

Frank Meets Jesus

We're delighted to see that Frank of IMAO is willing to contemplate **abandoning his religion** if Jesus turns out to be an asshole:

Finally, I had a lab assistant stop my own heart temporarily. I found myself at the gates of Heaven, and there stood Jesus.

"The time of your judgment has come," thus spake Jesus, "and now I shall..."

"Sorry to interrupt, Jesus, but I'm only here temporarily," I informed Him, "You see, Laurence Simon wanted to know if there is a Doggy Heaven, and I knew you'd have the answer."

"Yes, and the answer is... Wait a second; did you say 'Laurence Simon'? He's a Jew, and he'll just use this information for the Zionist conspiracy."

"What are you talking about?"

"Hey, I already have enough problem dealing with dead Iraqis since those bagel eating neoconservatives tricked Bush into attacking Iraq."

"Oh my God, Jesus, you're like a total anti-Semite!"

"Hey, just because someone raises legitimate questions about whether the Holocaust happened, doesn't make him an 'anti-Semite'."

"How can you be a Holocaust denier? You must have met all the dead people."

"Yeah, but I think they were lying about how they died as part of their Zionist conspiracy. It's all so they can oppress the peaceful Palestinians and..."

At this point, Jesus started cracking up, and I knew he was just pulling my leg. "You're such a rascal, Jesus."

"I had you going there, didn't I, though?"

"Yeah. I was thinking, **'Man, this Jesus is an asshole.**

"I think maybe I'll become a Buddhist."

"Sorry, but I just love playing jokes on people. You should see how much I mind-f**k the atheists."

[Our emphasis.]

Now ... can anyone think of any way of persuading Frank to **read the New Testament?**

Fri, 05/09/2003 - 22:45 | [permalink](#)

It Wouldn't Matter

Notice that Frank didn't say "...I think maybe I'll give up religion."

He'd rather adopt Buddhism, a religion that he'd never before considered to be true, than reject religion altogether. Because he seems to care more about being religious than about the *content* of the particular religion he's landed in.

He didn't consider leaving Christianity because he discovered it was false, but because it became uncomfortable. He has a stronger commitment to the comfortable lie than to reason.

On the other hand, he *is* funny, sometimes.

by [Gil](#) on Sat, 05/10/2003 - 05:21 | [reply](#)

Frank's Education, Continued

Since reading this article, I've been pondering this issue (no, not that of Frank's sadly lacking education, but of how Christians can read the Bible and take it seriously). I asked some good friends with theological backgrounds to comment, and one replied:

Money generally gets a very bad press in the NT – e.g.

In the Gospels – giving up everything is the only way the rich young ruler can get into heaven (his morality is already beyond question, but he is excluded because he won't give all his possessions up).

It doesn't stop at giving up material things – one potential follower is excluded because he wants to bury his father before he gives up everything and is told 'let the dead bury the dead' – there is a prevailing apocalyptic morality in which familial relationships must be abandoned in favour of serving God. In a parable Jesus excludes those who care about land they've bought or a person they have that day married – God is first, middle and last and nothing else can have priority.

In Acts the early Christians form a kind of commune and *everything* is handed over to be kept in common – one

couple keep back some land of their own and are struck

dead for their 'sin'

In terms of attitudes to women -

There is advice in Corinthians about correct dress for women to worship in and Paul has several references to women not being suitable to lead. He instructs women to be subservient in the same way as men should be subservient to Christ, with a resulting whole philosophy of male 'headship'.

The story of the woman taken in adultery is a bit double edged - although Jesus saves her life and prevents her being stoned, pointing out the fallibility of everyone, she is then told 'go and sin no more' - she is 'let off', but sex outside marriage is still bad.

Slavery is not questioned - "slaves, obey your masters". (Those translations which say "servants, obey your masters" were simply masking the historical reality, probably because "servants" was more culturally useful at the time of the King's James translation, which is very inaccurate generally.) The whole book of Philemon concerns a slave who has become a Christian and although Paul wants Onesimus (his owner) to let Paul have him he acknowledges the primary ownership of another person as a given.

For more general thinking the sermon on the mount (on the plain in Luke's gospel) glorifies suffering as a means of salvation and the central theme of Luke unfolds in the verse - 'whoever would follow me, let him first deny himself, take up his cross and follow me.' Suffering and self denial are very much *good* things. The 'suffering servant' Christology is a very strong motif and is held up as a model of discipleship.

Luke also contains Mary's Magnificat which talks of those who have losing what they have and the rich becoming poor.

How does Frank gloss over all this? How do other Christians rationalize it? Beats me! Can anyone explain it to me?

by a reader on Sun, 05/18/2003 - 18:14 | [reply](#)

Glossing Over Bad Ideas In The Bible

Well, one technique is to realise is no one uses them today, they *really don't matter*. Christianity has evolved, the current day version is better, and so people go by that. You may be objecting "if it changed, how can it be true?" And that is a problem even many Christians have. But the notion of "true and mutable" is actually a very important epistemic truth. We can and should hold our best theories true, and at the same time seek to improve them. And

when they do improve, we should hold these new theories true,

knowing full well they will be replaced. If you're objecting that "true" is supposed to mean "absolutely true" you've forgotten fallibility.

If you want something to bug Frank about, tell him that **washing a child's mouth out with soap** is not funny. *cringe*

-- Elliot Temple
<http://curi.blogspot.com/>

by **Elliot Temple** on Sun, 05/18/2003 - 20:32 | [reply](#)

Reconciling The Bible and Reason

I think that the problem with the question is that it assumes that people go to religion because they think it's a great source of truth. Only idiots think that today. But many non-idiots continue to be religious.

I think people go to religion for authority (both to relieve themselves of the responsibility of figuring out what's right, and to use as a weapon against others), for social bonding, for emotional comfort; **not** for true explanations. Elliot has to do lots of contortions and tap dancing to pretend that Christianity is something like an evolving body of knowledge containing our best theories. It isn't. I don't think it ever was.

So, I don't think there is a problem reconciling religion with the truth and the best theories available. I don't think anybody seriously tries to do this (who isn't willing to delude himself, and is thus not serious about it). I think they've effectively separated the parts of their minds that are interested in the truth from the parts that are drawn to religion. If the only way to read a passage as true is to "interpret" it as having a message completely different from its plain meaning, you have to undercut the entire authority of the text as the revealed word of an omniscient God. It's not comfortable to go there, so people who want to be religious just don't go there.

I think this is similar to some of the anti-war activists who rely on slogans and leftist consensus rather than arguments and explanations. They're not trying to pursue the truth, they're reveling in something that they like; something that people like them agree upon; something that lets them emotionally vent outrage at ideological enemies. It's not about what's reasonable, it's about what's comfortable.

by **Gil** on Sun, 05/18/2003 - 23:28 | [reply](#)

Delusions

To think that the memes perpetuated by a religion are not affecting people today- that a religion has changed and 'improved'- is a delusion, in this reader's opinion. These memes are so deeply inculcated into the culture that people don't even realize where they come from, and even those who are not 'religious' absorb and expound them- from patriarchy and women's inferiority to the

glorification of suffering and sacrifice, to the necessity of authority outside of one's self. These bad ideas cannot just be glossed over; a thorough deconstruction, in the light of reason, along with better ideas to replace them with, are necessary. It's slow going, but it's possible and desirable.

by a reader on Fri, 05/23/2003 - 15:45 | [reply](#)

Re: Delusions

To think that the memes perpetuated by a religion are not affecting people today- that a religion has changed and 'improved'- is a delusion, in this reader's opinion. These memes are so deeply inculcated into the culture that people don't even realize where they come from, and even those who are not 'religious' absorb and expound them

Aren't you contradicting yourself here? If non-religious people absorb and expound them (which I agree they do),

then these memes are not being perpetuated by a religion, right?

by [David Deutsch](#) on Sat, 05/24/2003 - 23:43 | [reply](#)

Re: Re: Delusions

David asks:

Aren't you contradicting yourself here? If non-religious people absorb and expound them (which I agree they do), then these memes are not being perpetuated by a religion, right?

Does "perpetuated by" have to mean "exclusively perpetuated by"?

If not, then I don't see a contradiction.

I'm not the reader who posted it. I just like to pick nits. :-)

by [Gil](#) on Sun, 05/25/2003 - 00:19 | [reply](#)