Humor in Religion

A Service at VIUUF on 18 February 2001

The following pages contain the script of a service at the Vashon Island Unitarian Universalist Fellowship on 18 February 2001. This serves as the record of that program for those who participated, those who are interested in doing something similar, or just to enjoy. It includes the Order of Service, some notes on the order and transitions, and the service itself.

For those of you reading this simply for enjoyment, please go past the programmatic notes to the core: the jokes, the readings, the songs. Everyone involved had great fun, particularly the ‘performers’. The delivery of the jokes, the readings, the music (harp and guitar) and the singing were very well done and brought many smiles to all who were there. The final song was a real gem … great lyrics, excellent solo and a choir that popped up in a joyful Gilbert & Sullivan style.

Many contributed to the selections that were used here … it eventually became a matter of sorting through a wealth of material to bring the time down to something manageable. This program came out of very fond memories of a similar program created years ago in the 1970’s by the Long Beach UU Church, and became a reality because of the caring efforts of Mary Lou Reed-Quinn of that church to provide an initial core of material from her files. We shamelessly borrowed from that core, added contributions from others, threw in our own ideas from the VIUUF, enjoyed the process of selecting and practicing, and ended up with one joyous hour on a Sunday in February.

Thanks very much to all who helped, participated, listened and enjoyed,

Dave Kearney
ORDER of SERVICE

Gathering Music
Ancient Chant

Welcome and Announcements
Fred Strong

Chalice Lighting

Hymn: “Enter, Rejoice and Come In” #361

Joys and Concerns

Children’s Time

Introduction
Dave Kearney

Humor in Religion
[Brought to you by courtesy of G.H.O.D.]*

Closing Hymn: “I’m the Very Model of a Modern Unitarian”
Ken Hicks and the Ad hoc VIUUF Choir

Discussion at Coffee Hour

* Good Humor Organizing Division of VIUUF: Carol Collins, Ken Hicks (Music Director), Elaine Kearney (Casting and Artistic Director), Dave Kearney, Laura Leonard (Joke Researcher Par Excel lance), Ann Lewis, George Lewis, Leslie McMichael (Harpist Extraordinaire), and Gary Preston with help from all the participants.

Credits and warm thanks to: Mary Lou Reed-Quinn of the Long Beach UU Church; Tom Lehrer; Rev. Christopher Raible; and many others.
Humor in Religion

Introductory sections as usual
Children’s Time

Intro

John …

Reading $ Bible in 50 Words $ John Collins

Thank you. Now for a few short jokes to get us in tune….

Jokes $ Group A -- series of jokes $ pop-ups from seats

Some of you may remember a satirist from the 60’s – Tom Lehrer. Here was one of his more popular songs, enjoyed by Catholics as well as others I give you Tom Lehrer himself…

Music $ Vatican Rag $ CD

Now for a few more light moments, which will be followed by a hymn

Jokes $ Group B -- series of jokes $ gather group in front

Music $ Hymn #26 “Coffee, coffee, coffee” $ all

Even without coffee, I think you’ll enjoy this further insight into the Bible …

Reading $ Adam $ Frank Petrie

Ken will now present us with a bit of music

Music $ ‘The Cowboy’s Mantra’ $ Ken Hicks

We have a few final jokes and a finale that can’t be beat, but first it’s time for the Offertory followed by one of our most traditional songs, though it’ll be a bit earlier than usual today…

Offertory (with ancient ‘Hogorian’ chant) – Hymn “Spirit of Life”

We hope you enjoy the final jokes and the ending musical piece. Listen carefully …

Jokes $ Group C -- series of jokes $ gather group in front

Music $ ‘I’m the Very Model of a Modern Unitarian’ $ Ken Hicks and chorus

VIUUF participants:
Carol Collins, John Collins, Pat Eastley, Marian Fitch, Ken Hicks, Charles Hitchin, Beth Holmes, Elaine Kearney, Da ve Kearney, Laura Leonard, Ann Lewis, George Lewis, Leslie Patheal, Frank Petree, Gary Preston, Calen Turner, Kristina Turner, Cynthia Zantz
Introduction

I must admit that the service this morning is not intended to present an intellectual dissertation on the role of humor in religion, or any other relationship between the two. No ... this morning we intent to laugh a bit at ourselves as Unitarians, as well as to enjoy some laughter about religion in general. But, unfortunately, not too general, as we have come across very little humor concerning the Eastern philosophies or religions. I guess we understand our Western gods a bit better. There are a number of churches and religions that deem it sacrilegious to laugh in church or other places of worship. So this morning I give thanks for this church where laughter is as welcome as tears, and just as healing.

Ironically, however, we Unitarian Universalists have sometimes been severely criticized for the lack of joy and celebration in our religion. Our sometimes dreary hymn singing and apparent inability to get into the spirit of a lively hymn has left some visitors in stunned disbelief. Music directors charge that we don't sing, period. We are too busy reading ahead to see if we agree with the words. And, you won't believe this, but some critics have had the nerve to call us "God's Frozen People"

Let me tell you a true story. A UU fellowship far to our south set in pastoral surroundings used to have on the Order of Service a quote from Thoreau: "I like the silent church before the service begins"

One day a friend of mine happened on the full quote somewhere. It is: "I like the silent church before the service begins better than any preaching."

He thought this was funny and passed it on to the minister. The next week the partial quote disappeared from the Order of Service and was never seen again.

Well. Those of us who have worked on this service believe there is plenty of joy in this church. And we hope to show some of it this morning.

However. As typical UUs, we take criticism seriously, so we come to you today after completing an intensive scholarly study on what makes people laugh.
We found that

- 10% of our congregation will laugh at absolutely anything—often quite inappropriately (and we hope you're all here);
- 83.92% have a very good sense of humor and will laugh if the material is at all funny (we're counting on you);
- 5.3% will laugh provided someone explains it to them (raise your hands and an assistant will come and explain it); and
- 3.02% would not laugh if the goddess herself came in and did stand up.

Based on these results, we have hand picked some songs and essays and jokes that, based on our research, are 98.63% guaranteed to cause you to laugh. In the unlikely event you don’t, we would have to regretfully conclude that our research is faulty and that the critics are correct, there is no joy in this church. Now who would you rather see come out on top? We thought so.

Now for the program. To get things underway we felt that we Unitarians needed a brief refresher course on the Bible, but given these busy modern times it seemed appropriate to condense it a bit.

John …

### The Bible in 50 Words, or 1 moderate sound bite

Stand up in place at your turn to deliver joke. Do NOT come to front. Tell joke slowly, slowly … no need to rush

A-1
A devout deist was arguing with a UU about the existence of God. He said: “OK, just prove that there is no God.”

The UU quipped: “You can’t prove there is no God … you have to take it on faith.”

A-2
Unitarianism is the only faith where prayers are addressed: “To Whom It May Concern”

A-3
A rabbi, a UU minister, and a Wiccan priestess decide to go on a fishing trip together. They go down to their local lake, rent a boat, and go out on to the lake for a day of fishing. As the afternoon approached, the trio became hungry - and realized that they had left their lunches on the shore of the lake.

The minister got out of the boat, walked across the lake, got his lunch, walked back, and sat down ... beginning to eat his lunch.

"You should have gotten all of our lunches!“, scolds the priestess. She then gets up, walks across the lake, picks up her lunch as well as the Rabbi's, walks back across the lake, and sits down ... handing the rabbi his afternoon meal.

The rabbi at this point is almost out of his mind, his eyes wide with shock. Finally, he manages to sputter.. "Wha.. what... how did you...?"

The minister grins at the priestess, nudges her, and asks "Do you think we should tell him about the rocks?"

The priestess looks at the minister, raises an eyebrow, and replies "... what rocks?"

A-4
Reminds me of the couple who died recently, and were walking the golden streets of the afterlife. There was more beauty and joy and pure contentment than either had ever dreamed imaginable.

One turned to the other and said “Can you believe how wonderful this is?”

The other replied, “yes, and to think we could have gotten here 10 years ago if we hadn’t eaten all that oat bran.”
A man bought a new Lamborghini. He wanted a blessing for it, so he went to his spiritual leader. “Father, can I have a blessing for my Lamborghini?”
“Certainly, my son, but what’s a Lamborghini?”

Incensed and disappointed, he marched right up the street to the first religious building that he saw, and asked the same question. The Rabbi said of course that he would, but again the question came back “I would love to say a blessing over your new possession, but what’s a Lamborghini?”

Finally, in desperation, the man went to the local UU Society. “Ms. Dibble-Fujimoto, can I have a blessing for my Lamborghini?”

“Wow”, she said, “a Lamborghini … may I have a ride?”

“Gladly”, he said. After the ride, he asked “Now, can I finally have the blessing for my beautiful vehicle?

“Sure”, she answered, “what’s a blessing?”
“The Vatican Rag”
by Tom Lehrer

Tom Lehrer’s intro: “Another big news story of year concerned the ecumenical council in Rome, known as Vatican II. Among the things they did in an attempt to make the church more commercial was to introduce the vernacular into portions of the mass, to replace Latin, and to widen somewhat the range of music permissible in the liturgy, but I feel that if they really want to sell the product, in this secular age, what they ought to do is to redo some of the liturgical music in popular song forms. I have a modest example here. It’s called *The Vatican Rag.*”

First you get down on your knees, Fiddle with your rosaries,
Bow your head with great respect,
And genuflect, genuflect, genuflect!

Do whatever steps you want, if you have cleared them with the Pontiff. Everybody say his own Kyrie Eleison,
Doin’ the Vatican Rag.

Get in line in that processional,
Step into that small confessional,
There, the guy who's got religion. …e'll
Tell you if your sin's original. If it is, try playin' it safer,
Drink the wine and chew the wafer, Two, four, six, eight,
Time to transubstantiate!

So get down upon your knees,
Fiddle with your rosaries,
Bow your head with great respect,
And genuflect, genuflect, genuflect!

Make a cross on your abdomen, When in Rome do like a Roman,
Ave Maria, Gee it’s good to see ya,
Get tin' ecstatic an' Sorta dramatic an'
Doin' the Vatican Rag!
Group B

Group to come up to front. Tell joke slowly, slowly ... no need to rush

B-1
A UU family moves into a new neighborhood. Their little girl finds a new playmate, and they are happily getting to know each other.

One day, the playmate says: “We’re Episcopalians, what are you?”

The UU child things for a minute and says: “I’m not sure, but I think we’re League of Women Voters.”

B-2
A man in Boston drove up McCatholics (or something like that) and said:
“I’d like a burger, but hold the guilt”
The worker was a priest, and said “I’m sorry, we don’t do special orders”
The first guy said “But what about your motto, ‘Have it your way’?”
Understanding, the priest said “Oh no, you’re thinking of ‘Unitarian King’ across the street.”

B-3
A UU was worried, and confided to a friend, “I want to invite a friend to the Sunday service, but our minister uses that J-word so much I’m afraid it will make my friend feel uncomfortable.”
When has our minister ever mentioned Jesus? asked the friend.
“I meant ‘Justice’.”

B-4
What is a Unitarian Universalist? An atheist with children.

B-5
Three religious persons are discussing when life begins.
One says: Life begins at the moment of conception.
The second says: Life begins at the moment of birth.
The UU says: You’re both wrong. Life begins when the last child goes to college and the dog dies.

B-6
A man was given a tour of Hell by the Devil. “This is the area where we keep people who have violated the food taboos of their religion”, the Devil said.
“Behind this first door are the Catholics .. they ate meat on Friday”
“Behind the second door are the Jews ... they all ate pork.”
“Behind the third door are the Unitarians.”
The man looked puzzled. The Devil clarified. “They all ate their entrée with their salad fork.”

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“Coffee, Coffee, Coffee”
by Rev. Christopher Raible
(to the tune of ‘Holy, Holy, Holy’)

Coffee, coffee, coffee,
Praise the strength of coffee.
Early in the morn we rise with thoughts of only thee.
Served fresh or reheated
Dark by thee defeated,
Brewed black by perk or drip or instantly.

Though all else we scoff we
Come to church for coffee;
If we're late to congregate, we come in time for thee.
Coffee our one ritual,
Drinking it habitual,
Brewed black by perk or drip or instantly.

Coffee the communion
Of our Uni Union,
Symbol of our sacred ground, our one necessity.
Feel the holy power
At our coffee hour,
Brewed black by perk or drip or instantly.
ADAM
By Nicholas Biel

On the third day I was dust, ordinary dust like you see on a country road in a dry spell, nothing expected of me, me expecting nothing neither.

On the sixth day he comes along and blows. “In my own image too,” he says, like he was doing me a favor.

Sometimes I think if he’d waited a million years by then I’d been tired maybe being dust. But after only two, three days, what can you expect? I wasn’t used to being even dust and he goes and makes me into Man.

He could see right away from the expression on my face I didn’t like it, so he’s going to butter me up. He puts me in this garden, only I don’t butter.

He brings me all the animals I should give them names -- what do I know of names? “Call it something,” he says, “anything you want,” so I make names up -- lion, tiger, elephant, giraffe -- crazy, but that’s what he wants.

I’m naming animals since 5 A.M., in the evening I’m tired I go to bed early, in the morning I wake up, there she is sitting by a pool of water admiring herself.

“Hello, Adam,” she says, “I’m your mate, I’m Eve.” “Pleased to meet you,” I tell her and we shake hands.

Actually, I’m not so pleased -- from time immemorial nothing, now rush, rush, rush; two days ago I’m dust, yesterday all day I’m naming animals, today I got a mate already.

Also I didn’t like the way she looked at me or at herself in the water.

Well, you know what happened, I don’t have to tell you, there were all those fruit trees -- she took a bite, I took a bite, the snake took a bite, and quick like a flash -- out of the garden.

Now I’m not complaining; After all, it’s his garden, he don’t want nobody eating his apples, that’s his business.

What irritates me is the nerve of the guy.

I didn’t ask him to make me even dust; he could have left me nothing like I was before -- and such a fuss for one lousy little green apple not even ripe (there wasn’t that much time from Creation, it was still Spring), I didn’t ask for Cain, for Abel, I didn’t ask for nothing, but anything goes wrong, who’s to blame? ... Sodom, Gomorrah, Bahel, Ararat ... me or my kids catch it, ... fire, flood, pillar of salt. “Be patient,” Eve said, “a little understanding. Look, he made it, it was his idea, it breaks down, so he’ll fix it.”

But I told him one day, “You’re in too much of a hurry. In six days you make everything there is, you expect it to run smoothly? Something’s always going to happen. If you’d a thought first, conceived a plan, consulted a specialist, you wouldn’t have so much trouble all the time.”

But you can’t tell him nothing. He knows it all.

Like I say, he means well but he’s a meddler and he’s careless. He could have made that woman so she wouldn’t bite no apple.

All right, all right, so what’s done is done, but all the same he should have known better, or at least he could have blown on other dust.
A COWBOY’S MANTRA

I ONCE WAS A BAPTIST, AND ON EACH SUNDAY MORN
I’D BE IN CHURCH PRAYIN’, JUST AS SURE AS YOU’RE BORN.
WE’D SIT THERE LIKE ANGELS, SING THE SWEET HARMONY;
BUT SIN AND SALVATION, ARE NO LONGER FOR ME.

CAUSE NOW I’M A BUDDIST, I CHANT MY MANTRA EACH DAY
BUT I SURE MISS THAT SINGING, IN THE GOOD GOSPEL WAY.
NOW I SING TO OLD BUDDHA, AND THE WONDERS OF ZEN,
WE’LL MEET IN NIRVANA, YES WE’LL MEET THERE THEN.

MY OLD FRIENDS THEY DON’T LIKE ME, SINCE I SHAVED MY HEAD;
AND THEY ALL TALK ABOUT ME, AS IF I WAS DEAD.
MY GOOD OLD ZEN BUDDIES, THEY ALL THINK I’M OK,
BUT I CAN’T GET THEM SINGING, MORE THAN ONE NOTE A DAY.

AS WE SIT THERE CROSS LEGGED, EATING BROWN RICE AND
BEANS,
WE CHANT OUT OUR MANTRAS, IN FOUR-PART HARMONY.
WE DON’T SING OF SALVATION, OR A HEAVENLY HOME.
IT’S ZEN GOSPEL SINGING, JUST “OM, OM, SWEET OM”.
Thermodynamic Question: Is Hell Exothermic (releasing heat) or Endothermic (absorbing heat)?

Asked at the University of Oklahoma School of Chemical Engineering, Final Exam question for May of 1997. One student, however, wrote the following:

First, we postulate that if souls exist, then they must have some mass. If they do, then a mole of souls can also have a mass. So, at what rate are souls moving into hell and at what rate are souls leaving? I think we can safely assume that once a soul gets to hell, it will not leave. Therefore, no souls are leaving. As for souls entering hell, let's look at the different religions that exist in the world today. Some of these religions state that if you are not a member of their religion, then you will go to hell. Since there are more than one of these religions and people do not belong to more than one religion, we can project that all people and souls go to hell. With birth and death rates as they are, we can expect the number of souls in hell to increase exponentially.

Now, we look at the rate of change in volume in hell. Boyle's law states that in order for the temperature and pressure in hell to stay the same, the ratio of the mass of souls and volume needs to stay constant.

Two options exist:

1. If hell is expanding at a slower rate than the rate at which souls enter hell, then the temperature and pressure in hell will increase until all hell breaks loose.
2. If hell is expanding at a rate faster than the increase of souls in hell, then the temperature and pressure will drop until hell freezes over.

So which is it? If we accept the quote given to me by Theresa Manyan during Freshman year, "That it will be a cold night in hell before I sleep with you" and take into account the fact that I still have NOT succeeded in having sexual relations with her, then Option 2 cannot be true....

Thus, hell is exothermic.

The student got the only A on the examination!
The Unitarian was at loose ends on one of those summer Sundays when the UUs choose not to meet. She decided to pay a visit to her Quaker cousins, and arrived promptly for their scheduled Friends Service meeting.

She took a seat on a pew among others gathering there. Several minutes passed as other Quaker Friends arrived and settled in silence. The Unitarian became increasingly aware of the firm bench upon which she was seated, and as more time elapsed she commenced to squirm and fidget. At last, with a discrete glance and nudge, she queried the gentleman to her left, "Excuse me, but when does the service begin??" The Quaker leaned her way and responded, "The service begins ... when we leave here."

A burglar broke into a house one night. He shone his flashlight around, looking for valuables, and when he picked up a CD player to place in his sack, a strange, disembodied voice echoed from the dark saying, "Jesus is watching you." He nearly jumped out of his skin, clicked his flashlight out and froze.

When he heard nothing more after a bit, he shook his head, clicked the light back on and began searching for more valuables. Just as he pulled the stereo out so he could disconnect the wires, clear as a bell he heard, "Jesus is watching you."

He freaked out. He shone his light around frantically, looking for the source of the voice. Finally, in the corner of the room, his flashlight beam came to rest on a parrot.

"Did you say that?" he hissed at the parrot. "Yep," the parrot confessed, "I'm just trying to warn you."

The burglar relaxed. "Warn me, huh? Who the hell are you??" "Moses," replied the bird. "Moses" the burglar laughed. "What kind of stupid people would name a parrot Moses??"

"Probably the same kind of people that would name their Rottweiler ‘Jesus’," the bird answered.
This song, sang with great skill by Ken Hicks and strongly supported by a wonderful small chorus group of “UU-ettes”, was a crowning end to a delightful morning ...

**I am the Very Model of a Modern Unitarian**

Sing to *I am a Major Model of a Modern Major General* from *Pirates of Penzance.*

I am the very model of a modern Unitarian,
Far broader than a Catholic, Hindu, Jew or Presbyterian.
I know the world's religions and can trace their roots historical
From Moses up to Channing, all in order categorical.
I'm very well acquainted, too, with theories theological,
On existential questions I am always wholly logical,
About most any problem I am teeming with a lot of views,
I'm full of fine ideas that should fill our church's empty pews.

(Chorus members:
We're full of fine ideas that should fill our church's empty pews.
We're full of fine ideas that should fill our church's empty pews.
We're full of fine ideas that should fill our church's empty empty pews.)

I quote from Freud and Jung and all the experts psychological.
I'm anti nuke, I don't pollute I'm chastely ecological.
In short, in matters spiritual, ethical, material,
I am the very model of a modern Unitarian.

(Chorus members:
In short, in matters spiritual, ethical, material,
We are the very model of a modern Unitarian.)

I use the latest language; God is never Father or the Lord,
But Ground of Being, Source of Life or almost any other word.
I never pray, I meditate, I'm leery about worshipping.
I serve on 10 committees none of which accomplish anything.
I give to worthy causes and I drive a gas conserving car,
I have good UU principles (although I'm not sure what they are).
I'm open to opinions of profound or broad variety,
Unless they're too conservative or smack of righteous piety.

(Chorus members:
Unless they're too conservative or smack of righteous piety.
Unless they're too conservative or smack of righteous piety.
Unless they're too conservative or smack of righteous pie-piety.)

I formulate agendas and discuss them with the best of 'em,
But don't ask me to implement, we leave that to the rest of 'em.
In short in matters spiritual, ethical, material,
I am the very model of today's religious liberal.

(Chorus members:
In short, in matters spiritual, ethical, material,
We are the very model of today's religious liberal.)
GET THEE OUT OF THE WAY!

Go Raise a Barn!

THY MOTHER WEARS ARMY BONNETS!

Step on it, Yoder!

PLACE IT UP THY BUTTER CHURN!

Amish Road Rage