilization. And to hell with being PC: people deserve respect (if they're respectable), but people's *ideas* deserve only as much respect as the data that support them. If their ideas are supported by zero evidence, then those ideas deserve zero respect.

To see why I would recommend ridiculing religious ideas (if it's safe for you), consider an example (suggested by Sam Harris in his book *The End of Faith*). Thus, Dear, suppose that someone stated that he "believed" that the state of Tennessee was on the West Coast of America and that he refused to consider any evidence that would demonstrate his error. Further, suppose he proceeded to profit from selling his stupidity to others (e.g., by selling airplane tickets to take the gullible to the West-Coast Tennessee). Then out of kindness to those others and left with no other alternative, don't you think you should ridicule the con-artist's claim?

As another example, suppose some con artist claimed that the world was about to end and that he had special knowledge (which he was willing to sell) with which the "believer" would avoid the forthcoming calamity. Further, suppose that this con artist offered not only no validated hypothesis but also not even any data to support his crazy speculation – yet he was such a smooth talker that many people bought into his con game. Then again, out of kindness to those others and left with no other alternative, don't you think you should ridicule the con-artist's claim?

Or suppose (as crazy it might seem) that a group of con artists successfully conned people into believing that if they would fly airplanes into sky scrapers, killing thousands of innocent people in the process, then the

airplane hijackers would go directly to paradise. Or that if they blew themselves up killing as many innocent bystanders as possible, then again it was a guaranteed ticket to paradise. Or if they committed suicide, then they'd instantly be transferred to a passing comet. Or... In such cases, Dear, and again out of kindness not only to the conned but also to their future victims, don't you think you should ridicule the con-artists' claims?

Similarly, Dear, think of the totally data-less claims in various religions: that an angel told Joseph Smith about a "golden bible" that described America being first inhabited by the lost tribes of Israel, that an angel dropped down to dictate rules for living to Muhammad, that the Emperor Constantine had the authority to specify that Jesus was a god, that the person who had sex with Mary was a ghost, that the creator of the universe popped up as a burning bush to chat with Moses, that earlier the creator of the universe dictated to some clerics that the vast majority of Hindus should be slaves, and so on. Such idiotic claims are all on par with (or actually, vastly exceed) the stupidity of the speculation that the state of Tennessee is on the West Coast of America – and have resulted in enormous harm to an enormous number of people. Therefore, out of kindness to people hoodwinked into believing such junk (most of them indoctrinated with it when they were innocent and trusting children), I agree with Harris's recommendation, which I put in my own words as: such stupidity should be ridiculed out of all discussions.

Let me put it a different way. When addressing any community problems, discussions based on evidence provide the foundations of civilization. Even then, strife will undoubtedly continue, and such strife can lead to violence and even war, but I'm certain that violence will diminish if differences in opinion are exposed by dialogue, based not on diatribes but on data. For those who form their opinions based on "beliefs" unsupported by evidence and who communicate *via* stones, clubs, swords, guns, bombs, flying loaded aircraft into occupied building, or weapons of mass destruction, then before we reciprocate with our own weaponry, let's first see if we can eliminate their stupid "beliefs" by ridiculing them.

And of course I agree that we should try to avoid ridiculing children for their beliefs; kids have active imaginations, and exercising their imagination is undoubtedly good for kids. And I could agree that we should tend to go easy when ridiculing adults, especially those of marginal intelligence (or less). But, Dear, of the many potential targets for ridicule (targets that I'll

* Go to other chapters *via*

identify later in this chapter), special attention should be given to ridiculing all clerical leaders. Through their lower-level clerics, they're selling snake-oil for profit, and I support attacking both their snake oil and the snake-oil salesmen.

I'd tend to agree than many of the lower-level clerics seem to be too dumb to realize the harm that they're doing pedaling their stupidities; they're just trying to help their "flocks". Clerical leaders, however, usually have demonstrated enough "smarts" to be able to climb to their leadership positions within their religious hierarchies; therefore, surely many of them realize that what they're peddling is snake oil; yet, they do it anyway, apparently relishing the resulting power and profit. Such people (the Billy Grahams, Jerry Farwells, Pat Robertsons, popes, leaders of various other sects such as the Mormons, various chief rabbis and ayatollahs, etc., of the world) have gained fame and are making fortunes duping their followers into "believing" various absurdities. Therefore, such leaders should be the special targets of intense ridicule.

More generally (but almost certainly needless to say) when applying ridicule, "ya gotta use your head"; that is, Dear, try to make sure that "the punishment fits the crime". Again: go easy on ridiculing kids. Almost certainly, religious kids are just wallowing in the stupidity taught to them by their parents; yet on the other hand, it's most important to try to help kids – to try to show them that, what they've been taught to "believe" are a bunch of fairy tales. With teenagers, as you know, there's a huge range in their religiosity, from those who mindlessly or minimally "go through the motions" (to placate their parents or whatever) to those who are "flat-out religious nuts" (quite possibly with serious mental disorders). In all such cases, play your cards appropriately! Then, there are the adults: in such cases, maybe you want to curtail ridiculing them "until you're older" (☺) – but maybe not; again, you'll need to need to use your head. In the case of the clerical leaders, however, I'd hope that you wouldn't feel the need to constrain yourself, even at you age: the President of the Mormon Church, all the TV-evangelical "leaders", the pope, the rabbis, and ayatollahs, etc. are making killings (figuratively and in many cases literally) promoting their snake oil, and since they've thereby chosen to be "public personalities", they've purposefully chosen to expose themselves – to the ridicule they so richly deserve.

As for the types of ridicule to use, although for what follows I haven't put much effort into distinguishing different types, I've organized them into the following seven categories: 1) Ridiculing gods, 2) Ridiculing religious worldviews, 3) Ridiculing religions, 4) Ridiculing "holy books", 5) Ridiculing clerics, 6) Ridiculing "belief" and "faith" unsupported by evidence, and 7) Ridiculing "the believers". I've obtained the quotations from many sources, of course including Aiken's collection. Another source has been a website that's otherwise entirely in German – and I'm afraid I've forgotten so much of my German that I can't find the name of the person who should be credited with creating the website! The nearest I have been able to get to acknowledging the source (and that, courtesy Google's automatic translator) is "This Web ring of German-language Atheisten side [sic] belongs to Markus G."¹⁵ From his list of quotations, I've omitted many of those that I've quoted earlier in this book as well as a few that seem to have been misinterpreted or that may be "too raunchy" for a grandfather to be relaying to his grandchildren! Another source I've used is at Positive Atheism.¹⁶

1. Ridiculing the gods:

It is fear that first brought Gods into the world.
(Gallus Petronius, Roman courtier and wit)

Man is certainly stark mad; he cannot make a flea, yet he makes gods by the dozens.
(Michel De Montaigne)

The idea of God is the sole wrong for which I cannot forgive mankind.
(Marquis de Sade)

God created man in his own image. And man, being a gentleman, returned the favor.
(Rousseau)

If we go back to the beginning we shall find that ignorance and fear created the gods, that fancy, enthusiasm, or deceit adorned or disfigured them, that weakness worships them, that credulity preserves them, and that custom, respect and tyranny support them in order to make the blindness of men serve its own interests.
(Baron D'Holbach)

¹⁵ The homepage (in German) is at <http://www.unmoralische.de/index.html> (and as I write this, it's had 2,472,317 hits since Feb. 97!); the quotations in English are at http://www.unmoralische.de/athe_3.htm.

¹⁶ At <http://www.positiveatheism.org/hist/quotes/qframe.htm>.

When it was first said that the sun stood still and world turned round, the common sense of mankind declared the doctrine false; but the old saying of *Vox populi, vox Dei* [the voice of the people is the voice of God], as every philosopher knows, cannot be trusted in science. (Charles Darwin)

All religions bear traces of the fact that they arose during the intellectual immaturity of the human race – before it had learned the obligations to speak the truth. Not one of them makes it the duty of its God to be truthful and understandable in his communications... The most serious parody I have ever heard was this: In the beginning was nonsense, and the nonsense was with God, and the nonsense was God. (Friedrich Nietzsche)

An infinite God ought to be able to protect himself, without going in partnership with State Legislatures. Certainly he ought not so to act that laws become necessary to keep him from being laughed at. No one thinks of protecting Shakespeare from ridicule, by the threat of fine and imprisonment. (Robert Ingersoll)

I don't know if God exists, but it would be better for His reputation if He didn't. (Jules Renard)

I contend that we are both atheists. I just believe in one fewer god than you do. When you understand why you dismiss all the other possible gods, you will understand why I dismiss yours. (Stephen Roberts)

People fashion their God after their own understanding. They make their God first and worship him afterwards. (Oscar Wilde)

Almost everyone who has read history in a more than casual manner knows that when the great figure of God appears in a controversy, the shooting cannot be far off. (Stewart H. Holbrook)

I don't believe in God because I don't believe in Mother Goose. (Clarence Darrow)

Gods are fragile things, they may be killed by a whiff of science or a dose of common sense. (Chapman Cohen)

Take man's most fantastic invention – God. Man invents God in the image of his longings, in the image of what he wants to be, then proceeds to imitate that image, vie with it, and strive to overcome it. (Eric Hoffer)

We must question the story logic of having an all-knowing all-powerful God, who creates faulty Humans, and then blames them for his own mistakes. (Gene Roddenberry, Creator of *Star Trek*)

I suggest that the anthropomorphic god-idea is not a harmless infirmity of human thought, but a very noxious fallacy, which is largely responsible for the calamities the world is at present enduring. (William Archer)

It is said that men may not be the dreams of the Gods, but rather that the Gods are the dreams of men. (Carl Sagan)

“Only the fool says in his heart ‘There is no god’.” The wise say it to the world.
(Author unknown)

How do I define God? I don't... People who find such conceptions important for themselves have every right to frame them as they like. Personally, I don't.
(Noam Chomsky)

And I must admit that I'm tempted to add some additional ridicule of the gods, especially the silly concept of God promoted by Jews, Christians, Muslims, and Mormons. For example, consider this syllogism. Nothing (except perhaps ideas) can live forever; it's claimed that God lives forever; therefore, God is just an idea – and like all the other gods who have gone before him, no doubt he, too, will be laughed out of existence.

As another example, consider this: For someone (or something) who is (or was) “all powerful” (could do anything) and “all knowing” (knew and had experienced everything), life would be intolerably boring. Therefore, God is dead. And I am quite prepared to give him some credit – by proposing that he chose the only remaining action that wouldn't bore him to death: he committed suicide. Therefore, for those humans who yet need prodding: stop praying to God; he hung up the phone, eons ago; for the past ever-so-long, you've just been talking to yourself (which no doubt explains why you've come away from your “conversations”, so many times, thinking that you were such a fine, upstanding example of a “good” person).

And as still another example, this one dealing with all the talk about putting God back in school: I'm all for it – obviously he needs more education!

For example, there's the flood that Noah survived but that killed an enormous number of babies, birdies and other beasties. Why? Well, the Bible says that the reason for the flood was because God said there was so much wickedness in the world – people killing other people and so on.

Yet, first, whose fault was it? The Bible says he made the people. It says he can do anything. Well, then, why didn't he make better people in the first place? Whose mistake was it that the people were so evil?

And then, what does he do about it? He kills everybody! Our father in heaven kills everybody, because they killed people. Like father, like son!

And his stupidity continues. Consider all the stuff about plate tectonics, earthquakes, tsunamis, and so on: doesn't he realize that when he shifts the Earth's plates he can kill hundreds of thousands of people?

Then there are the suicide bombers. I can understand that he wants to get rid of them, but doesn't he realize that when he blows them up, innocent people can get killed?

Or does that bother HIM? I mean, think about it.

He royally screws up the Garden-of-Eden gig: if he didn't want the kids to eat the fruit, then why in hell did he put the tree there in the first place? But he did, and Eve did, and Adam did – so then what? God himself screwed it up – so, to redeem himself, what does he do? He kills his “only begotten son”. Are you with me on this one? He screwed it up, and what does he do? Does he apologize? Does he try to make amends? Does he... what? What?! He kills his son!

So you see what I'm saying: put God back in school. Reform School! And if that doesn't work, then to Hell with him.

2. Ridiculing the religious worldview

Philosophy is questions that may never be answered; religion is answers that may never be questioned. (Author unknown)

I do not feel obliged to believe that the same God who has endowed us with sense, reason, and intellect has intended us to forgo their use. (Galileo Galilei)

All religions are founded on the fear of the many and the cleverness of the few.
[Marie Henri Beyle (Stendhal)]

Maybe this world is another planet's hell. (Aldous Huxley)

Today the god hypothesis has ceased to be scientifically tenable... and its abandonment often brings a deep sense of relief. (Julian Huxley)

Acceptance without proof is the fundamental characteristic of Western religion; rejection without proof is the fundamental characteristic of Western science.
(Gary Zukav)

So far as I can remember, there is not one word in the Gospels in praise of intelligence. (Bertrand Russell)

Religion does three things quite effectively: Divides people, Controls people, Deludes people. (Carlespie Mary Alice McKinney)

To explain the unknown by the known is a logical procedure; to explain the known by the unknown is a form of theological lunacy. (David Brooks)

If you want to get together in any exclusive situation and have people love you, fine – but to hang all this desperate sociology on the idea of The Cloud-Guy who has The Big Book, who knows if you’ve been bad or good – and CARES about any of it – to hang it all on that, folks, is the chimpanzee part of the brain working. (Frank Zappa)

Imagine a world in which generations of human beings come to believe that certain films were made by God or that specific software was coded by him. Imagine a future in which millions of our descendants murder each other over rival interpretations of *Star Wars* or *Windows 98*. Could anything – anything – be more ridiculous? And yet, this would be no more ridiculous than the world we are living in. (Sam Harris)

3. Ridiculing religions

There was a time when religion ruled the world. It was known as the dark ages. (Ruth Hurmence)

The time appears to me to have come when it is the duty of all to make their dissent from religion known. (John Stuart Mill)

‘Theocracy’ has always been the synonym for a bleak and narrow, if not a fierce and blood-stained tyranny. (William Archer)

Of all the tyrannies that affect mankind, tyranny in religion is the worst. (Thomas Paine)

The blackest billingsgate, the most ungentlemanly insolence, the most yahooist brutality, is patently endured, countenanced, propagated, and applauded. But touch a solemn truth in collision with the dogma of a sect, though capable of the clearest proof, and you will soon find you have disturbed a nest, and the hornets will swarm about your eyes and hand, and fly into your face and eyes. (President John Adams)

Religions are all alike – founded upon fables and mythologies. (President Thomas Jefferson)

Religious bondage shackles and debilitates the mind and unfits it for every noble enterprise. (President James Madison)

Religion is a collective insanity. (Mikhail A. Bakunin)

To hate man and worship god seems to be the sum of all the creeds... Our ignorance is God; what we know is science. (Robert G. Ingersoll)

Religion is all profit. They have no merchandise to buy, no commissions to pay, and no refunds to make for unsatisfactory service and results.... Their commodity is fear. They blackmail their parishioners with threats of hell and damnation. These poor deluded people give them their hard earned money to save them from a hell that does not exist, and from eternal torment that was invented by the perverted minds of [clerics] to rob the living – and in addition, they are exempt from taxation! Insult to injury! Let me tell you that religion is the cruelest fraud ever perpetrated upon the human race. It is the last of the great scheme of thievery that man must legally prohibit so as to protect himself from the charlatans who prey upon the ignorance and fears of the people. The penalty for this type of extortion should be as severe as it is of other forms of dishonesty. (Joseph Lewis, *Ingersoll the Magnificent*)

Already the spirit of our schooling is permeated with the feeling that every subject, every topic, every fact, every professed truth must be submitted to a certain publicity and impartiality. All proffered samples of learning must go to the same assay-room and be subjected to common tests. It is the essence of all dogmatic faiths to hold that any such ‘show-down’ is sacrilegious and perverse. The characteristic of religion, from their point of view, is that it is intellectually secret, not public; peculiarly revealed, not generally known; authoritatively declared, not communicated and tested in ordinary ways... It is pertinent to point out that, as long as religion is conceived as it is now by the great majority of professed religionists, there is something self-contradictory in speaking of education in religion in the same sense in which we speak of education in topics where the method of free inquiry has made its way. The ‘religious’ would be the last to be willing that either the history or the content of religion should be taught in this spirit; while those to whom the scientific standpoint is not merely a technical device, but is the embodiment of the integrity of mind, must protest against its being taught in any other spirit. (John Dewey)

Religion is fundamentally opposed to everything I hold in veneration – courage, clear thinking, honesty, fairness, and, above all, love of the truth.
(Henry Louis Mencken)

The truth is that Christian theology, like every other theology, is not only opposed to the scientific spirit; it is also opposed to all other attempts at rational thinking. Not by accident does Genesis 3 make the father of knowledge a serpent – slimy, sneaking and abominable. Since the earliest days the church, as an organization, has thrown itself violently against every effort to liberate the body and mind of man. It has been, at all times and everywhere, the habitual and incorrigible defender of bad governments, bad laws, bad social theories, bad institutions. It was, for centuries, an apologist for slavery, as it was the apologist for the divine right of kings.
(H.L. Mencken)

The religion of one age is the literary entertainment of the next. (Author unknown)

If God has spoken, why is the world not convinced? (Percy Bysshe Shelley)

All religions have been made by men. (Napoleon Bonaparte)

The first requisite for the happiness of the people is the abolition of religion... The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is the demand for their real happiness. To call on them to give up their illusions about their condition is to call on them to give up a condition that requires illusions. The criticism of religion is therefore in embryo the criticism of that vale of tears of which religion is the halo. (Karl Marx)

Religion: universal obsessional neurosis of humanity. (Sigmund Freud)

So far as religion of the day is concerned, it is a damned fake... Religion is all bunk. (Thomas Alva Edison)

My own view of religion is that of Lucretius. I regard it as a disease born of fear and as a source of untold misery to the human race... I am as firmly convinced that religions do harm as I am that they are untrue. (Bertrand Russell)

Whenever I think of how religion started, I picture some frustrated old man making out a list of all the ways he could gain power, until he finally came up with the great solution of constant fear and guilt; then he leaped up and started planning a new wardrobe. (Steve Blake)

Immature and defenseless children are early indoctrinated with religious ideas by their parents, grandparents, Sunday school teachers, etc. By adulthood they become convinced that they possess the truth, and spend the rest of their lives elaborating and defending their religion. (C.W. Dalton)

Religion is a by-product of fear. For much of human history, it may have been a necessary evil, but why was it more evil than necessary? Isn't killing people in the name of God a pretty good definition of insanity? (Arthur C. Clarke)

I condemn false prophets, I condemn the effort to take away the power of rational decision, to drain people of their free will – and a hell of a lot of money in the bargain. Religions vary in their degree of idiocy, but I reject them all. For most people, religion is nothing more than a substitute for a malfunctioning brain. (Gene Roddenberry)

I am against religion because it teaches us to be satisfied with not understanding the world. (Richard Dawkins)

In the final analysis all theology, whether Christian or otherwise, is a marvelous exercise in logic based on premisses that are no more verifiable – or reasonable – than astrology, palmistry, or belief in the Easter Bunny. Theology pretends to search for truth, but no method could lead a person farther away from the truth than that intellectual charade. The purpose of theology is first and foremost to perpetuate the religious *status quo*. Religion, in turn, seeks to maintain the social stability necessary for its own preservation. (Joseph L. Daleiden)

Morality is doing what is right no matter what you are told; religion is doing what you are told no matter what is right.¹⁷

4. Ridiculing the “holy books”

The day will come when the mystical generation of Jesus, by the supreme being as his father in the womb of a virgin, will be classed with the fable of the generation of Minerva in the brain of Jupiter. (Thomas Jefferson)

The Bible is not my Book and Christianity is not my religion. I could never give assent to the long complicated statements of Christian dogma. (Abraham Lincoln)

It ain't the parts of the Bible that I can't understand that bother me, it is the parts that I do understand... The Bible has noble poetry in it... and some good morals and a wealth of obscenity, and upwards of a thousand lies. (Mark Twain)

If all the historic books of the Bible were blotted from the memory of mankind, nothing of value would be lost... (Robert Ingersoll)

I know of no other books that so fully teach the subjection and degradation of women. (Elizabeth Cady Stanton, American suffragist commenting on the Bible)

If the Bible is mistaken in telling us where we came from, how can we trust it to tell us where we're going? (Justin Brown)

He comes into the world God knows how, walks on the water, gets out of his grave and goes up off the Hill of Howth. What drivel is this? (James Joyce)

5. Ridiculing the clerics

Again, Dear, maybe it would be good if you were careful with ridicule in this category, because maybe 90% of the clerics are just plain dumb (maybe 99% in the case of Mormonism!); it's the top few percent (the clerical leaders) who are the connivers.

¹⁷ From http://www.gr8st8.com/main_pages/atheists.htm.

When I look upon seamen, men of physical science, and philosophers, man is the wisest of all beings. When I look upon priests, prophets, and interpreters of dreams, nothing is so contemptible as man. (Diogenes, 412-323 BCE)

A theologian is like a blind man in a dark room searching for a black cat which isn't there – and finding it! (Author unknown)

Clearly the person who accepts the Church as an infallible guide will believe whatever the Church teaches. (Thomas Aquinas, 1225-1274)

To assert that the earth revolves around the sun is as erroneous as to claim that Jesus was not born of a virgin. (Cardinal Bellarmine, 1615, during the trial of Galileo)

Nothing can be more contrary to religion and the clergy than reason and common sense. (Voltaire)

Civilization will not attain to its perfection until the last stone from the last church falls on the last priest! (Emile Zola)

Given, a man with moderate intellect, a moral standard not higher than the average, some rhetorical affluence and a great glibness of speech, what is the career in which, without the aid of birth or money, he may most easily attain power and reputation in English society? Where is that Goshen of mediocrity in which a smattering of science and learning will pass for profound instruction, where platitudes will be accepted as wisdom, bigoted narrowness as holy zeal, unctuous egoism as God-given piety? [George Eliot (Mary Ann Evans)]

Don't believe all the tommy-rot the priests tell you; learn and prove everything by your own experience. (Frederick Delius)

I confess that I do not see what good it does to fulminate against the English tyranny while the Roman tyranny occupies the palace of the soul. (James Joyce)

“If all the achievements of theologians were wiped out tomorrow, would anyone notice the difference? Even bad achievements of scientists, the bombs and sonar-guided whaling vessels, *work*! The achievements of theologians don't do anything, don't affect anything, don't mean anything. What makes anyone think that “theology” is a subject at all?” (Richard Dawkins)

Personally, Dear, I'd put it this way: the existence of so much evil in the world is inconsistent with the existence of God; the existence of so much of the evil in the world is, however, consistent with the existence of so many clerics.

6. Ridiculing “belief” and “faith” (unsupported by evidence)

A man is his own easiest dupe, for what he wishes to be true he generally believes to be true. (Demosthenes, c.384-322 BCE)

The way to see by faith is to shut the eye of reason. (Benjamin Franklin)

Faith is believing in something you know ain't true. (Mark Twain)

Faith means not wanting to know what is true. (Freidrich Nietzsche)

Faith may be defined briefly as an illogical belief in the occurrence of the impossible. (H.L. Mencken)

Man is a credulous animal, and must believe something; in the absence of good grounds for belief, he will be satisfied with bad ones. (Bertrand Russell)

If you were taught that elves caused rain, every time it rained, you'd see the proof of elves. (Ariex)

The invisible and the non-existent look very much alike. (Delos B. McKown)

All the biblical miracles will at last disappear with the progress of science. (Matthew Arnold)

The doctrine that future happiness depends upon belief is monstrous. It is the infamy of infamies. The notion that faith in Christ [or Allah] is to be rewarded by an eternity of bliss, while a dependence upon reason, observation and experience merits everlasting pain, is too absurd for refutation, and can be relieved only by that unhappy mixture of insanity and ignorance, called “faith.” (Robert Ingersoll)

Religion... comprises a system of wishful illusions together with a disavowal of reality, such as we find in an isolated form nowhere else but in amentia, in a state of blissful hallucinatory confusion. (Sigmund Freud)

God is the immemorial refuge of the incompetent, the helpless, the miserable. They find not only sanctuary in His arms, but also a kind of superiority, soothing to their macerated egos; He will set them above their betters. (H.L. Mencken)

The origin of the absurd idea of immortal life is easy to discover; it is kept alive by hope and fear, by childish faith, and by cowardice. (Clarence Darrow)

Man is the product of causes which had no prevision of the end they were achieving; his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms; no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling, can preserve an individual life beyond the grave. (Bertrand Russell)

It is wrong always, everywhere and for everyone to believe anything upon insufficient evidence. (W. K. Clifford)

Faith is the short-circuit of reason, destroying the mind. (Ayn Rand)

The Jewish religion like all other religions is an incarnation of the most childish superstitions. (Albert Einstein)

Say what you will about the sweet miracle of unquestioning faith. I consider the capacity for it terrifying. (Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.)

It is fashionable to wax apocalyptic about the threat to humanity posed by the AIDS virus, “mad cow” disease, and many others, but I think a case can be made that faith is one of the world’s great evils, comparable to the smallpox virus but harder to eradicate. (Richard Dawkins)

Faith is powerful enough to immunize people against all appeals to pity, to forgiveness, to decent human feelings. It even immunizes them against fear, if they honestly believe that a martyr’s death will send them straight to heaven. What a weapon! Religious faith deserves a chapter to itself in the annals of war technology, on an even footing with the longbow, the warhorse, the tank, and the hydrogen bomb. (Richard Dawkins)

We are bound to one another. The fact that our ethical intuitions must, in some way, supervene upon our biology does not make ethical truths reducible to biological ones. We are the final judges of what is good, just as we remain the final judges of what is logical. And on neither front has our conversation with one another reached an end. There need be no scheme of rewards and punishments transcending this life to justify our moral intuitions or to render them effective in guiding our behavior in the world. The only angels we need invoke are those of our better nature: reason, honesty, and love. The only demons we must fear are those that lurk inside every human mind: ignorance, hatred, greed, and *faith*, which is surely the devil’s masterpiece. (Sam Harris)

Dear: please read that last sentence again – and think of Harris’ idea: “faith, which is surely the devil’s masterpiece.” Think, now, of the difference between that idea and the one in which you were indoctrinated by your parents, by your Church, and by our society: that you were a “good girl” for “believing”, for having “faith” in God. To get children to transfer their biologically required trust and confidence in their parents and their societies into “belief” in propositions supported by zero evidence, into having “faith” in concepts that “shouldn’t survive an elementary school education”, surely is (as Harris says) “the devil’s masterpiece”.

7. Ridiculing “the believers”

Again, Dear, be careful with ridicule in this category: be careful when ridiculing kids (be kind – but remember, sometimes it’s kindest to be cruel), be careful when ridiculing religious teenagers (some of whom may be mentally ill), and be careful when ridiculing religious adults – because some are not beneath reacting with violence. In sum: use your head!

Beliefs, “faiths”, reason,... Have they never heard of evidence? Do they know nothing about the scientific method? (Author unknown)

A tyrant must put on the appearance of uncommon devotion to religion. Subjects are less apprehensive of illegal treatment from a ruler whom they consider god-fearing and pious. On the other hand, they do less easily move against him, believing that he has the gods on his side. (Aristotle)

Sensible men no longer believe in miracles; they were invented by priests to humbug the peasants. (Alfonso the Wise, King of Castile, 1226–1284)

The Christian god can easily be pictured as virtually the same god as the many ancient gods of past civilizations. The Christian god is a three headed monster: cruel, vengeful and capricious. If one wishes to know more of this raging, three headed beast-like god, one only needs to look at the caliber of people who say they serve him. They are always of two classes: fools and hypocrites. (Thomas Jefferson)

Religion is excellent stuff for keeping common people quiet. (Napoleon Bonaparte)

For my part I would as soon be descended from a baboon... as from a savage who delights to torture his enemies... treats his wives like slaves... and is haunted by the grossest superstitions. (Charles Darwin)

Ignorance is the soil in which belief in miracles grows. (Robert G. Ingersoll)

Man is a Religious Animal. He is the only Religious Animal. He is the only animal that has the True Religion – several of them. He is the only animal that loves his neighbor as himself and cuts his throat if his theology isn’t straight. (Mark Twain)

“In God We Trust.” I don’t believe it would sound any better if it were true. (Mark Twain)

Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people. (Karl Marx)

It has always seemed absurd to suppose that a god would choose for his companions, during all eternity, the dear souls whose highest and only ambition is to obey.

(Robert Ingersoll)

I distrust those people who know so well what God wants them to do because I notice it always coincides with their own desires. (Susan B. Anthony)

The fact that a believer is happier than a skeptic is no more to the point than the fact than a drunken man is happier than a sober one. (George Bernard Shaw)

The sailor does not pray for wind, he learns to sail. (Gustaf Lindborg)

Religion is a monumental chapter in the history of human egotism.

(William James)

When the missionaries came to Africa they had the Bible and we had the land. They said 'Let us pray'. We closed our eyes. When we opened them we had the Bible and they had the land. (Bishop Desmond Tutu)

We are always making God our accomplice, so we may legalize our own iniquities.

(Henri Frederic Amiel)

There is no arguing with the pretenders to a divine knowledge and to a divine mission. They are possessed with the sin of pride; they have yielded to the perennial temptation. (Walter Lippmann)

If Jesus had been killed 20 years ago, Catholic school children would be wearing little Electric Chairs around their necks instead of crosses. (Lenny Bruce)

For that... is what all manner of religion essentially is: childish dependency.

(Albert Ellis)

Geology shows that fossils are of different ages. Paleontology shows a fossil sequence, the list of species represented changes through time. Taxonomy shows biological relationships among species. Evolution is the explanation that threads it all together. Creationism is the practice of squeezing one's eyes shut and wailing "does not!" ("Dr. Pepper")

If God kills, lies, cheats, discriminates, and otherwise behaves in a manner that puts the Mafia to shame, that's okay; he's God. He can do whatever he wants. Anyone who adheres to this philosophy has had his sense of morality, decency, justice and humanness warped beyond recognition by the very book that is supposedly preaching the opposite. (Dennis McKinsey)

The atheist, agnostic, or secularist... should not be cowed by exaggerated sensitivity to people's religious beliefs and fail to speak vigorously and pointedly when the devout put forth arguments manifestly contrary to all the acquired knowledge of the past two or three millennia. Those who advocate a piece of folly like the theory of an

“intelligent creator” should be held accountable for their folly; they have no right to be offended for being called fools until they establish that they are not in fact fools. (Sunand Tryambak Joshi)

Personal dishonesty seems to be a necessary basis for religion. That is understandable. Children are indoctrinated with a code of behavior that is instinctually impossible to follow. So they regularly violate the code and to avoid punishment cover up the violations by lying. For them, lying becomes part of their religion. (C. W. Dalton)

We have names for people who have many beliefs for which there is no rational justification. When their beliefs are extremely common we call them “religious”; otherwise, they are likely to be called “mad”, “psychotic” or “delusional”. (Sam Harris)

Out of all of the sects of the world, we notice an uncanny coincidence: the overwhelming majority just happens to choose one that their parents’ belong to. Not the sect that has the best evidence in its favor, the best miracles, the best music: when it comes to choosing from the smorgasbord of available religions, their potential virtues seem to count for nothing, compared to the matter of heredity. This is an unmistakable fact; nobody could seriously deny it. Yet people with full knowledge of the arbitrary nature of this heredity, somehow manage to go on believing in *their* religion, often with such fanaticism that they are prepared to murder people who follow a different one. (Richard Dawkins)

Now, Dear, if you’re unconvinced about the need for (or wisdom of) ridiculing the ideas of theists, then first, I’d point out that the proposed method is the first of four methods proposed. That is, my proposed four-part strategy for dealing with “real brats” is: 1) ridicule them (this chapter), 2) set a better example (the next chapter, **X-28**), 3) show them what they’re doing wrong and how they could behave better (**X-29**), and 4) exclude them from cooperative activities (**X-30**). And if you find that even that response to be inadequate, then secondly I should mention that in the subsequent two **X**-chapters (in **X-31** and **X-32**), I’ll be proposing to “up the ante”. But it may be better to delay explaining what I mean by that until later chapters, until after I show you what I mean by the other three parts of my proposed four-part strategy – and until after you get some more exercise!