

# Greta Christina's Blog

Sex, atheism, politics, dreams, and whatever. Thinking out loud since 2005.

## Atheists and Anger



I want to talk about atheists and anger.

This has been a hard piece to write, and it may be a hard one to read. I'm not going to be as polite and good-tempered as I usually am in this blog; this piece is about anger, and for once I'm going to fucking well let myself be angry.

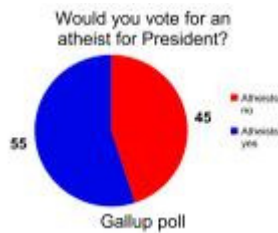
But I think it's important. One of the most common criticisms lobbed at the newly-vocal atheist community is, "Why do you have to be so angry?" So I want to talk about:

1. Why atheists are angry;
2. Why our anger is valid, valuable, and necessary;

And 3. Why it's completely fucked-up to try to take our anger away from us.

So let's start with why we're angry. Or rather -- because this is my blog and I don't presume to speak for all atheists -- why I'm angry.

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I'm angry that according to a recent [Gallup poll](#), only 45 percent of Americans would vote for an atheist for President.



I'm angry that atheist conventions have to have extra security, including hand-held metal detectors and bag searches, because of fatwas and death threats.



I'm angry that atheist soldiers -- in the U.S. armed forces -- have had prayer ceremonies pressured on them and atheist meetings broken up by Christian superior officers, in direct violation of the First Amendment. I'm angry that evangelical Christian groups are being given exclusive access to proselytize on military bases -- again in the U.S. armed forces, again in direct violation of the First Amendment. I'm angry that atheist soldiers who are complaining about this are being harassed and are even getting death threats from Christian soldiers and superior officers -- yet again, in the U.S. armed forces. And I'm angry that Christians still say smug, sanctimonious things like, "there are no atheists in foxholes." You know why you're not seeing atheists in foxholes? Because believers are threatening to shoot them if they come out.



I'm angry that the 41st President of the United States, George Herbert Walker Bush, said of atheists, in my lifetime, "No, I don't know that atheists should be regarded as citizens, nor should they be regarded as patriotic. This is one nation under God." My President. No, I



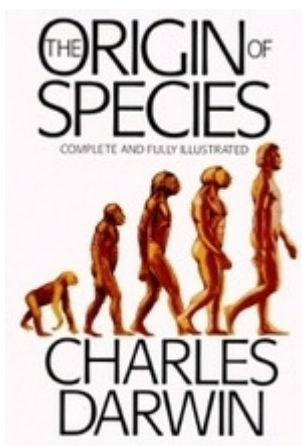
didn't vote for him, but he was still my President, and he still said that my lack of religious belief meant that I shouldn't be regarded as a citizen.



I'm angry that it took until 1961 for atheists to be guaranteed the right to serve on juries, testify in court, or hold public office in every state in the country.



I'm angry that almost half of Americans believe in creationism. And not a broad, "God had a hand in evolution" creationism, but a strict, young-earth, "God created man pretty much in his present form at one time within the last 10,000 years" creationism.



And on that topic: I'm angry that school boards all across this country are still -- 82 years after the Scopes trial -- having to spend time and money and resources on the fight to have evolution taught in the schools. School boards are not exactly loaded with time and money and resources, and any of the time/ money/ resources that they're spending fighting this stupid fight is time/ money/ resources that they're not spending, you know, teaching.



I'm angry that women are dying of AIDS in Africa and South America because the Catholic Church has convinced them that using condoms makes baby Jesus cry.



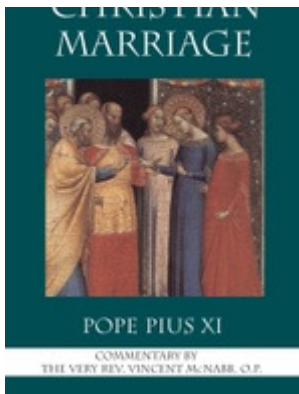
I'm angry that women are having septic abortions -- or are being forced to have unwanted children who they resent and mistreat -- because religious organizations have gotten laws passed making abortion illegal or inaccessible.



I'm angry about what happened to Galileo. Still. And I'm angry that it took the Catholic Church until 1992 to apologize for it.



I get angry when advice columnists tell their troubled letter-writers to talk to their priest or



minister or rabbi... when there is absolutely no legal requirement that a religious leader have any sort of training in counseling or therapy.



And I get angry when religious leaders offer counseling and advice to troubled people -- sex advice, relationship advice, advice on depression and stress, etc. -- not based on any evidence about what actually does and does not work in people's brains and lives, but on the basis of what their religious doctrine tells them God wants for us.



I'm angry at preachers who tell women in their flock to submit to their husbands because it's the will of God, even when their husbands are beating them within an inch of their lives.



I'm angry that so many believers treat prayer as a sort of cosmic shopping list for God. I'm angry that believers pray to win sporting events, poker hands, beauty pageants, and more. As if they were the center of the universe, as if God gives a shit about who wins the NCAA Final Four -- and as if the other teams/ players/ contestants weren't praying just as hard.



I'm especially angry that so many believers treat prayer as a cosmic shopping list when it comes to health and illness. I'm angry that this belief leads to the revolting conclusion that God deliberately makes people sick so they'll pray to him to get better. And I'm angry that they foist this belief on sick and dying children -- in essence teaching them that, if they don't get better, it's their fault. That they didn't pray hard enough, or they didn't pray right, or God just doesn't love them enough.



And I get angry when other believers insist that the cosmic shopping list isn't what religion and prayer are *really* about; that their own sophisticated theology is the true understanding of God. I get angry when believers insist that the shopping list is a straw man, an outmoded form of religion and prayer that nobody takes seriously, and it's absurd for atheists to criticize it.

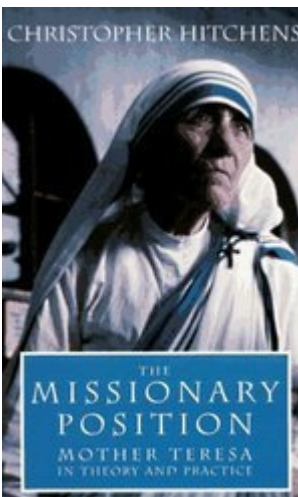


I get angry when believers use terrible, grief-soaked tragedies as either opportunities to toot their own horns and talk about how wonderful their God and their religion are... or as

opportunities to attack and demonize atheists and secularism.



I'm angry at the Sunday school teacher who told comic artist Craig Thompson that he couldn't draw in heaven. And I'm angry that she said it with the complete conviction of authority... when in fact she had no basis whatsoever for that assertion. How the hell did she know what Heaven was like? How could she possibly know that you could sing in heaven but not draw? And why the hell would you say something that squelching and dismissive to a talented child?



I'm angry that Mother Teresa took her personal suffering and despair at her lost faith in God, and turned it into an obsession that led her to treat suffering as a beautiful gift from Christ to humanity, a beautiful offering from humanity to God, and a necessary part of spiritual salvation. And I'm angry that this obsession apparently led her to offer grotesquely inadequate medical care and pain relief at her hospitals and hospices, in essence taking her personal crisis of faith out on millions of desperately poor and helpless people.



I'm angry at the trustee of the local Presbyterian church who told his teenage daughter that he didn't actually believe in God or religion, but that it was important to keep up his work because without religion there would be no morality in the world.



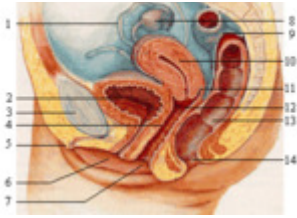
I'm angry that so many parents and religious leaders terrorize children -- who (a) have brains that are hard-wired to trust adults and believe what they're told, and (b) are very literal-minded -- with vivid, traumatizing stories of eternal burning and torture to ensure that they'll be too frightened to even question religion.



I'm angrier when religious leaders explicitly tell children – and adults, for that matter -- that the very questioning of religion and the existence of hell is a dreadful sin, one that will guarantee them that hell is where they'll end up.



I'm angry that children get taught by religion to hate and fear their bodies and their



sexuality. And I'm especially angry that female children get taught by religion to hate and fear their femaleness, and that queer children get taught by religion to hate and fear their queerness.



I'm angry about the Muslim girl in the public school who was told -- by her public-school, taxpayer-paid teacher -- that the red stripes on Christmas candy canes represented Christ's blood, that she had to believe in and be saved by Jesus Christ or she'd be condemned to hell, and that if she didn't, there was no place for her in his classroom. And I'm angry that he told her not to come back to his class when she didn't convert.



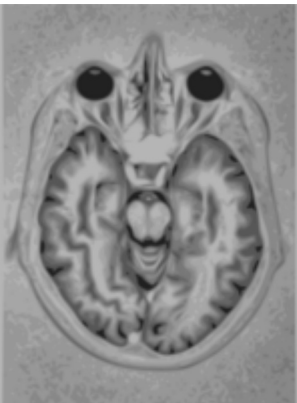
I'm angry -- enraged -- at the priests who molest children and tell them it's God's will. I'm enraged at the Catholic Church that consciously, deliberately, repeatedly, for years, acted to protect priests who molested children, and consciously and deliberately acted to keep it a secret, placing the Church's reputation as a higher priority than, for fuck's sake, children not being molested. And I'm enraged that the Church is now trying to argue, in court, that protecting child-molesting priests from prosecution, and shuffling those priests from diocese to diocese so they can molest kids in a whole new community that doesn't yet suspect them, is a Constitutionally protected form of free religious expression.



I'm angry about 9/11.



And I'm angry that Jerry Falwell blamed 9/11 on pagans, abortionists, feminists, gays and lesbians, the ACLU, and the People For the American Way. I'm angry that the theology of a wrathful God exacting revenge against pagans and abortionists by sending radical Muslims to blow up a building full of secretaries and investment bankers... this was a theology held by a powerful, widely-respected religious leader with millions of followers.



I'm angry that, when my dad had a stroke and went into a nursing home, the staff asked my brother, "Is he a Baptist or a Catholic?" And I'm not just angry on behalf of my atheist dad. I'm angry on behalf of all the Jews, all the Buddhists, all the Muslims, all the neo-Pagans, whose families almost certainly got asked that same question. That question is enormously disrespectful, not just of my dad's atheism, but of everyone at that nursing home who wasn't a Baptist or a Catholic.



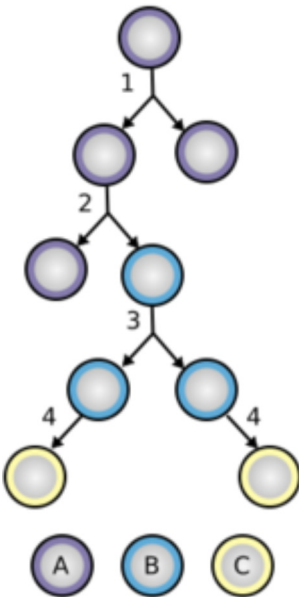
I'm angry about Ingrid's grandparents. I'm angry that their fundamentalism was such a huge source of strife and unhappiness in her family, that it alienated them so drastically from their children and grandchildren. I'm angry that they tried to cram it down Ingrid's



throat, to the point that she's still traumatized by it. And I'm angry that their religion, which if nothing else should have been a comfort to them in their old age, was instead a source of anguish and despair -- because they knew their children and grandchildren were all going to be burned and tortured forever in Hell, and how could Heaven be Heaven if their children and grandchildren were being eternally burned and tortured in Hell?



I'm angry that Ingrid and I can't get legally married in this country -- or get legally married in another country and have it recognized by this one -- largely because religious leaders oppose it. And I'm angry that both religious and political leaders have discovered that they can score big points exploiting people's fears about sexuality in a changing world, fanning the flames of those fears... and giving people a religious excuse for why their fears are justified.



I'm angry that huge swaths of public policy in this country -- not just on same-sex marriage, but on abortion and stem-cell research and sex education in schools -- are being based, not on evidence of which policies do and don't work and what is and isn't true about the world, but on religious texts written hundreds or thousands of years ago, and on their own personal feelings about how those texts should be interpreted, with no supporting evidence whatsoever -- and no apparent concept of why any evidence should be needed.



I get angry when believers trumpet every good thing that's ever been done in the name of religion as a reason why religion is a force for good... and then, when confronted with the horrible evils done in religion's name, say that those evils weren't done because of religion, were done because of politics of greed or fear or whatever, would have been done anyway even without religion, and shouldn't be counted as religion's fault. (Of course, to be fair, I also get angry when atheists do the opposite: chalk up every evil thing done in the name of religion as a black mark on religion's record, but then insist that the good things were done for other reasons and would have been done anyway, etc. Neither side gets to have it both ways.)



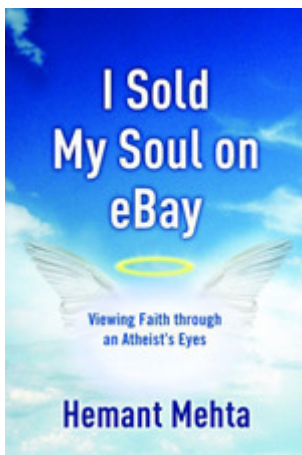
I'm angry at the believers who put decals on their cars with a Faith fish eating a Darwin fish... and who think that's clever, who think that religious faith really should triumph over science and evidence. I'm angry at believers who have so little respect for the physical world their God supposedly created that they feel perfectly content to ignore the mountains of physical evidence piling up around them about that real world; perfectly content to see that world as somehow less real and true than their personal opinions about God.

(Note: The litany of specific grievances is now more than halfway over. Analysis of why

anger is necessary and valuable is coming up soon. Promise.)



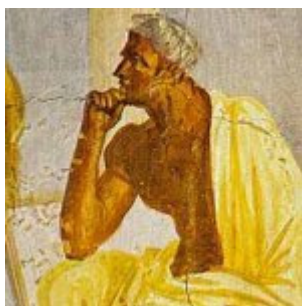
I get angry when religious leaders opportunistically use religion, and people's trust and faith in religion, to steal, cheat, lie, manipulate the political process, take sexual advantage of their followers, and generally behave like the scum of the earth. I get angry when it happens over and over and over again. And I get angry when people see this happening and still say that atheism is bad because, without religion, people would have no basis for morality or ethics, and no reason not to just do whatever they wanted.



I get angry when religious believers make arguments against atheism -- and make accusations against atheists -- without having bothered to talk to any atheists or read any atheist writing. I get angry when they trot out the same old "Atheism is a nihilistic philosophy, with no joy or meaning to life and no basis for morality or ethics"... when if they spent ten minutes in the atheist blogosphere, they would discover countless atheists who experience great joy and meaning in their lives, and are intensely concerned about right and wrong.



I get angry when believers use the phrase "atheist fundamentalist" without apparently knowing what the word "fundamentalist" means. Call people pig-headed, call them stubborn, call them snarky, call them intolerant even. But unless you can point to the text to which these "fundamentalist" atheists literally and strictly adhere without question, then please shut the hell up about us being fundamentalist.



I get angry when religious believers base their entire philosophy of life on what is, at best, a hunch; when they ignore or reject or rationalize any evidence that contradicts that hunch or calls it into question... and then accuse atheists of being close-minded and ignoring the obvious truth.



And I get angry when believers glorify religious faith without evidence as a positive virtue, a character trait that makes people good and noble... and then continue to accuse atheists of being close-minded and ignoring the obvious truth.



I get angry when believers say that they can know the truth -- the greatest truth of all about the nature of the universe, namely the source of all existence -- simply by sitting quietly and listening to their heart... and then accuse atheists of being arrogant. (This isn't just arrogant towards atheists and naturalists, either. It's arrogant towards people of other religions who have sat just as quietly, listened to their hearts with just as much sincerity, and come to completely opposite conclusions about God and the soul and the universe.)



And I get angry when believers say that the entire unimaginable enormity of the universe was made solely and specifically for the human race -- when atheists, by contrast, say that humanity is a microscopic dot on a microscopic dot, an infinitesimal eyeblink in the vastness of time and space -- and yet again, believers accuse atheists of being arrogant.



I get angry when believers say things like, "Yes, of course, the human mind isn't perfect, we see what we expect to see, we see faces and patterns and intention when they aren't necessarily there... but that couldn't be happening with me. The patterns I see in my life... they couldn't possibly be coincidence or confirmation bias. I'm definitely seeing the hand of God." (And then, once again, those same believers accuse atheists of being close-minded and only seeing what we want to see.)



I get angry when believers treat the gaps in science and scientific knowledge as somehow proof of the existence of God. I get angry when, despite a thousands-of-years-old pattern of supernatural explanations being consistently and repeatedly replaced with natural ones, they still think every single unexplained phenomenon can be best explained by God. And I'm angry that, whenever a gap in our knowledge does get filled in, believers either try to suppress it (see above re: evolution in the schools), or else say, "Okay, that part of the world isn't supernatural... but what about this gap over here? Can you explain that, Mr. Smarty-Pants Scientist? You can't! It must be God!"



I get angry when believers say at the beginning of an argument that their belief is based on reason and evidence, and at the end of the argument say things like, "It just seems that way to me," or, "I feel it in my heart"... as if that were a clincher. I mean, couldn't they have said that at the beginning of the argument, and not wasted my fucking time? My time is valuable and increasingly limited, and I have better things to do with it than debating with people who pretend to care about evidence and reason but ultimately don't.



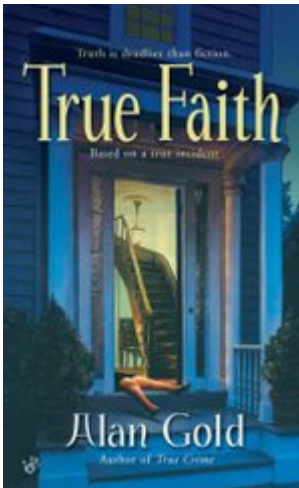
I'm angry that I have to know more about their fucking religion than the believers do. I get angry when believers say things about the tenets and texts of their religion that are flatly untrue, and I have to correct them on it.



I get angry when believers treat any criticism of their religion -- i.e., pointing out that their religion is a hypothesis about the world and a philosophy of it, and asking it to stand up on its own in the marketplace of ideas -- as insulting and intolerant. I get angry when believers accuse atheists of being intolerant for saying things like, "I don't agree with you," "I think you're mistaken about that," "That doesn't make any sense," "I think that position is morally indefensible," and "What evidence do you have to support that?"



And on that point: I get angry when Christians in the United States -- members of the single most powerful and influential religious group in the country, in the wealthiest and most powerful country in the world -- act like beleaguered victims, martyrs being thrown to the lions all over again, whenever anyone criticizes them or they don't get their way.



I get angry when believers respond to some or all of these offenses by saying, "Well, that's not the true faith. Hating queers/ rejecting science/ stifling questions and dissent... that's not the true faith. People who do that aren't real (Christians/ Jews/ Muslims/ Hindus/ etc.)." As if they had a fucking pipeline to God. As if they had any reason at all to think that they know for sure what God wants, and that the billions of others who disagree with them just obviously have it wrong. (Besides -- I'm an atheist. The "They just aren't doing religion right" argument is not going to cut it with me. I don't think any of you have it right. To me, it all looks like something that people just made up.)



On that topic: I get angry when religious believers insist that their interpretation of their religion and religious text is the right one, and that fellow believers with an opposite interpretation clearly have it wrong. I get angry when believers insist that the parts about Jesus's prompt return and all prayers being answered are obviously not meant literally... but the parts about hell and damnation and gay sex being an abomination, that's real. And I get angry when believers insist that the parts about hell and damnation and gay sex being an abomination aren't meant literally, but the parts about caring for the poor are really what God meant. How the hell do they know which parts of the Bible/ Torah/ Koran/ Bhagavad-Gita/ whatever God really meant, and which parts he didn't? And if they don't know, if they're just basing it on their own moral instincts and their own perceptions of the



world, then on what basis are they thinking that God and their sacred texts have anything to do with it at all? What right do they have to act as if their opinion is the same as God's and he's totally backing them up on it?



And I get angry when believers act as if these offenses aren't important, because "Not all believers act like that. I don't act like that." As if that fucking matters. This stuff is a major way that religion plays out in our world, and it makes me furious to hear religious believers try to minimize it because it's not how it happens to play out for them. It's like a white person responding to an African-American describing their experience of racism by saying, "But I'm not a racist." If you're not a racist, then can you shut the hell up for ten seconds and listen to the black people talk? And if you're not bigoted against atheists and are sympathetic to us, then can you shut the hell up for ten seconds and let us tell you about what the world is like for us, without getting all defensive about how it's not your fault? When did this international conversation about atheism and religious oppression become all about you and your hurt feelings?



But perhaps most of all, I get angry -- sputteringly, inarticulately, pulse-racingly angry -- when believers chide atheists for being so angry. "Why do you have to be so angry all the time?" "All that anger is so off-putting." "If atheism is so great, then why are so many of you so angry?"

Which brings me to the other part of this little rant: Why atheist anger is not only valid, but valuable and necessary.

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There's actually a simple, straightforward answer to this question:

Because anger is always necessary.



Because anger has driven every major movement for social change in this country, and probably in the world. The labor movement, the civil rights movement, the women's suffrage movement, the modern feminist movement, the gay rights movement, the anti-war movement in the Sixties, the anti-war movement today, you name it... all of them have had, as a major driving force, a tremendous amount of anger. Anger over injustice, anger over mistreatment and brutality, anger over helplessness.



I mean, why the hell else would people bother to mobilize social movements? Social movements are hard. They take time, they take energy, they sometimes take serious risk of life and limb, community and career. Nobody would fucking bother if they weren't furious about something.



So when you tell an atheist (or for that matter, a woman or a queer or a person of color or whatever) not to be so angry, you are, in essence, telling us to disempower ourselves. You're telling us to lay down one of the single most powerful tools we have at our disposal. You're telling us to lay down a tool that no social change movement has ever been able to



do without. You're telling us to be polite and diplomatic, when history shows that polite diplomacy in a social change movement works far, far better when it's coupled with passionate anger. In a battle between David and Goliath, you're telling David to put down his slingshot and just... I don't know. Gnaw Goliath on the ankles or something.



I'll acknowledge that anger is a difficult tool in a social movement. A dangerous one even. It can make people act rashly; it can make it harder to think clearly; it can make people treat potential allies as enemies. In the worst-case scenario, it can even lead to violence. Anger is valid, it's valuable, it's necessary... but it can also misfire, and badly.



But unless we're actually endangering or harming somebody, it is not up to believers to tell atheists when we should and should not use this tool. It is not up to believers to tell atheists that we're going too far with the anger and need to calm down. Any more than it's up to white people to say it to black people, or men to say it to women, or straights to say it to queers. When it comes from believers, it's not helpful. It's patronizing. It comes across as another attempt to defang us and shut us up. And it's just going to make us angrier.



And when believers tell passionate, angry atheists that extremism is never right and the truth usually lies somewhere in the middle, they're making a big, big mistake. Not just because they're making us want to spit in their eye. They're making a mistake because they're simply mistaken. Read this piece from Daylight Atheism on The Golden Mean. Read the quotes from the abolitionist movement, the civil rights movement, the anti-war movement, the American Revolution. And then come tell me that the moderate position is

usually the right one.



And you know what else? I think we need to have some goddamn perspective about this anger business. I mean, I look at organized Christianity in this country -- not just the religious right, but some more "moderate" churches as well -- interfering with AIDS prevention efforts, trying to get their theology into the public schools, actively trying to prevent me and Ingrid from getting legally married, and pulling all the other shit I talk

about in this piece.

And I look at atheists sometimes being mean-spirited and snarky in blogs and books and magazines.

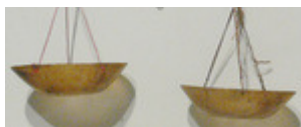
And I think, Can we please have some goddamn perspective?



Because the other thing I'm angry about is the fact that, in this piece, I've touched on -- maybe -- a hundredth of everything that angers me about religion. This piece barely scratches the surface. I know, almost without a doubt, that within five minutes of hitting "Post" and putting this piece on my blog, I'll think of six different things that I'd wished I'd put in. I could write an entire book about everything that angers me about religion -- other people certainly have -- and still not be finished.



Are you really looking at all of this shit I'm talking about, a millennia-old history of abuse and injustice, deceit and willful ignorance -- and then on the other hand, looking at a couple of years of atheists being snarky on the Internet -- and seeing the two as somehow



equivalent? Or worse, seeing the snarky atheists as the greater problem?

If you're doing that, then with all due respect, you can blow me.

We now return you to your regularly scheduled attempts at civility.

*Addendum: If you're having trouble commenting, seeing your comment, or reading the other comments on this post, please [read this](#). Thanks.*

*Addendum 2: I've written a [reply](#) to the most common themes that are coming up in the comments here. If you're going to comment on this post, you might want to [check it out](#) first.*

October 15, 2007 in [Atheism](#), [Politics](#) | [Permalink](#)

## Comments



I used to answer medical questions on a couple of online fora, and would occasionally wander into their religion areas. I'd point to the huge inconsistencies in the arguments that god is omniscient and omni-powerful... and that most christians argue that the reason to do good is to reap eternal reward or avoid eternal punishment -- a damn selfish reason. I'd point out that a god that would create humans imperfect -- as christians say -- means that he deliberately did so knowing most couldn't follow his rules and would therefore boil in oil for eternity. Give them life for the blink of an eye, set up some rules that billions can't follow, burn them for a trillion years times a trillion. Sort of a pervert, seems to me. And that if you believe in the power of prayer, you must also believe that god is fallable or capricious or both. Anyhow, one person with whom I was making these arguments said I'd caused him to question his faith. So I stopped posting there. Made me feel bad. Now, if people truly keep their religion to themselves, it's ok by me. But as it's becoming more and more public, and the effect is to dunn down our entire country and to poison our politics to the point of hopelessness, as the effect of "religion" is to perpetuate hate for entire classes of people, it's time to start talking again. You give it a heck of a start.

Posted by: [Sid Schwab](#) | [October 15, 2007 at 08:49 AM](#)



All this anger is well-directed, as far as I'm concerned. I think emotions are the body's way of telling us that something is not right and needs to be corrected. You're right, if there was no anger, nothing would change. Anger is a very useful force, but gets a bad name from people who can't be angry without being blatantly aggressive and destructive.

As for the previous comment, congratulations to the author for getting someone to question their faith. I have spiritual beliefs, but they are completely different from what they were twenty years ago, and will probably be different twenty years from now. It seems to me that having one concrete set of beliefs and attitudes for a lifetime would feel very confining and boring, whether those beliefs included spiritual aspects or not. (This is not a dig at athiesm. The happy atheists that I know have evolved their beliefs over the course of a lifetime, and their ethics and philosophies continue to evolve.) I just wonder, as a person who welcomes new information and perspectives, what it must be like to be so insecure in one's beliefs that questioning them brings about a crisis.

Posted by: [Shannon Brown](#) | [October 15, 2007 at 10:15 AM](#)



This is a fantastic and, honestly, sometimes emotionally difficult piece to read. As an agnostic spiritual humanist, as someone who feels spirituality but doesn't buy into religion, I'm also angry about a ton of these things. But some of them, I think I understand why theists fear your anger. (Specifically: "I get angry when believers treat any criticism of their religion -- i.e., pointing out that their religion is a hypothesis about the world and a philosophy of it, and asking it to stand up on its own in the marketplace of ideas -- as insulting and intolerant.")

It's because they're afraid that atheists are going to take away their faith from them. Not change their minds, so much, but rather not allow them to have the faith, the spirituality, that gives so much to their lives.

I'm all about people believing or not believing what they want, as long as they don't force it on other people, and as long as it harms noone. I understand how important it is to point out the flaws and fallacies in religion for people who accept their religion as right

not just for themselves but for everyone. But when you try to point out these things to someone who wants to mind their own business with their religion, it feels like you're out to take their religion away from them by proving them wrong. It feels like you want to dissolve that which gives them joy and hope by proving it illogical and irrelevant. As someone who recognizes the fallacies of religion, but still has extremely powerful emotional response via spirituality, which can be triggered by the trappings of religion, it feels like, when people argue with what works for us, you're out to take that away from people who feel it. I believe some people are wired to want religion, to need it, to crave it, and others aren't. Of course, I have no formal data to back this up, but I'd love to see a study done on it. As long as those people don't force their views on other people, what's wrong with having religion or faith? (Now, agreed, quite a few people of faith DO try to force it on other people, and I'm right up there with you, fighting back.)

And I think the outside world needs to ask: what is it that you, the atheists, want? We (at least, now) know WHY you're angry... but, in the words of social movements, what are your demands? What is it that you'd like to see changed? Is it a world without belief, without religion? (I doubt it... few atheists that at least I know are that militant or "hardcore".) Is it mere acknowledgment of your existence? Is it a greater sensitivity and awareness in our relations and laws? What is it that atheists want?

For surely you don't WANT to be angry. (Well, maybe some do. Anger can be quite intoxicating.) You've been forced into anger, at the breaking point, so that you can get your needs met.

What is it that atheists really want?

Posted by: [c4bl3fl4m3](#) | [October 15, 2007 at 12:15 PM](#)



You're beautiful when you're angry!

I kid, I kid. But you make an incredible point: we aren't going to convince the godheads that they're wrong - about the things that you've noted and more - by, as you say, gnawing on their ankles.

Awesome post!

Posted by: [Pi Guy](#) | [October 15, 2007 at 06:28 PM](#)



"Are you really looking at all of this shit I'm talking about, a millennia-old history of abuse and injustice, deceit and willful ignorance -- and then on the other hand, looking at a couple of years of atheists being snarky on the Internet -- and seeing the two as somehow equivalent?"

No. Repeating pseudohistory about beliefs in Mithras or Osiris isn't nearly as dangerous or far-reaching as the pseudohistory of creationism. Quote-mining John Adams to make him look like an atheist isn't quite as pernicious as quote-mining him to making him look like an orthodox Christian. An implausible slandering of a majority as cretins or nuts is far less of a hazard as an slander of a minority, like atheists, that is treated as fact. But it is still pseudohistory. It is still quote-mining. It is still slander. And two wrongs do not make a right.

Posted by: [J. J. Ramsey](#) | [October 15, 2007 at 07:24 PM](#)



Me, too.

Posted by: [miz\\_geek](#) | [October 15, 2007 at 07:30 PM](#)



Er.. Galileo was treated with kid gloves. His long-standing friendship with then-pope Urban VIII certainly helped, although calling him a simpleton in print didn't. But he had very good reason to fear, because Giordano Bruno had been burned at the stake for heresy a few years earlier.

I really wish people would remember remember Bruno a little more.

Posted by: [Eclectic](#) | [October 15, 2007 at 07:31 PM](#)



Me, too.

Posted by: [miz\\_geek](#) | [October 15, 2007 at 07:31 PM](#)



c4bl3fl4m3: "What is it that atheists really want?"

Depends. For some atheists, the agenda is to be treated like human beings and accepted as first-class citizens. For others, it is to knock back the influence of religion or get rid of it altogether. For yet others, it is the promotion of evidence-based thinking over trust in handed-down traditions that are less than trustworthy.

Posted by: [J. J. Ramsey](#) | [October 15, 2007 at 07:42 PM](#)



And good point about dogma. I've never read more than snippets the damned thing, but even I know that the catholic bible and the protestant bible are different, and the Lutheran and Calvinist branches of protestantism disagree on what the sixth commandment says.

A few months ago I startled someone who had never noticed that the first two books of Genesis flatly contradict each other. Did Yahweh make animals before man (Genesis 1:21–26) or after (Genesis 2:19)?

I'll have a civil discussion with a theologian, but some stupid yahoo quoting a book at me that he understands less than I understand Thorne, Misner, Wheeler & Wheeler's *Gravitation* can stick it where the sun don't shine.

Posted by: [Eclectic](#) | [October 15, 2007 at 07:57 PM](#)



Beautiful, Greta! This post is a perfect example of why this is fast becoming one of my favorite sites for atheist writing. This is what a rant should be - bracing, clear, well-informed, and guided by energy and passion. Applause!

In my experience, atheists are no angrier than the average person, and possibly less angry. Why shouldn't we be? We have a whole universe full of beauty and mystery to explore, more than sufficient reason for happiness. The only time we get angry is when we're confronted by hatred and injustice committed in the name of religion (as well as evil and injustice in general, of course, the same as everyone else). We're stirred to anger when seeing these evils, as any person with a functioning conscience would be. If we seem like we're angry often, well, that's just because there are *\*so many\** evils committed in God's name. What would be a far more serious indictment of atheists, in my mind, would be if we *\*weren't\** angry at the perpetrators of such crimes.

The important thing, when feeling angry, is to let it stir you to useful action. As you pointed out, righteous anger at injustice has been the driving force for many of the most important movements for social change. For people to truly get involved in a cause, to truly work at it, it *\*has\** to stir them to strong emotion. The bad thing isn't anger itself, but misdirected anger that's unleashed without reason or justification. But when controlled in the service of reason and aimed at those who truly deserve our opprobrium, it can be a positive and valuable feeling.

To the commenter who asked what atheists want, I'd suggest the answer is that we want the same thing as everyone else: to live in peace and security and to have the freedom to guide our lives as we see fit, free of outside interference and oppression. We don't want to take away anyone's right to worship as they see fit (pace the usual disclaimers about that worship not itself involving harm of the unconsenting). By all means, believe in whatever crazy things you like. But let your belief stay *\*your\** belief, and don't try to intrude on our lives and demand that we conform to your rules or pay taxes to support your convictions.

Posted by: [Ebonmuse](#) | [October 15, 2007 at 08:02 PM](#)



Right on, sister. Great article. This is something I've felt strongly about since a very young age.

Too many people have lost their rights, their families, their homes, their livelihoods, their lives "in the name of one "god" or another."

Religion too often gives people a mask and an excuse to dish out evil.

Posted by: [Jane Know](#) | [October 15, 2007 at 10:42 PM](#)



Great post, you are right it is just the very tip of the iceberg. what about the church group when i was a child that told me that

women were second class citizens and should never teach men or wear shorts around them. And that rock music is from the devil but beethoven beating his wife is cool and groovy.

Telling me as a young person that all the people who had never heard of christianity and died would rot in purgatory for ever. the whole thing was poisonous but at least it awakened my nascent feminism.

Posted by: yoyo | [October 15, 2007 at 10:56 PM](#)



Yes, you are beautiful when you are angry Greta. Keep it up!

I find that some days I'm athiest (as I was raised by Athiest parents), and some days I'm Unitarian and or a Tantric/GoddessWorshiper/Pegan/Sufi/Methodist, and more. i'm an enjoyer and explorer of many religions. I find both can co-exist quite nicely. Depending on the day and what is happening. I'm "fluid" when it comes to Athiesm and Religion. Like with my sexuality. Some days I'm queer, and some days I'm kinky, other days straight as can be, or even asexual. In any case, I certainly resonate in every way with your blog today. Actually I find snake handling churches super interesting lately.

Annie Sprinkle ([anniesprinkle.org](http://anniesprinkle.org))

Posted by: [Annie Sprinkle](#) | [October 15, 2007 at 11:15 PM](#)



One point I'd like to make is that it's mathematically provable that a contradiction implies anything. So, for example, starting with the premise that  $1=2$  I can prove, by an impeccable chain of logic, that there are space aliens named Xenu hanging on my butt.

Starting from the premise that the bible is consistent (given that it isn't) can lead to exactly the same conclusion. Or to the conclusion that skull-fucking Benjamin Sinclair will bring about the Second Coming.

And supposedly \*I\* have no firm foundation for my morality?

Posted by: Eclectic | [October 16, 2007 at 12:08 AM](#)



I am angry that, after my grandfather had open heart surgery and went through it without complications, every single member of the family thanked Jesus for it. I'm angry that exactly the same thing happened when my cousin's child was born 6 weeks ahead of time and survived without problems. I'm angry that on both occasions I didn't have the guts to say that the doctors and nurses who took care of them also deserved some credit.

Posted by: [Luis](#) | [October 16, 2007 at 01:46 AM](#)



Bravo. I would like to start a 'slow clap'.

>Clap.Clap.Clap.<>Clap.Clap.<>Clap.<>Clap.<>Clap.<>Clap.<>Clap.<>Clap.<>Clap.<>Clap.<

Brilliant piece. Thank you for giving me back my right to anger. Excellent, excellent, excellent.

(Please move here to Canada if the fight there makes you too weary. We'll getcha married to Ingrid in a day. Could be longer if there's a line.)

Posted by: [The Flying Trilobite](#) | [October 16, 2007 at 01:46 AM](#)



Greta. Wow. Extremely great piece. Can I say that again? You nailed it!!!

My personal favorite line of 'defense:'

"You're not really talking about the real religion, that's just a caricature of the real religion. I wouldn't believe in a God like that either. In order to argue against religion, you have to look at the subtle, nuanced, sophisticated views of theologians throughout history. You have to look at what those scriptures meant to all those believers in all those societies. After all, it's tradition! You have no respect for people or their traditions. You hate religion! You're on some kind of a witch hunt! An Inquisition even! How can you attack something you don't understand, and how can you understand it if you haven't even bothered to study it for 15-20 years?"

How can you even discuss or argue reasonably against something when you haven't read every scripture and theology book written in the last 2,000 years? Dawkins is a moron! I mean, why would you ask an evolutionary biologist about God?? He doesn't know anything about the subject. That's like asking a medical doctor to talk about ancient Mayan history."

Or words to that effect. Which I've actually had said to me by a family member recently across a dinner table.

Aaaarrrrggghhh.

Posted by: [BlackSun](#) | [October 16, 2007 at 02:36 AM](#)



I'm angry too. Well said for all the above.

I'd like to add a couple of things I'm angry about though.

I'm angry at other atheists who can't see why they should be angry. Who take religious crap regularly and don't seem to be bothered by it. Who put up with religion in others like it's a harmless eccentricity, and don't question or challenge the ridiculous unfounded beliefs of others.

I'm also increasingly angry when people compare a complete lack of respect for absurd religious beliefs to racism, sexism or xenophobia. Religion is a choice - race, sex and nationality are not - and as such derision is absolutely defensible.

Posted by: [Dave Child](#) | [October 16, 2007 at 02:46 AM](#)



This is a fantastic post. It's the first time I've read your blog, but definitely not the last!

(BTW, I was reading a previous comment with some skepticism and atheistic intolerance (Atheist/Tantric/Sufi/Methodist etc. etc., who's this nut? quoth I) but you know what? Annie Sprinkle is FUCKING AWESOME and can believe (&love) anything she damn well pleases! So can anyone else, really. End of intolerance. For now...)

Posted by: [Phill](#) | [October 16, 2007 at 03:09 AM](#)



Why should we oppose religion? Why does Richard Dawkins' radical ideas resonate with us? Because religious indoctrination can be very dangerous for us. It teaches us to accept authority for itself, not because we have proof of its validation. It encourages us to surrender responsibility for our own lives in favor of religious guidelines under the guise of "submitting to God's Will."

We must all accept responsibility for ourselves and our actions. We need to deliberately consider the paths we choose rather than allow them to be made for us by some guy in a nice suit who claims to speak for God. Religion encourages us to be lazy and submissive when we need to be responsible. It's one thing to use religious teachings as a means to inspire ourselves to become greater than we are; it's something else to use it as a crutch instead of actively taking control of our lives. Religion can be a powerful tool in our lives, but I find it's rarely used that way. So ultimately I don't seek to abolish religion by force, but I'd like to diminish its hold on our lives by encouraging more critical thinking in place of passive acceptance.

Posted by: [Michael](#) | [October 16, 2007 at 03:32 AM](#)



There's right, and then there's very right. This is just about the best thing I've read in quite a long time.

Posted by: [Rystefn](#) | [October 16, 2007 at 03:36 AM](#)



two words are all that's needed.

thank you.

Posted by: [Jessiqua](#) | [October 16, 2007 at 04:15 AM](#)



That was a tremendous post. I hope you will write a book describing the roots of our anger, because you really present a very strong explanation. Maybe I still incline more towards contempt than anger, but you convincingly argue the case that religion is often a malignant force. Anyway, thanks, this was a great read.

Posted by: Allienne Goddard | [October 16, 2007 at 04:20 AM](#)



Good job.

Posted by: RickD | [October 16, 2007 at 04:46 AM](#)



Wow, very impressive. I stumbled on your site and read that entire thing. It's like you took the words out of my mouth and put them much more eloquently on paper than I ever could have. Well said on all counts.

Posted by: Jessie | [October 16, 2007 at 04:51 AM](#)



Great post!

However, I would add some more things which make atheists angry:

1. When believers say that Hitler's/Stalin's and Mao's regimes were evil, because they were "atheistic".
2. When believers say, that Einstein believed in God, because he used that word from time to time
3. When believers are confronted with inconsistencies and errors in sacred texts and they say "it is only a metaphor!". Every stupidity can be metaphor for something real, it is only matter of fantasy to find out what it could be.
4. When believers are confronted with violent sacred texts and they dismiss them as "out-of-context", without explaining what the fucking context is, in which, for example, genocide is not evil.

Posted by: Infidel Michael | [October 16, 2007 at 05:00 AM](#)



wow,

thank you, you've done some valuable work with this.

wonderfully put together reasoning and facts, and well backed-up and resourced.

i'll probably be referring to this in my own arguments, i hope you don't mind.

thanks again, and keep up the work. :)

hopefully in our lifetime we'll see you get a legal marriage.

Posted by: Marky | [October 16, 2007 at 05:15 AM](#)



Great stuff! My new mission in life is to memorize this post so I can throw it back in the face of the dopey religious apologists who call me a "fundamentalist" or "evangelical" atheist or try to use the fallacious arguments that you've so brilliantly eviscerated in support of their "faith".

Posted by: heathen | [October 16, 2007 at 05:42 AM](#)



This is brilliant. For some time I have been trying to compile an itemised list of all the things that anger me about religion, and you have saved me the bother. Well done.

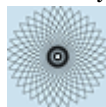
Posted by: Rudi Tapper | [October 16, 2007 at 06:13 AM](#)



This needed to be said,

now it needs to be forwarded.

Posted by: Jason Failes | [October 16, 2007 at 06:27 AM](#)



Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

This is completely invaluable.

Posted by: Mike Haubrich, FCD | [October 16, 2007 at 06:30 AM](#)



As an atheist, I find myself wanting to kill every religious I see every time I think of the sheer misery caused by religion. I know I don't have the right to do it, and I know that it won't do any good. However, that anger, that desire to grab a non-existent God by the throat and kill him -- just to show his followers how worthless and weak their god really is -- doesn't go away.

DEATH TO ALL RELIGIONS!!

Posted by: Matthew Graybosch | [October 16, 2007 at 06:32 AM](#)



Righteous!

I've been an angry, furious, \*livid\* atheist for years, for exactly the reasons you list (and many, many more). I'm delighted that the anger is growing. It needs to. It is \*necessary\* to get angry about evil things.

Posted by: Jack Rawlinson | [October 16, 2007 at 06:34 AM](#)



Don't you also get angry at the amount of money spent on churches and other religious moneypits, money that could be spent on things that actually help people?

Posted by: Willo the Wisp | [October 16, 2007 at 06:39 AM](#)



Your blog is awesome... :) Thank You.

Teitur Atlason  
Iceland.

Posted by: Teitur Atlason | [October 16, 2007 at 06:42 AM](#)



I'm a Christian and think you have quite a slanted viewpoint on Christianity. See, Christianity is about believing by faith that God created us, sent his son to die for our sins, etc (I'm sure you know the rest).

What, however, is one of the greatest commandments taught in the new testament? Love thy neighbor as thyself.

If Christians acted like Christians, you wouldn't be angry. At some point, after exposing you to God and the message of Life, we have to let you go. It's up to you to find God after that... We can pray for you, that their be some intervention by the Holy Spirit, but badgering you is NOT the answer NOR is segregating you or making you do things you don't wish to do.

I could go on and on about how I feel about some of the issues you posted above and I think you could agree that while we may not see eye to eye on all of them, that I can certainly understand your view point.

Some that you mentioned, I felt like had been bastardized. Like wives submitting to their husbands... what women do you know who would submit to their husband if they had a man of utter integrity who provided for her, served her, served others, and made her feel more loved than humanly possible? Probably all of them... And I don't mean submitted in the context you are familiar with, but submit as in allow him to lead, be apart of him. In order to understand some things in the bible, you have to understand that the other side of it (as I just mentioned). Women in abusive situations (verbal or physical) shouldn't submit, they should seek help.

Furthermore, using a Catholic church or any catholic official when talking about Christianity is not very fair. They are a small sub-set of Christianity and believe in many things that most of the Protestant denominations don't. The whole point of the Pope is so that he can be our representative to God. However, we don't need him. We can have our own personal relationship with God.

My challenge to every atheist I meet, is to ask them to read the bible and pray to the God (even if they don't think he exists). Do this for a few minutes for 3-7 days. If they don't feel a change in themselves, the longing for more, the need to understand what they are feeling than they can go along with their lives.

I'll accept them however they are but I want them to know that the few bad Christians could be tainting them and making them miss something wonderful.

I apologize if this is rough and ill-conceived, I thru it together rather fast... Thanks for taking the time to read.

Posted by: Brad | [October 16, 2007 at 06:45 AM](#)



Dave Child closed his comment with this line: Religion is a choice - race, sex and nationality are not - and as such derision is absolutely defensible.

In one sense he's right, people don't control their gender, race, etc. In another sense, he's not quite accurate about how religion is transmitted from generation to generation. The children of religious believers are immersed in an atmosphere of religiosity from infancy until adulthood. They cannot view the world from any lenses other than the ones with which their parents equip them for a long time. Even if they learn fairly early on that other lenses exist, they may not have opportunities to try on those lenses for a long time. By then, they may have comfortably settled into viewing the world through the lenses they've inherited. Having come from a conservative evangelical Christian perspective, my experience is that it takes a lot of hard work to shed that point of view. It requires something akin to Kuhn's paradigm shift and can be an extremely uncomfortable experience until one comes out the other side. Once there, one finds it has been liberating. Freedom of any kind never comes without a struggle.

Is religion chosen? No and yes. Children often are reared in such a way that it's very difficult to say no. Nevertheless, they can say no or yes in a way that will never be possible regarding gender, race, etc.

Posted by: ESVA | [October 16, 2007 at 06:48 AM](#)



Thank you.

Thank you for articulating. I have been too angry for too long to articulate clearly.

Posted by: John Randall | [October 16, 2007 at 07:07 AM](#)



Great post Greta!

Feel free to speak for this atheist any time you want. :)

Posted by: Tim | [October 16, 2007 at 07:09 AM](#)



As a lifetime member of the United Methodist Church, I just want you to know that I appreciate your post. You have plenty of good reasons to be angry; everything you said is valid.

If I could somehow speak for other Christians, I would apologize to you. I would abase myself and grovel. Nobody deserves that.

Despite the force and legitimacy of your anger, you still chose your words carefully, so that your anger is directed like a laser beam, rather than a shotgun blast. Your anger is much more effective that way, which is something Matthew Graybosch apparently does not understand.

I don't use the term "fundamentalist atheist," but I have often used the term "evangelical atheist." I am often annoyed by evangelicals on both sides of the fence.

One very minor quibble: unless you deliberately intend irony, you might want to find alternatives to "goddamn" and "damn." They don't really fit into the atheistic belief system. I recognize that they are rarely used for their literal meaning, and that is not how you intended to use them. But you chose all your other words so carefully.

Very good job, though. It all needs saying, and you said it quite lucidly. People need to keep saying this stuff until it sinks in.

Posted by: Stomper | [October 16, 2007 at 07:10 AM](#)



I have bookmarked this article, when someone asks me why i get angry over religion, i will link them here. :)

great article.

Posted by: zorn | [October 16, 2007 at 07:15 AM](#)



Brad posted while I was drafting mine. He doesn't get it. You spell it out for him, and he still doesn't get it. I can't improve his reading comprehension or apologize on his behalf, but I just want people to know we are not all like that.

"Catholics are a small sub-set of Christianity." I snickered out loud when I read that one.

Posted by: Stomper | [October 16, 2007 at 07:18 AM](#)



Brad posted while I was drafting mine. He doesn't get it. You spell it out for him, and he still doesn't get it. I can't improve his reading comprehension or apologize on his behalf, but I just want people to know we are not all like that.

"Catholics are a small sub-set of Christianity." I snickered out loud when I read that one.

Posted by: Stomper | [October 16, 2007 at 07:23 AM](#)



Yoyo quote: And that rock music is from the devil but beethoven beating his wife is cool and groovy.

Just to clear Beethoven's name, he didn't beat his wife because he never had one. He apparently was somewhat miserable (he was a composer and musician who was going deaf, after all!), but I don't recall that he was in the habit of beating women.

Anyway, great rant! It makes me grateful that I'm living in one of the more religion-free areas of Canada.

Posted by: TBDM | [October 16, 2007 at 07:24 AM](#)



Hey, you can too get married in this country... before there was gay marriage in Europe, there was gay marriage in the great Commonwealth of Massachusetts. 'Course, you'll have to stay here to enjoy all the associated rights. But that's just a bonus.

Seems like, however, there's no stance a Christian can take that won't make you angry... I mean, if they're anti-gay woman-subjugating hellfire preaching child abusers, you're angry, but if they're not, you're still angry. It seems like at some point, you should just let them off with being 'wrong', and reserve your anger for worse offenses. If you are angry at people just for being wrong, I guess you better enjoy being angry -- a lot.

Posted by: jy | [October 16, 2007 at 07:24 AM](#)



Sorry for the double post. Not sure how or why I did that.

Here's a link, showing Catholics are the largest denomination of Christians (if you'll trust wikipedia on this):

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_Christian\\_denominations\\_by\\_number\\_of\\_members](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Christian_denominations_by_number_of_members)

Of course, nothing in the original post claims that Catholics represent all Christians, or that all Christians should be tarred with the Catholic brush. There was no need for Brad to be defensive in the first place.

Posted by: Stomper | [October 16, 2007 at 07:26 AM](#)



Well, that was just part of the link. Not sure how to get the whole link to appear. Here's the rest of the link:

ons\_by\_number\_of\_members

Posted by: Stomper | [October 16, 2007 at 07:29 AM](#)



One more thing... you said:

'But unless you can point to the text to which these "fundamentalist" atheists literally and strictly adhere without question, then please shut the hell up about us being fundamentalist.'

But that's not the only thing fundamentalist means. That's one definition. Here's another one:

"strict adherence to any set of basic ideas or principles" (from Dictionary.com).

By that definition, no text is required, and I'm sure there are some atheists who could aptly be described as 'fundamentalist', in this sense. That's not necessarily the best word to use, but it certainly isn't wrong. So on that particular point, there's no reason to get angry: if people mean it that way, then they aren't wrong to use it that way.

Posted by: JY | [October 16, 2007 at 07:38 AM](#)



Great work, Greta. I want to let you know that we are exactly alike except that I'm a married heterosexual male. Good luck on getting married soon. Your time will come if all of us keep fighting with you. I have a wife and two kids who are firmly rational, and my kids are much smarter than I am. They will be a great force for change.

Hang in there and don't stop being angry.

- betalife

Posted by: betalife | [October 16, 2007 at 07:59 AM](#)

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