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Review of Bill Maher's Religulous - Part 2

Review by Jeffrey Stueber

Around September of last year, there was an interesting occurrence in the world of media. The movie *An American Carol* ridiculed the American left while the movie *Religulous* criticized religion – all religions. One could, if one wished, get theatrical whiplash after viewing this unique potpourri of left and right thought.

Later in the movie Maher suggests that Christianity is, in fact, a half-baked reproduction of numerous pre-Christian messianic movements from founders Mithra and Krishna, for instance. However, J.P. Holding has challenged both propositions.⁶ On the Mithra hypothesis, Holding summarizes by saying “In not one instance has a convincing case been made that Christianity borrowed anything from Mithraism. The evidence is either too late, not in line with the conclusions of modern Mithraic scholars, or just plain not there.”

Maher cannot be blamed for his lack of a grasp on the issues. Often throughout the movie the people he interviews come up far short of giving an adequate response. Maher speaks to Steve Burg, a former Jew now a Christian, who relates the evidence he has for his faith. According to Burg, he has in the past asked God for things in the name of Jesus and God proved his existence at those times. In one example, he was at a party for Jews for Jesus and he asked a person at that party for a drink of water and was given a cup and told to stick his hand out a window. Mysteriously it rained and Burg takes this to be an example of a miracle. Maher, quick to the punch, said he doesn't pray for rain but if he did and it rained, he wouldn't think it did so because he prayed for it but because it sometimes rains. If this is the best evidence a Christian can muster, it is no surprise Maher has difficulty accepting any Christian beliefs. Mark Pryor, senator from Arkansas and Evangelical Christian, is asked why being a man of faith is a good thing. He states that faith has a way of softening people and, if you look at the teachings of Jesus, you'll see that He is a very forgiving individual. This nonsensical answer doesn't faze Maher who retorts that Jesus also said if anyone does not abide in him he is like a branch that withers and is cast into the fire and burned. Pryor continues on his bungling ways misusing the word “literacy” in a sentence and doesn't finish up the interview strongly by jokingly suggesting senators don't have to pass an IQ test to be a senator (which paints him badly as he obviously realizes when changing his facial expression after saying this). I would have challenged Maher by noting that faith is not good or bad; what is important is the object of the faith. We have to live with some kind of faith, but we must seek good reasons for the faith we have – whether in God, our spouse, or even our leaders.

Even the person playing Jesus [I'll call him “Jesus” in this paragraph for brevity] at the Holy Land Experience in Orlando, Florida, gets into the act. Maher asks him why God doesn't just obliterate the Devil and Jesus correctly says God is waiting for the end times, but then stumbles when Maher presses him on this. God's ways are so above ours, Jesus tells us, an explanation he offers when Maher brings up the Holocaust. “God has a plan for that,” Jesus tell us, an explanation that doesn't satisfy Maher or me for that matter. What Jesus should have said is that it is important for mankind to have free choice to choose good or evil and one cannot have a choice unless there are at least two things to choose from – in this case good or evil. The destruction of evil will come at a time when there are no more souls to save and there is no reason to continue allowing the existence of evil and the Devil.

At the end of the movie Maher leaves no question where he stands: "Religion must die for mankind to live. The hour is getting very late to be able to indulge in having key decisions made by religious people, by irrationalists. . . . Faith means making a virtue out of not thinking. It's nothing to brag about, and those who preach faith and enable and elevate it are intellectual slaveholders." That's a powerful assessment of the situation and in this video Maher gives no reason to assume he has grasped the more intellectual side of religion to be worthy of making such a judgment. Earlier he criticizes John Westcott for claiming that the millions of people who are gay are not complete people as men or women – a "pretty big judgment for a Christian" in Maher's words. However, Maher is guilty of making a big judgment of religion despite his lack of research which makes him either deliberately or unconsciously inconsistent.

Yet, returning to the beginning of the movie, Maher may have admitted his real motivation for not believing. His family quit his church when Maher was thirteen (because the couple practiced birth control which the church frowned upon) and he was relieved, not for any ideological reasons, but because he was bored and he would have worshipped anything that would have allowed him to sexually sin more. When Maher asked his mother what "we" (he and her) believe, it is instructive that she could not give him an answer. So Maher apparently has found religion unsatisfactory because of personal sexual reasons and because of his family's inability to instruct him or even defend their incoherent beliefs.

The people Maher engages certainly aren't capable of defending their beliefs. In fact, one reviewer at rottentomatoes.com said "Maher's theories will get up the nose of believers of almost every creed, but his strategy of mocking easy targets will shake few temples worldwide." That's precisely it. Neither is Maher capable of engaging more serious and scholarly material about his subject of study. Maher is a comedian by nature and his film has humorous possibilities, but he approaches his subject like researching alcohol consumption habits of adults by interviewing the town drunk or studying theology by reading Richard Dawkins. **LSI**

End note

6. <http://www.tektonics.org/copycat/mithra.html>; <http://www.tektonics.org/copycat/krishna02.html>