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A Little dirty word.....

I'm really glad to be here. I love talking about atheism in churches. The most common response I receive after the talk at a slightly more religiously devout church is something like - I can't believe you're an atheist - you seem like such a nice guy!

Im going to talk about many things this morning - some more briefly than others. And I'd be happy to answer some of your expected questions after.

Im somewhat familiar with the Universalist Unitarian principles, but to be sure I looked them up. The seven principles of which Unitarian Universalist congregations affirm and promote are:

The inherent worth and dignity of every person;

Justice, equity and compassion in human relations;

Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations;

A free and responsible search for truth and meaning;

The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large;

The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all;

Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

All of these are noble and worthy tenants of what I consider the most reason-based, vs faith based group. I greatly respect the fact that there seems to be no supernatural beliefs or deities which your church officially believes in. In essence these principles are very similar to what humanists include in the humanist Manifesto and what most atheists agree with.

When I look at the the UU approach to religion - I like what I see. What I see is individuals not worshipping a deity - rather -worshipping life itself. There is no other nobel personal philosophy that to worship life itself without the need for a supernatural law-giver.

You are at an advantage over us atheists who mostly do not attend a liberal church such as this. Atheists have no church or official umbrella organization, but we have many other social networking sites such as Facebook, the Atheist Nexus website and even some political support organizations such as the Secular Coalition in Washington DC. Atheists do not have a manifesto such as the humanist manifesto or agreed upon tenants except for one: we reject the belief in the existence of any deity. Notice I did not say we reject the existence of a deity – jut the belief that there is no deity. Atheist's beliefs are not rooted In religious beliefs. Instead, they are rooted in philosophy, ethics, human experience and human values.

Technically - I am an agnostic atheist. I leave the remote - very remote possibility that there is a supernatural force somewhere in the universe - I just need the evidence to believe in one and gladly admit that we will probably never see one. Although it's very difficult to prove there is any god or gods, it's not as hard to prove, at least in part, that a god does not exist - at least any Abrihamic god. More on that later .

As for the question of why I have decided to not believe in the supernatural - it's simply because of the observation of evidence, or as in this case - no evidence of anything but natural laws, matter and energy. We can talk of the theological, ontological and cosmological arguments pro and con, but I have so much more I want to mention besides the standard 'does God exist' debate.

I should call myself an anti-theist - one who not only rejects the belief in a deity but one who thinks the world would be a better place without any type of religious dogma.. From sociologist Phil Zuckerman, who studies the link between religiosity and a country's societal health in his book *Society without God*, he shows that nearly all countries that are non-theistic have the highest values of society health, including women's right, free health care, free education, tolerance of minority groups, happier citizens and longevity among many other measurable values of how healthy a

country is. These countries include all the scandinavian countries - Denmark and Norway as well as France and Britain. So the next time a religious or political leader says the US is doomed without God they have no basis in their statement. And maybe, in an ironic twist of omnipotent power, if there is a God, he is rewarding all the atheistic countries of the world just as he is rewarding the east and west coast states with prosperity over the more religious southern states.

Besides being an way-out-of-the-closet atheist, I am also a skeptic. A skeptic is not a cynic - one who might see the negative in most things. I think a skeptic should be called an evidencialist instead - one who relies on the evidence of any claim which one might assert. I'm also a materialist - one who believes that the only thing in the universe is matter and energy, and a naturalist - one who believes that the natural laws are the rules that govern the structure and behavior of the natural universe and that nothing exists beyond the natural universe or, if it does, it does not affect the natural universe that we know.

Like most atheists, I did not have an epiphany nor a born-again experience like is told by emotionally-based belief systems. It was a slow and constant study for the truth - which I see in one of your guiding principles. I know that many Americans have a negative connotation of the word 'atheists' but they had the same reaction of the words women's rights, interracial marriage, homosexual and negro.

It's surprising to me that those who are atheists do not use that word simply because of an decreasingly negative connotation of the word. They might use freethinker, humanist and even universe unitarianist. Maybe there is a ghost image of a immoral philosophy when one uses the A word. Even if one does not use the A word, but believes in any of these humanistic world views then they ARE An ATHEIST. Being an atheist must be part of their religious definition. I for one celebrate the word. I wear an A pin. I promote the philosophy as a more peaceful and reasonable way to live.

Funny thing about this new atheism movement - I am the most outted atheist in the county, and not one negative act of discrimination or retaliation has happened to me. If I were superstitions I would be knocking on some wood right now. No death threats, no keyed cars, no taggers and no protests in from of my house. I know we don't live in the deep south - maybe it would be different. But here in conservative Republican-owned Orange County, if no harm has become of me, maybe the tides of tolerance are turning. Maybe it is safe to 'come-out'. Yes I have lost some friends - but were they really friends if they left my polite company simply because of a change in my philosophical opinion? So be it. I have made more true friends because of my decision to come out. They respect who I am any how I define myself.

I've learned that it is important to study and do some self-exploration to determine what one decides is the 'truth'.

Doing so defines oneself. The one more explores what one considers the 'truth', then one must define what he or she believes in. Some people insist they do not fit in a box or can be categorized, but I feel its important to research things of interest which is part of a 'self-examination' process. The more one defines what one believes - they more confident one is when discussing different belief systems with others. Plus it's a great way to self-educate oneself and often results in some very interesting conversation.

Religionists might also be looking for the 'truth', but their truth is based on worship, supernatural forces and the belief that salvation is real. This to me this not truth - it is a belief. As Richard Dawkins said, we should not be satisfied with the world given to us by a deity and accept that the sky is blue or HE is in total control of earthquakes. We should roll up our sleeves and get to work finding out HOW the natural world works. This is obsoletely the only way to improve well-being of others, increase longevity and increase economic growth. This is also a reason why the belief in Creationism results in the hinderance of education and science. If God made the universe in 10,000 years, and the bible is our history book, why study paleontology, geology or anthropology? If one is indoctrinated into this simplistic world view, one would never be inspired to explore any further into the 'how' question.

One of the reasons why I an outspoken atheist is that I generally see more harm in believing in religion than

helpfulness, and I'm trying to do something about it. I'm not against any religion as long as their followers do not cause harm to others, but unfortunately the top four religions of the world increase the suffering of the human condition without question. Psychologically, physically and emotionally. I would like to keep this talk positive, so I will not go in to the details of how people suffer but you can find the information on my website at backyardskeptics.com. A short list would be the pain of suffering of innocent children, the selfish act of sacrificing the lives and well being of others to obtain a place in a mythical heaven, and the support of religious moderates of their affiliated religious extremists.

I sometimes think of what would happen if I meet a young person who would be in a high political position in the future and I mention just one secular idea which would reveal to him or her a phrase that would be remembered - something like - life is not so supernatural. Maybe that person would grow up to be just a little more secular in their political decision making. Reminiscent of a Twilight Zone episode, I wonder that even a young agnostic 15 years old version of myself somehow met the older, current atheist 'me'. What would I look like now if I would have been inspired at an earlier age? Would I have seen my future truth sooner? Maybe another Hitchens? I dream of what could have been.

Talking of Christopher Hitchens:

I've listened and attended many of his debates and after the theist spend 15 minutes talking about how atheists have no 'standard of morals' Hitchens said this (and I am paraphrasing here): Tell me any moral thing a religionist can do that a atheist cannot. Then tell me all the immoral actions religionists have done in the name of their religion. Can you mention any immoral action any atheist has done in the name or atheism? No. In other words, both believers and atheists who have been in power has done some nasty things, but never has a war been waged under the atheist flag. Not one in the history of mankind. I guess atheists get their gold star for good behavior in this matter.

Some see me and others as passionate as 'angry' atheists. If you're in this camp I hope my knowledge of the misery religion creates doesn't lessen the sincerity of my convictions. I study articles and news reports every day on the drama and battles of pious people forcing their superstitious dogma on others. Church and state separatists, many of whom are religious, are keeping at bay deconstructionists who would like to instate a holy text as our constitution. Pugnacious;- probably - yes. Militant; probably not. Violent: absolutely not. If I were to name some of the unjust and unconstitutional accounts which deprive non-theists of their rights they would be:

40% of Americans won't vote for a non-believer even if they think he/she has the qualifications for the job

Up until 1962 atheists could not hold public office or serve

on a jury or testify in court

Atheists in the US are regularly denied custody of their children in family court.

An atheist's blogger in Iran must blog unanimously in fear of being executed

School boards 80 years after the Scopes trial, are spending time and money and resources to eliminate evolution in public schools

People are dying in Africa because the Catholic church promoting the idea that condoms cause AIDS

Married women are told by religious leaders to submit to their husbands even if they are abused by their husbands

In India small children are still sacrificed to receive a strong crop harvest.

People in Africa are being tortured and killed because of preachers

Parents and religious leaders terrorize their children with stories of torture

In Mormon religious cults are told they are going to hell for not marrying men who they are told to marry.

In Utah, 40% of homeless teenagers are gay because the families have kicked them out of the house because of their religious beliefs.

High schoolers in public schools, when trying to legally organize an atheist club are being stonewalled by HS administration.

And this is just the tip of the iceberg.

You don't have to be a non-believer to be an advocate of church and state separation, an idea presented in the first - not the second or third, but the first amendment to the constitution. Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof;

Jefferson also supported this idea as a wall of separation.

Many religionists of different creeds support the separation of church and state as well, because if there was a state-sponsored religion, it would be much harder to gain status as a different religion. I'm sure all minority religions and even some Christian sects that have been persecuted, such as Mormons, are in favor of Jefferson's idea.

Today there stands a 43' high cross in San Diego on public property that has been found to be unconstitutional under 9 different court cases, yet it still stands. Keep in mind I don't have any problem with religious symbols - as long as they are displayed on private land. Our government is a secular one which cannot hinder nor promote religion on public land, public city halls, or public schools. Im sure the Christians would agree with this idea if Muslims or Wickens, God forbid - atheists started placing their symbols on public land. Just down the freeway are two crosses on public land inside Camp Pendleton. American's United, a organization which support church & state violations is looking into litigations. I would surely support any war memorial which lends itself to all religions or no religion.

Let's talk about spirituality;

There are many things one can believe in and still claim there either is no god, which is generally called positive atheism or one who simply has no belief in a deity because there are currently no rational grounds that support its existence.

I know some atheists that, although not believing in a supernatural form of a god, they call themselves spiritualists - one who thinks there might be something unexplained which might exist, something beyond the material world. This is where I might diversify outside the tenants of the Universalist church. I need a better definition of the word 'spiritual'. It can mean anything one can think of, from ghosts to souls to an transcendent destination. If one is to call themselves spiritual, it would be much clearer to me if they explain exactly what they are referring to. If one believes in something more than themselves what is it exactly. If they can't explain it, why do they believe it? The Abrahamic religions have no problem explaining exactly they believe. A spiritualists should be no different.

My mother said to never talk about politics and religion in public - I guess this is the time to break some taboos. But I can't resist making a little fun of what's happening in the current church-riddled sparring of out potential future

leaders. I read that four of the Republican candidates were told by God to run for president. This seems like either God is a jokester, or three of them misunderstood the message, or if Obama is re-elected that four of them were wrong. Take your pick.

Many of you might remember the prayer rally Rick Perry had during the summer of 2011. Over 20,000 Christians prayed for rain - but the long drawn-out drought continued. Two weeks after the rally there was an atheist convention in the same area with only 400 non-believers. It rained. Maybe if there is a god he's trying to send a message to the Christians.

Now it time for all the kids in the room to cover their ears - for what comes forth will be of distain and anguish – OK – I got a little over the top there.

When I hear the words “Thank God for my blessings or “thank heavens I don’t have cancer” it denotes that whoever is uttering these phrases that they believe in a God that is omnipotent – all powerful. If they are just saying this out of habit or metaphorically, that’s fine and non consequential. But if they are true evangelical Christians

and really believe that there is a transcendent power that's neither matter nor energy, that has come down to this pale blue dot in the universe to heal or protect us humans, I find that quite disturbing and selfish – even disguising, that their God has blessed them and not the millions of innocent children who have died from horrible diseases. This is a slant on religionists worst nightmare – the problem of evil. Why is there so much suffering among humans which appears totally random in all religions, cultures and countries? If you're an evangelistic Christian you'd blame it on original sin, which to me seems one of the most far-fetched, superstition and infantile ideas mankind has created.

I hinted earlier that I might have partial proof that god does not exist. One way to do this is by selecting a particular god, let's say the Christian God, and examining one of his promises – that He will answer intercessory prayers. Although there are many claims that can be examined, answering prayers seem to be one of the major claims most religionists make.

According to the *Washington Post*, "...prayer is the most common complement to mainstream medicine, far outpacing acupuncture, herbs, vitamins and other alternative remedies

There's been 49 prayer studies in the past 52 years and in all but two studies, prayer had no effect, and in two the result was inconclusive. So what do believers have to say of these studies?

Response from believers – God cannot be coerced - doesn't

answer to humans. He prefer to be 'hidden' . He knows you're doing the study so He will change the study to hide Himself.

Using our critical thinking skills, how wold we respond to this critic??

1. How does anyone know what God prefers to do? He wasn't hidden 2000 years ago.

2. Do humans have the power to change God's mind simply by doing a study? Wouldn't it be great if there WAS a difference in people being prayed for? Look at all the scientific work which would follow. Billions of dollars to find out why one sect would have healed faster than another sect or one from a different religion, or no religion. I suspect the final explanation might be one of a natural one, possibly leading to the improvement of all of mankind.

3. What if there are conflicting prayers? Example: What if Christians were praying to heal the sick and other Christians were praying to keep the study neutral?

4. If any scientific study knew that God could change the result – why do any study at all?

5. And finally - What about the poor people who would have been saved by prayer but weren't because God had changed His mind??

This is an inquiry of just one claim. Take more claims and if they have a built-in fallacy which is easily debunked or

cannot stand up to critical analysis, they will add more validity to the reality that a supernatural God does not and cannot exist.

In a small way, I am trying my best to make our future world better for our future generations. By exposing the inconsistencies and hidden immoral tenants of the Abrahamic religions, I hope more people will question their own convictions, indoctrinated or not, and will move their principles to reason and science vs. faith and belief in the supernatural. IMHO this is the only way to improve the human condition, decrease sectarian violence, and even keep our political parties from becoming more divisive. Maybe after discovering for yourself how religion poisons everything, you too might decide to join me on my quest for a better world.

If you attend this church you're starting at the right place - from one of knowing that a free and responsible search for truth and meaning is a worthwhile endeavor.

I applaud Universalist Unitarians for your humanistic approach to religion.

Of all the religions in the world, the UU are the most reasonable of them all.

Of all of the religions in the world that obfuscate their

malevolent underlings UU is not one of them

UU tenants promote peace and understanding

Let's talk about how doing nothing is worse than doing something.

If you see a person being mugged in from of your home, you'd probably call the police. If you saw a house on fire, you'd call the police. If you believed a law was unjust, you would vote against it. But what about if you saw pain and suffering in the world and had the power to help, but didn't. If you have a crystal ball to the future and saw one political system or religion bring the world to its knees, you'd try and influence future generations to avoid that demise. In this instance, doing nothing is worse than doing something – it's making the immoral action of not helping others. The morality question is simply put this way: If you have a choice between two instances, you always choose the one which causes the least amount of suffering.

In a small way, I am trying my best to make our future world better for our future generations by making and acting on this moral dilemma .

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divisive.

I'll end with a message from Ronald A. Lindsay **director from the Council for Secular Humanism.**

Religion has a powerful message. Its power is exhibited by the fact that it remains attractive to most inhabitants of this planet, even when belief in supernatural agents has lost all intellectual respectability. In the infancy of humanity, belief in supernatural agents had some empirical justification. The existence of the gods seemed to explain things that otherwise escaped our understanding. If our ancestors did not understand the natural causes of wind, rain, drought, flooding, fertility, disease, and so forth, it's not surprising that they attributed such phenomena to an agent or agents, and obviously such agents had to possess powers far exceeding our own. But for modern humans—except for those who are ignorant, willfully or otherwise—the gods explain nothing.

I hope my talk has promoted you to think a bit more about how fortunate you are in this minority community of life worshippers and maybe a little incentive to not be afraid to admit what used to be a little dirty word - atheist.

Thank you

