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Snark Wars

Kerry S. Walters
Gettysburg College

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Abstract

The latest volley in the war of words waged by cultured despisers of Christianity was fired on Christmas Day. Celebrity astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson, host of the television series "Cosmos," bushwhacked Christians with this tweeted broadside: "On this day long ago, a child was born who, by age 30, would transform the world. Happy Birthday Isaac Newton b. Dec 25, 1642."

Not content with just one shot, Tyson let fly again. "Merry Christmas to all," he tweeted. "A Pagan holiday (BC) becomes a Religious holiday (AD). Which then becomes a Shopping holiday (USA)."

Then, the coup de grace. "QUESTION: This year, what do all the world's Muslims and Jews call December 25th? ANSWER: Thursday." [*excerpt*]

Keywords

Christmas, Christians, Jesus Christ, Neil deGrasse Tyson

Disciplines

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THE HUFFINGTON POST

Snark Wars

By Kerry Walters

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The latest volley in the war of words waged by cultured despisers of Christianity was fired on Christmas Day. Celebrity astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson, host of the television series "Cosmos," bushwhacked Christians with this [tweeted broadside](#): "On this day long ago, a child was born who, by age 30, would transform the world. Happy Birthday Isaac Newton b. Dec 25, 1642."

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When readers (and not only Christians) criticized Tyson for dissing one of the two holiest days of the Christian calendar, he feigned surprise that anyone could've been insulted by his words, protesting that he was merely drawing attention to Newton's birthday. But since his clear intent was to thumb his nose at Christians, this was just his backhanded way of accusing them of being unreasonably touchy.

Taken by themselves, Tyson's tweets could be dismissed as the cyber-sprayed graffiti of a guy who thinks it's clever to mock Christians on Christmas Day. (One has to wonder if Tyson would feel as uninhibited about poking fun at Jews on Rosh Hashanah or Muslims on Eid Al-Fitr.) But his remarks aren't isolated. Tyson and others like him who think themselves too sophisticated, too cosmopolitan, and too intelligent for religion continuously hit God-believers with snarky contempt, sometimes with side blows like the Christmas tweets, and at other times with verbal body slams.

Philosopher [Daniel Dennett](#), for example, delights in labeling religious people "dims" in contrast to atheist "brights." Atheist pundit [Richard Dawkins](#) thunders that parents who expose their sons and daughters to religious instruction are monsters who should be persecuted for "child abuse." His colleague [Sam Harris](#) insists that Christians are "morally repugnant." And on and on it goes. Snark attack after snark attack, all intended to discredit religious belief by innuendo or outright insult rather than reasoned argument.

When challenged, cultured despisers either disingenuously deny (like Tyson) that they intended any harm, or try to deflect by bloviating about how evil, dogmatic, and judgmental Christianity is. They trot out real enough examples of lamentable corruption or silliness -- the Spanish Inquisition, for example, or creationism -- but then absurdly insist that all religious belief is cut from the same soiled cloth.

Hasty generalizations like this are sadly predictable, because cultured despisers never take the time to actually learn much about the religions they trash. Instead, they shoot from the hip at caricatures of their own making, and then preen themselves for being enlightened slayers of superstitious nonsense.

The curious thing is that cultured despisers claim to be stalwart defenders of reason, and they take great pride in their IQs. Many of them teach at colleges and universities, and are models of intellectual probity within their specific disciplines. But when it comes to religion, their fidelity to reason flies out the window and is replaced with visceral rage. In the world of cultured despisers, trashing Christianity is de rigueur.

Are all skeptics cultured despisers? Thankfully, no. Many atheists and agnostics come to their disbelief only after earnestly studying religion and thoughtfully dialoging with believers. Peace be with them. They've paid their dues. They're honorable searchers for truth, and Christians, even though disagreeing with their denial of God, can respect their integrity and learn many things from them.

But because carefully reasoned skeptical arguments aren't as sexy or as intellectually undemanding as snark, the nastiness of cultured despisers like Tyson captures media spotlight and sets the tone in public discourse about religion. For anti-Christian snarksters, there's absolutely nothing good that can be said about Christianity, so they encourage a blanket dismissal of centuries of Christian thought, literature, art, culture, and science. As [Christopher Hitchens](#) insisted in one of those idiotically over-generalized slogans cultured despisers adore, "religion ruins everything." But in what possible world is such a scorched earth attitude rational?

It would be deplorable if Christians answered cultured despisers with recriminatory snark of their own, tempting as that may sometimes be. Instead, what's called for is sensitivity to the wounds that might've soured despisers on religion in the first place and patience to invite them, for as many times as it takes, to engage in reasoned and civil dialogue. Perhaps then the snark wars can give way to détente.

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/kerry-walters/snark-wars_b_6406110.html