

A closer look at *Religulous* (video-script)

Fragment 1:

- Bill Maher: *I certainly, honestly believe religion is detrimental to the progress of humanity. You know, it's just selling an invisible product, it's too easy. These questions about what happens when you die... They so freak people out that they will just make up any story and cling to it – you know, things that they know can't be true. People who are otherwise so rational about everything else, and then they believe that on Sunday they're drinking the blood of a two thousand year old God. That's a dissonant in my head... I can't... I have to find out, I just have to find out, I have to try...*

First set of prejudices: religion is based on fear or stupidity

Prejudice 1: religion is based on fear...

so let's find some religious people who fear hellish punishment!

Fragment 2:

- Evangelical Christian: *Let me ask you this question: What if we're right and you're wrong? We gonna make it and you ain't.*
- Bill Maher: *If you're being good just to save your ass just because, "Ooh, they might be right and I just want to double down here and make sure that when I get up to the pearly gates, that St. Peter doesn't say to me, 'Sorry, asshole, you had the wrong religion. Enjoy Hell, buh-bye!...' " That's not a good reason, and you know that.*

indeed Jesus criticizes people like some Pharisees in his time, who 'do good' to obtain, in social terms, some kind of 'heavenly' reward and to avoid being punished...

Jesus desires people to be guided by unconditional love, that's why he says: "When you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing..." (Matthew 6:3)

Prejudice 2: religion provides solace to people in distress...

because Bill Maher says so!

Fragment 3:

- Bill Maher: *I think being without faith is something that's a luxury for people who were fortunate enough to have a fortunate life. You know, you go to prison and you hear a guy say, "You know what, buddy? I got nothing but Jesus in here." I completely*

understand that. I think not having faith is a luxury sometimes. If you're in a foxhole, you probably have a lot of faith, right? So I get that. But you guys aren't dumb. You're smart people.

Fragment 4:

- Bill Maher: *When I was 17, my first girlfriend dumped me, and I was sad in a way I'd never been sad. You know, your first dumping is the worst. And at that point, you're very vulnerable to any sort of connection with, you know... I didn't get like Jesus-religious, but I did think a force out there was communicating to me through song lyrics or... numerology I was very interested in for a while.*
- Companion: *You said you were groping for something at that time.*
- Bill Maher: *You know, you make up an imaginary friend who loves you, is sympathetic to you and has a plan for you. It's much more important. He didn't have to love me, God, He just had to be working for me. You know, He's like an agent.*

and yet religious people like Jesus, Mahatma Gandhi and Oscar Romero put themselves in distress and in a socially precarious situation because they were moved by the fate of the suppressed and the outcasts...

because they were moved by God (Compassion) they left their 'comfort zone'...

Prejudice 3: religious people are dumb...

so let's find some scientifically arguable statements from certain religious people!

Fragment 5:

- Bill Maher: *Do you believe in evolution?*
- Mark Pryor (United States Senator, Arkansas): *You know my... I don't know. Clearly the scientific community's a little divided on some of the specifics of that and I understand that.*
- Bill Maher: *I don't think they are.*
- Senator: *No, no, well...*
- Bill Maher: *I think they pretty much agree.*
- Senator: *I don't know how it all happened. I'm certainly willing to accept the scientific premise.*
- Bill Maher: *It couldn't possibly have been Adam and Eve 5,000 years ago with a talking snake and a garden, could it?*
- Senator: *Well, it could've possibly been that.*
- Bill Maher: *Come on. See, this is my problem. I mean, you're a senator. You are one of the very few people who are really running this country. It worries me that people are running my country who think who believe in a talking snake.*
- Senator: *You don't have to pass an IQ test to be in the Senate, though.*

Second set of prejudices: science and religion try to answer the same kind of questions

Prejudice 4: Christians assume the Bible is also a book of modern natural science... so, indeed, let's find some Christians who think like that!

Fragment 6:

- Ken Ham (Answers in Genesis USA; Creation Museum, Petersburg, Kentucky): *As you first come into the Creation Museum, there's going to be a sense of "This is something really big." This is something awe-inspiring, something great here. We can answer the questions of the skeptics that attack the Bible's history. We admit that we start from the Bible here to teach them how to think. Really, in a nutshell, we're saying, the Bible's true from Genesis to Revelation. We're building the whole place for about \$27 million. I have many people say to me, "As a Christian, can't you believe in evolution?" I say, "Well, you got a problem. God made a man and a woman." If you believe in evolution, the woman had to come from an ape woman.*
- Fragment taken from the movie *The Planet of the Apes: All right, but you're so damned ugly.*
- Ken Ham: *This is what we call the main hall here. Immediately, people see dinosaurs and people together, which is very different to the idea of the evolutionists who say dinosaurs died out 70 million years ago or so, and so they didn't live with humans. They see an animatronic dinosaur over here. Two animatronic baby T-Rexes and two animatronic children. It's basically just to give people a wow factor as they come in here.*
- Promotional video: *How to share your faith effectively and Biblically, to be able to reason with people, learn to circumnavigate or go around the person's intellect...*
- Bill Maher: *There's plenty of people who would say, "Well, it's just my faith." But that's not good enough for you. You say, "No. We can basically reconcile the science with what's in Genesis."*
- Ken Ham: *We're an organization that – to put it in a nutshell – is telling people that the Bible's history is true, its history beginning in Genesis.*
- Bill Maher: *Scientists line up overwhelmingly on one side of this issue. It would have to be an enormous conspiracy going on between scientists of all different disciplines in all different countries to have such a consensus. That doesn't move you?*
- Ken Ham: *No, not at all, because from a Biblical perspective, I understand why the majority would not agree with the truth. Man is a sinner. Man is rebelling against his creator.*
- Bill Maher: *All these scientists are sinners?*
- Ken Ham: *Well...*

and yet Bill Maher also interviewed religious people who make a clear distinction between the concerns of modern science and the concerns of the Bible:

Fragment 7:

- Bill Maher: *We have been talking to so many religious people and many of them believe the earth is 5,000 years old.*
- Father George Coyne PhD (Vatican Observatory): *If you're a scientist, you can't accept that.*
- Bill Maher: *Now you recently were the director of the Vatican Observatory. A Vatican astronomer. It's one of those terms like "gay Republican" – you know, you just don't expect it.*
- Father George Coyne: *I'm not getting into that.*
- Bill Maher: *No, no, no, I'm not asking you to.*
- Father George Coyne: *It's not that the church has the idea, you know, they're gonna train us up so we can be the first ones out there to baptize those extraterrestrials before the Mormons get at 'em. The reason is simply historical facts. John Paul II, for instance, said evolution in the neo-Darwinian sense is no longer a mere hypothesis. I mean, he said that. It's in writing.*

Fragment 8:

- Father George Coyne: *The Christian Scriptures were written between about 2,000 years before Christ to about 200 years after Christ. That's it. Modern science came to be with Galileo up through Newton, up through Einstein. What we know as modern science, okay, is in that period. How in the world could there be any science in scripture? There cannot be. Just the two historical periods are separated by so much. The Scriptures are not teaching science. It's very hard for me to accept, not just a literal interpretation of scripture, but a fundamentalist approach to religious belief. It's kind of a plague. It presents itself as science and it's not.*

**too bad Bill Maher didn't get into this man's faith a little further...
but then again, he was trying to prove religion to be ridiculous...**

Prejudice 5: Christians consider the Bible mainly to be a source of morality... but there is a better source, provided by ('objectively' perceived) nature!

Fragment 9:

- Bill Maher: *You see so many nice people trying to make it about something good and yet it turns into not just corrupt, but, like, fucking-little-kids corrupt and burning-people-alive corrupt... I mean, really evil shit.*

Fragment 10:

- Bill Maher: *If I ever had to swear an oath, why would I want to put my hand on the King James Bible? I think I could find more morality in the Rick James Bible.*
- Additional fragments: *God hates fags... The Constitution does not grant to homosexuals the right to perform sodomy.*

Fragment 11:

- Bill Maher: *Man is who wrote the Bible. Nature made gay people.*
- Pastor John Westcott (Exchange Ministries, Winter Park, Florida): *Nobody's born gay. There's no scientific or...*
- Bill Maher: *Really? Have you ever met Little Richard?*
- Pastor John Westcott: *We can look at creation and say, "What's the normal order?" A man has a penis. A woman has a vagina. Let's just be blunt. There's no scientific data that proves that anyone is... there's no gay gene.*
- From an interview with Dr. Dean Hamer (Author – The God Gene):
 Bill Maher: *And you also discovered the gay gene?*
 Dr. Dean Hamer: *Yes.*

Homosexuality doesn't harm anyone, but what if we discover the 'serial killer gene' or the 'pedophile gene'... should we let nature 'have its way'?

We already tried to develop a moral system out of so-called 'objective' scientific theories... remember Nazism and its racial theories?

Third set of prejudices: the Bible is false because it is full of mythological stories with an underlying political agenda

Prejudice 6: the Bible is mainly a political book...

written to sustain the power of misogynistic men who are also against homosexuals...

Fragment 12:

- Bill Maher: *Are you ever bothered by many things that are in Christianity that are not in the Bible? Like original sin. Immaculate conception. The virgin birth is only in two of the Gospels – popes. Are you worried that these things came not from the founders, the people that wrote this book, but from – and this is indisputable – but from men, from human beings who came after? And when I say men, I mean people with penises.*

Fragment 13:

- Bill Maher: *This is all coming from the Bible which you believe...*
- Pastor John Westcott: *Right...*
- Bill Maher: *...to be the word of God.*
- Pastor John Westcott: *I do.*
- Bill Maher: *All of the proscriptions against homosexuality come from the Old Testament. Jesus never said a word about homosexuality. And if it's so important, why didn't he ever bring it up?*
- Pastor John Westcott: *You know, we could pick lots of little things that he didn't specifically talk about...*
- Bill Maher: *But this is a big thing!*

and yet women are granted the lead role in the most important story of Christianity – the story of the resurrection... (Bill Maher knows this)

and yet many Christians have no problem whatsoever with homosexuals (as is shown by a Catholic, Franciscan monk)

Fragment 14:

- Catholic, Franciscan monk (train tourist in Amsterdam): *I'm a monk.*
- Bill Maher: *A monk...*
- Franciscan: *Franciscan...*
- Bill Maher: *What do you think of homosexuality? Do you think that's... the Bible is against it.*
- Franciscan: *No, the Bible is not against it.*

- Bill Maher: *The Bible's not against homosexuality?*
- Franciscan: *If you are born homosexual, you are to stay there. You have to be happy.*
- Bill Maher: *But that's what the Bible says?*
- Franciscan: *What the Bible means to say, yeah.*
- Bill Maher: *Oh, what the Bible means to say! Now that's a good book.*

Prejudice 7: mythological metaphors in biblical stories should be considered as having merely the pretension to be historical facts – which makes these stories sound stupid

Fragment 15:

- Bill Maher: *This man lived inside of a fish for three days?*
- Steve Burg (Ex-Jew for Jesus in Monsey, New York): *Miraculously, yes.*
- Bill Maher: *Steve, Steve, Steve.*
- Steve Burg: *You don't believe in miracles. That doesn't mean they don't exist.*
- Bill Maher: *Of course not! I'm not 10! He lived in a fish. Come on. Your bar on miracles is pretty low, I gotta tell you, bro.*
- Steve Burg: *Well, whatever.*

Fragment 16:

- Bill Maher: *How can smart people... how can they believe in the talking snake, people living to 900 years old and the virgin birth? And you know, that's my question. You guys have your own questions.*

Excuse me, Bill, it seems to me that you don't know how to read poetic or epic literature that tries to express universally human experiences...

Bill, you seem to *imitate* your religious counterparts in the way you treat biblical stories (only to come to different conclusions)

May I invite you to consider the following facts (after a brief scientific survey):

Our ancestors knew very well how to write and interpret 'stories' and how they function:

FACT 1: In the biblical 'Second Book of Samuel' the prophet Nathan tells a fictitious story to king David in order to make David reflect on his own life experience

FACT 2: Plato wrote a famous, indeed 'fictitious' allegory about prisoners in a cave to express a universal truth about the human condition

FACT 3: In Antiquity and the Middle Ages the biblical scriptures were considered to have different meanings, the literal meaning being the least important...

See for example the adage: "Littera gesta docet, quid credas allegoria, moralis quid agas, quo tendas anagogia"

"The letter teaches the actions, the allegory [teaches] what you believe, the moral how you act, the anagogical where you are going"

- Bill Maher: *How can smart people... how can they believe in the talking snake, people living to 900 years old and the virgin birth? And you know, that's my question.*

Well, Bill, they don't... which brings me to

FACT 4: Consider what Geert Groote, an important Christian thinker, writes around 1383:

"No child believes that the trees or the animals in the fables could speak. After all, the literal meaning of the poems or of the poetic, ornate writings precisely is their figurative sense, and not the sense the bare words seem to hold at first glance. Who would actually believe that, as the book of Judges tells it, the trees would choose a king and that the fig tree, the vine, the olive tree and the bush would have responded to that choice in a certain way? Christ uses all kinds of images in his teaching. Matthew the evangelist even says that Christ never spoke without images. And even though it is Christ who uses these images, I do not think that those things actually (literally) took place..."

FACT 5: the New Testament writers use common cultural mythological patterns to convey the historical, subjective experience of people with Jesus

you knew that, Bill, although you made some mistakes in your comparison between 'Horus' and 'Jesus' (a little more research would have prevented that)

Fragment 17:

- Bill Maher: *Moving on. Does it ever bother you that the story of a man who was born of a virgin was resurrected? Your bio was something that was going around the Mediterranean for at least 1,000 years. We've got Krishna who was in India 1,000 years before Christ. Krishna was a carpenter, born of a virgin, baptized in a river.*
- Actor who plays Jesus at The Holy Land Experience (Orlando, Florida): *Are you saying that was written in history? That was written down in history, is that what you're saying?*
- Bill Maher: *Absolutely, there's the Persian god Mithra, 600 years before Christ. Born December 25th, performed miracles, resurrected on the third day, known as the Lamb, the Way, the Truth, the Light, the Savior, Messiah.*
- Additional fragment: *Stop! Blasphemer!*
- Jesus impersonator: *All I know is that I don't go by that hearsay. I go by the word of God. I know that's why I believe.*

- Holy Land Experience tourist: *Well, I believe it because it's truth.*
- Bill Maher: *Believe it, yes. But there's a difference between truth and what you believe.*
- Tourist: *In the Bible it tells us that all things are possible with God, okay?*
- Bill Maher: *Study the religions of the Mediterranean region for a thousand years before. Many of the gods were born on December 25th.*
- Tourist: *No, it's not.*
- Bill Maher: *It's not a new one.*
- Other tourist at Holy Land Experience: *It's funny you should bring that up because of course in "Star Wars: Episode I – The Phantom Menace," Anakin is born to a virgin. People see that and say, "Wait a second. Where have we heard that before?" That's not original.*
- Bill Maher: *But the Jesus story wasn't original.*
- Tourist: *How so?*

well, now you're at it...

[EXCURSION: JOSEPH CAMPBELL INTERVIEWED BY BILL MOYERS]

so it's not because the story of Jesus is written with certain universally, sometimes 'incompatible' mythological and poetic images that the experience expressed by them is not 'true'...

FACT 6: the New Testament writers also refer to Jewish metaphors and stories from the Old Testament to express how people experienced and interpreted the personality of Jesus

once again you knew that, Bill...

Fragment 18:

- Evangelical Christian: *How can you go back into the prophets and the prophets specifically specifies that certain things...*
- Bill Maher: *Well, first of all, the New Testament came after the Old Testament. We agree to that?*
- Evangelical Christian: *I agree to that, but that doesn't mean anything.*
- Bill Maher: *All it means is the people that wrote the New Testament read the Old Testament and then made the prophesies fit.*
- Evangelical Christian: *They can't make it fit if something didn't happen.*
- Bill Maher: *Of course they can.*
- Evangelical Christian: *Then you're saying the Bible is fictitious?*
- Bill Maher: *I am.*
- Evangelical Christian: *Can't be.*

- Bill Maher: *I am.*

and yet, Bill, you still believe metaphors to be 'literal' claims (as you continue to imitate your religious counterparts)

Fragment 19:

- Bill Maher: *We do all know that those texts don't match.*
- Dr. Francis Collins (Head of Human Genome Research Project): *Yeah, sure. Would you expect them to?*
- Bill Maher: *I'm surprised that things that are very important to the story like the virgin birth isn't in all four of them.*
- Dr. Francis Collins: *Wouldn't you really expect that kind of discordance when you're thinking about the way in which these documents came into being?*
- Bill Maher: *But you'd think if you were one of Christ's biographers, that would be sort of an important thing not to leave out. Oh, God, he was also born of a virgin.*
- Bill Maher: *They don't notice the virgin birth. You know, I think that is something if you were any sort of reporter you'd put into the story. What editor looks at the facts and goes, "Yeah, but take out the thing about the virgin birth. That's not interesting."*

Prejudice 8: scientific truth replaces mythological truth

Fragment 20:

- Bill Maher: *But in layman's terms, Jesus was nuts. Moses "Stay here, I'm going up and getting the 10 Commandments right from God." You know, 'cause one thing I've also...*
- Dr. Andrew Newberg, MD (Author – Why We Believe What We Believe): *We didn't have brain-scan technology back then, so it's a hard to tell.*
- Bill Maher: *I know, but if a guy says he went up on a mountain and he talked to God, and He talked to him through a burning bush, that guy's a cuckoo.*

once again, Bill, if you think these fictitious stories are to be taken literally... metaphors should not be confused with the facts they refer to...

consider, for example, the story of Cain and Abel in the book of Genesis

it is a fictitious story, but it does convey a universal truth about human beings, namely that we can be very jealous sometimes...

so fictitious stories can be true in the sense that they express universal human experiences does science tell you what to do with your jealous tendencies?

no, science can merely explain how we become jealous

the myth of Cain and Abel does not explain jealousy (that could be a scientific concern)

the myth of Cain and Abel makes us wonder what we should do with our envy

so the scientific truth (explanation of the origins of envy) coexists with the mythological truth (which tries to answer the existential question how to deal with envy)

the question whether or not we should be guided by envy or compassion is not a scientific one, it is an existential question...

existential questions are treated by our mythological, philosophical, religious and spiritual scriptures...

Fourth set of prejudices: religion is the real source of all evil in the world

Prejudice 9: God is all powerful but is actually a sadist who likes people to suffer

Fragment 21:

- Bill Maher: *God is super powerful. He can do anything.*
- Jesus impersonator: *Sure.*
- Bill Maher: *Why doesn't he just obliterate the devil and therefore get rid of evil in the world?*
- Jesus impersonator: *He will.*
- Bill Maher: *He will? What's he waiting for?*
- Jesus impersonator: *End times.*
- Bill Maher: *But why play it out like that? Why make it a game?*
- Jesus impersonator: *Well, it's not necessarily a game.*

Fragment 22:

- Bill Maher: *What was the Holocaust? Why was that good?*
- Jesus impersonator: *You know, God had a plan for that. Maybe it's to cause...*
- Bill Maher: *I wonder if you would have thought that if you were one of the people being pushed into an oven.*
- Jesus impersonator: *Well, you know what? It's like trying to explain to an ant how a TV works. That's... God's ways are so much higher than ours. There's no way you can understand that.*

Fragment 23:

- Dr. Andrew Newberg: *How we define what is crazy or not crazy about religions is ultimately up to how we define crazy. If you define mental illness as anyone who hears a voice talking to them, then anyone who has heard the voice of God is crazy.*
- Additional fragments: *She talks about a prophecy that these children needed to die. The dispatcher asked "Why did you do this?" "I was told to." "Who told you?" "God." ... There is nothing He may not ask of thee?*

but what if God's power is the power of a Love which dares to be vulnerable 'in all circumstances', and that in this paradoxical sense God is 'all powerful'?

Jesus dared to be vulnerable, consumed by Compassion, 'in all circumstances'...

taking sides with the victims of violence and diseases of any kind...

Prejudice 10: 'the good guys' need to battle for Truth against the sources of evil... to wipe out evil...

let's remember Bill Maher's statement at the beginning of his documentary

Fragment 24:

- Bill Maher: *I certainly, honestly believe religion is detrimental to the progress of humanity.*

after a supposedly 'unprejudiced', non-propagandist investigation, Bill Maher's conclusion at the end:

Fragment 25:

- Bill Maher: *The plain fact is, religion must die for mankind to live.*

but Bill, don't you think that's exactly how intolerance and violence keep on returning in the world?

[EXCURSION on Stalin and his atheist regime – comparison with other sacrificial systems]

a wise man once said: "satan cannot cast out satan"... I think he was right...

Prejudice 11: so-called secularists differ radically from so-called religious people

Fragment 26:

- Bill Maher: *Yeah, you could be right. I don't think it's very likely, but, yes, you could be right, because my big thing is I don't know. That's what I preach. I preach the gospel of I don't know! I mean that's what I'm here promoting – doubt. That's my product. The other guys are selling certainty, not me. I'm on the corner with doubt.*

really, Bill, you aren't looking for certainty, for evidence?

Fragment 27:

- Evangelical Christian: *It's a faith thing.*
- Bill Maher: *But why is faith good? Why is believing something without evidence good?*

and Bill, are you sure that only religious people are guided by fear?

Fragment 28:

- Bill Maher: *Religion is dangerous because it allows human beings who don't have all the answers to think that they do.*

Fragment 29:

- Bill Maher: *This is why rational people, anti-religionists, must end their timidity and come out of the closet and assert themselves. And those who consider themselves only moderately religious really need to look in the mirror and realize that the solace and comfort that religion brings you actually comes at a terrible price.*

in the end, your adversary becomes your 'mimetic double' – a true story, as ancient as humanity itself...

Fragment 30:

- Jesus impersonator: *What if you're wrong?*
- Bill Maher: *What if you're wrong?*

Fragment 31:

- Bill Maher: *So how do you convince people of what's the true faith?*
- Catholic priest (at the Vatican): *You don't, forget it. You just have to live and die with their stupid ideas. I'm sorry. What are you gonna do?*

Well, if you're really concerned with a peace that is not obtained by violent means, go educate yourself before you turn to fundamentalism, be it religious or atheist...

There's Another Story out there, for you to discover...