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An Explication of Satire in Mark Twain's *Letters from the Earth*

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Abstract

This thesis discusses an explication of the key criticisms Mark Twain levies against modern day Christians, the Church, and God. While some scholarly sources are employed, the main comparison of Twain's *Letters from the Earth* comes from the book he most often references in *Letters: the Bible*. This work also examines a few select points of his later life in the context of his writing.

“As with a moral View design'd
 To cure the Vices of Mankind:
 His Vein, ironically grave,
 Expos'd the Fool, and lash'd the Knave:

 Yet, Malice never was his Aim;
 He lash'd the Vice but spar'd the Name.
 No Individual could resent,
 Where Thousands equally were meant.
 His Satyr points at no Defect,
 But what all Mortals may correct;”

(Swift)

These words, from Jonathan Swift’s “Verses on the Death of Dr. Swift,” describe the art of satire. Swift notes that the purpose of satire is of a higher order: to restore the world, expose wickedness, and blaspheme foolishness. Satire often implores use of shock value—such as in Swift’s “An Indecent Proposal,” which is an essay advocating for the consumption of Irish babies as a British delicacy.

Perhaps nothing would have been more shocking to a reader in 1910—the approximate year that the letters were completed—than to read Mark Twain’s *Letters from the Earth*, attacks on religion from the point of view of a reasonable Satan. In fact, when the *Letters* were to be published in 1939, Twain’s daughter objected to their posthumous publication on the grounds that they did not truly reflect her father’s religious views. Finally in 1960, Twain’s daughter lifted her objections in hopes that the world was a more

tolerant place for the *Letters* that the *New York Times* had called “vituperative” and “highly inflammatory, anti-religious essays” upon its release (Gelb).

While reaction to this series of essays may frequently be accompanied by notes about the darkness and tragedy surrounding the end of Samuel Clemens’s life, it is important to remember what his daughter said regarding her initial objections to the publication of *Letters from the Earth*: The letters represented a “distorted view of her father’s ideas and attitudes” towards religion (Gelb). While many readers may be shocked and dismayed at the beloved author of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*’s seemingly blasphemous attitudes presented in *Letters*, perhaps it is in the reader’s best interest to believe his daughter in noting that this is a “distorted view” and meant to inspire the reader to evaluate and challenge his own ideas towards Christianity and religion. Religion, after all, is man-made. Many aspects of it, especially some emphasized in Twain’s writing, are not even based in the canonized holy scriptures. Twain’s later life experiences “show Twain’s increasing skepticism about orthodox Christian belief,” but a skepticism fueled by “a kind of controlled spiritual and moral rage” (Messent 371), not by an attitude of atheism. Recall that Swift said that for the satirist, “malice never was his aim” and that “satyr points at no defect but what all mortals may correct.” Let us make the assumption that Twain is a satirist after Swift’s own heart and that he did not mean malice toward the Kingdom of Heaven, but instead wrote to point out flaws in the thinking of present-day Christians that Twain believes should be corrected.

The Creation

“Then God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light.” (*New American Standard Version*, Genesis 1:3)

Twain’s *Letters from the Earth* begins with an illustrious depiction of the Creator, with only a thought, generating the universe, while three archangels—Gabriel, Michael, and Satan—observe in awe. Over time, the Creator decides to make animals and men as an experiment in the Law of Nature. The Law of Nature, which Twain also refers to as the Law of God, is self-regulated and governs what is implied to be such things as physical law—which dictate gravity, rotation of planets and stars, etc.—as well as the instincts of animals and man.

In discussing how Natural Law governs the animals, Twain’s Creator provides examples of the tiger and the rabbit. It is against the Law of God for them to go against their nature (a nature of ferocity for the tiger and cowardice for the rabbit). The Creator then combines various degrees of all the moral qualities from the animal kingdom and places them within his ultimate masterpiece: man.

Interestingly enough, Natural Law has been a subject of philosophy for thousands of years, but is perhaps most prominently addressed by John Hobbes. Hobbes’s 19 Laws of Nature ultimately conclude that man must submit himself to a sovereign in order to survive (Ch. 15). Perhaps Twain is suggesting here that the Creator, who developed natural law, purposely placed within human nature a desire to submit to a sovereign—that sovereign being the Creator himself. John Ditsky argues,

Couched in the language of theology, it contains the frame work of a created system which is completely self-contained after its original establishment, a

conception related to the universe of the Deists, but going beyond it to the point where all movement within the system becomes not only foreseen, but foreordained, and there is, therefore, no Free Will to any significant extent: to any degree whereby the rhythm of the created universe may be violated. (16)

The Banishment of Satan

“And He said unto them, ‘I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven.’” (NASV, Luke 10:18)

The teachings of Christianity point to the origins of Satan as the serpent in the Garden of Eden who tempted Eve with the fruit of knowledge. He is an agent of darkness who “comes only to steal, kill and destroy” (NASV, John 10:12). He is referred to as “accuser” (NASV, Rev. 12:10), “adversary” (NASV, 1 Peter 5:8), “deceiver of the world” (NASV, Rev. 12:9), “enemy” (NASV, Matt. 13:28), “father of lies” (NASV, John 8:44), and “ruler of the demons” (NASV, Matt. 9:34). Most commonly, he is known as “devil.” In his brutal satire, Twain must have some nerve with his mild portrayal of a Satan who clearly has a role so influential over the other Archangels and God—even after his supposed fall! While Christians may be outraged at the insensitive portrayal of their enemy, one shouldn’t be too quick to praise Twain for his originality in this depiction of the devil, as this can be drawn directly from the book of Job.

Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them. The Lord said to Satan, ‘From where do you come?’ Then Satan answered the Lord and said ‘From roaming the earth and walking around on it.’ (NASV, Job 1:6-7).

Compare this with writings of *Letters from the Earth*:

At His feet stood three colossal figures, diminished to extinction, almost, by contrast—archangels—their heads level with His ankle-bone....At the end of an hour the Grand Council [of the archangels Satan, Gabriel and Michael] was dismissed...He [Satan] was ordered into banishment for a day....it occurred to

him to push on and hunt up the earth and see how the Human-Race experiment was coming along. (Twain 13-14)

If one could contain his outrage at Twain's blasphemous *Letters*, then one might notice that Twain's depiction of the relationship of Satan with the Creator and other archangels is quite in place with the book of Job. Indeed the character of Satan portrayed in the Book of Job is not necessarily the great Prince of Darkness shown throughout the rest of the Bible—such as the vile deceitful serpent in the Garden of Eden or the powerful one who tempted Jesus in the desert—but a creature who is simply questioning the moral experiment of mankind, with Job as God's example. *Letters from the Earth* conceivably could be a continuation of Satan's discourse on the matter. Stanley Brodwin describes the Satan in *Letters* as “a mischievous, sarcastic questioner of God's way” (208), an exact description of Satan in the Book of Job:

The LORD said to Satan, “Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil.” Then Satan answered the Lord, “Does Job fear God for nothing? Have You not made a hedge about him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But put forth Your hand now and touch all that he has; he will surely curse You to Your face.

(NASB, Job 1:7-11)

All Satan is doing is questioning the reasoning of God and suggesting an experiment with God's claims. With that being said, let us examine the fine points brought up by Satan in his letters.

Timing is Everything

“By the seventh day God completed His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done.” (*NASB*, Genesis 2:2)

Satan addresses the issue of time regarding creation. Twain challenges that earthly time is not measured in the same way as heavenly time. This is a reasonable argument to bring forward to modern-day Christians, as it has even become a political debate whether the Earth is 6,000 years old—from estimates by theologians—or around 4.5 billion years old, as estimated by scientists (Schultheis). While critics refer to *Letters from the Earth* as Twain’s darkest work and attribute it to the bitterness he experienced at the end of his life, Twain actually wrote about this very issue some forty years prior to his death:

I have been reading some new arguments to prove that the world is very old, & that the six days of creation were six immensely long periods. For instance, according to Genesis, the *stars* were made when the world was, yet this writer mentions the significant fact that there are stars within reach of our telescopes whose light requires 50,000 years to traverse the wastes of space & come to our earth. (Berkove and Csisila)

Twain also challenges the proportion of time spent on creation in “Letter III.” It certainly does seem disproportional, as Twain suggests, that God took one day to create the universe and five to create Earth. Twain is not challenging that God was incapable of creating a universe in one day—in fact, the opening chapter of *Letters* suggests he did: “He lifted His hand, and from it burst a fountain-spray of fire, a million stupendous suns, which clove the blackness and soared, away and away and away...” (Twain 11). Twain is challenging the arrogance of man whose religion suggests that God spent five times as

much time creating a place for mankind to abide than he did creating the entire universe. He also points out the inconsistency regarding laws of physics, such as the speed of light, and the Genesis creation timeline—which is a Natural Law set up by God—which, as applied to the night sky, means that it is physically impossible for the light of the stars in the sky to have reached the Earth within the time frame set up by Genesis. For most stars seen in the sky, their light would not reach Earth within the 6,000 year timeline of theologians, much less six days (Twain 21)!

Twain's arguments, while frustrating to some Christians who view the six days of creation as a literal model, can find support from within the Bible when the Apostle Peter, in his Second Epistle, states, "But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day" (3:8). Thus the Bible suggests, like Twain, that the heavenly kingdom is not governed by same time structures here on Earth.

The B-I-B-L-E

“All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness.” (*NASB*, 2 Timothy 3:16)

In his third letter, Twain’s Satan challenges the infallibility of the Bible. He spends time pointing out that many biblical events can be found within other bibles. While this may once again cause outrage from Twain’s Christian readers, he is correct. For example, the story of Noah’s ark (which will be discussed later), where a wicked people were destroyed by a great flood and an ark full of animals was built to save a sample of each species, can be found in Greek mythology as well as in stories from the ancient cultures of Babylon, the Chaldea, the Masai in East Africa, the Altai in Central Asia, the Hindu, the Hawaiian, and some Native American tribes (Isaak). Additionally, the story of the Garden of Eden is very similar to stories found in texts of ancient Persia and Greece (Carpenter 138).

Twain here is urging Christian brethren to consider the historical aspects of many stories of the bible, especially those in the Old Testament, and consider that perhaps some events were man made or may have happened, but were not divinely written. The Bible was written by men, and most books can be attributed directly to specific authors. While the Bible is the most sacred text for Christians, Twain does not wish to be a blind sheep that does not challenge where his guidance and wisdom is derived from. It is not in the best interest of Christianity to blindly ignore facts about where sacred texts may originate.

Brother Noah Built the Ark

“So they went into the ark to Noah, by twos of all flesh in which was the breath of life.”

(*NASB*, Genesis 7:15)

Twain’s illustration of the classic story of Noah and his ark is enough to make biblical enthusiasts uncomfortable but provides some very valid points. For the hundreds of thousands of species in the world, there certainly was not enough room on a single ark to contain a sample of each. Twain does provide an excuse for the Bible’s fallacy:

So he had no kangaroo, and no possum, and no Gila monster....they having long ago wandered to a side of this world which he had never seen and with whose affairs he was not acquainted. And so everyone of them came within a hair of getting drowned....There was not water enough to go around. Only enough was provided to flood one small corner of the globe—the rest of the globe was not then known, and was supposed to be nonexistent. (Twain 28)

Here we see a startling truth about the book of Genesis. It was obviously written by a man who was not all-knowing, as the Creator was. This story could not be completely true regarding the flooding of the entire Earth otherwise the animal population of the Earth would not be as diverse as it is today (excepting for a very fast evolutionary timeline, but Twain does not attack creationists’ disregard for evolution, so I shall avoid that discussion).

Twain’s satirical writing ultimately implies that, taken literally, Noah’s story could not possibly be factual. As every animal could not be stored on a single ark, Twain introduces speculation about animals that Noah left behind, which includes prehistoric species that are now extinct. Noah is essentially blamed for the extinction of all of these

species and criticized for covering up that these animals were left behind. After all, Twain suggests that these large animals would be especially useful today for transportation.

Twain also suggests that the ark was responsible for the salvation of diseases. “The wonderful example of the preservation of the housefly in the Flood, and the subsequent and resultant transmission of disease to further generations of men, becomes the crux of Twain’s argument against the existence of a real Providence” (Ditsky 17). Additionally, Twain points out that Noah and his family must have made themselves full of microbes in order to supply the world with the proper amount of diseases. Noah and his family must have been miserable on the ark with the stench of animals and buzzing of insects, but that was their reward, for “Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord” (*NASB*, Genesis 6:8). Much of Twain’s disdain for religion stems from this idea of a God who controls everything but allows—or perhaps even promotes—suffering. Noah is just one example that Twain uses, and the rest will be discussed later.

It's All About Me

“What is man that You take thought of him, And the son of man that You care for him?”

(*NASB*, Psalm 8:4)

In “Letter I,” Satan makes fun of the notion that man, without ever challenging the idea, believes that he holds such an important place in the eyes of God. He “in all sincerity calls himself the noblest work of God....he thinks he is the Creator’s pet. He believes the Creator is proud of him; he even believes the Creator loves him” (Twain 14-15). Jonathan Ditsky summarizes the first letter:

...everything on earth is ridiculous, and in particular Man, who thinks himself the high point in all creation, and believes himself intimately associated with a God who answers his prayers and intends to reward or punish him for his good deeds and transgressions—this from a God who, in Satan-Mark Twain’s already-established frame of reference, had casually sent mankind to an obscure planet that the angels were incapable of distinguishing. (15)

What Twain suggests here is something that is at the basis of Christianity. The most commonly recited scripture is likely John 3: 16: “For God so loved the world that He gave his only Son...” It is a necessity to the building blocks of faith that God cares for each of his creatures. While Twain’s Satan makes fun of the notion, he never states that the notion is false. Twain conceivably could be pointing out that this is something that Christians take for granted: a powerful Creator loves every man. This is something that Twain thought about throughout his life. In a letter written to Olivia Langley in 1870, Twain asked,

Did Christ live 33 years in each of the millions & millions of worlds that hold their majestic courses above our heads? Or was *our* small globe the favored

one of all? Does one apple in a vast orchard think as much of itself as we do?--
 or one leaf in the forest,--or one grain of sand upon the sea shore?...Verily,
 what is man, that he should be considered of God? (Berkove and Csisila)

However, it is much more likely that this is a truth that Twain struggled to accept in the waning months of his life. His friends said that “Much of the last decade of his life, he lived in Hell” (“Mark Twain”). This is certainly understandable, as he lost two children and his wife during that time. He sank into depression and was described as bitter (“Mark Twain”). As *Letters from the Earth* were written in his later life, it seems that Twain’s bitter feelings seeped into his writings, and he likely could not accept the idea of a loving God, as we see throughout the *Letters* that Twain believes that if God accepts credit for all the goings on of the world, “If we believe...that their God invented these cruel things, we slander him” (Twain 20). Yes, it seems that Twain points out the flaws of believing that a God who truly loves everyone could not afflict mankind with the cruelties we see today.

Additionally, Twain repeatedly criticizes the notion that God hears and answers prayers. However, this basic tenant can be found throughout the Holy Bible: “I love the Lord, because He hears my voice and my supplications” (*NASB*, Psalm 116:1); “And all things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive” (*NASB*, Matthew 21:22); “This is the confidence we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us” (*NASB*, 1 John 5:14). Twain’s disdain of prayer is noted in a separate “Letter to the Earth,” in which an angel details the acceptances, denials, and policies regarding prayer. While Twain struggled with the notion of prayer in his life, it seems—at least in his early life—that he had a breakthrough that made him value prayer, but not the selfishness of the concept. Consider this excerpt of a letter he wrote to his then-fiancée and future wife, Livy:

...that although I had been praying . . . since about the middle of September, & here latterly day by day & earnestly, I feared I had not made as much progress as I ought to have done—& that now I began clearly to comprehend that one must seek Jesus for himself alone, & uninfluenced by selfish motives.

(Masset 378)

Nonetheless, we can take lesson from Twain's criticisms and try to better understand the nature and expectations of prayers.

How Beautiful Heaven Must Be

“In My Father’s house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you.” (NASB, John 14:2)

Perhaps Twain’s most scathing criticism in *Letters* is found in “Letter II,” regarding heaven. Satan describes man’s view of heaven as something that man truly would not desire. There is an absence of sexual intercourse, which is something man desires—Twain likens man’s desire for sex to his desire for water in a desert. There is a presence of continuous singing, which most men are not skilled at doing nor which they enjoy hearing for long periods of time. Everyone plays a harp, which will likely sound awful when millions are played simultaneously. All nations and races will be equal and mixed throughout heaven, despite their hatred for one another on Earth. Finally, despite man’s love for advancing intellect, there are not intellectual activities in heaven at all (Twain 17-20).

While the description is tongue-in-cheek, many Christians would agree that Twain has presented a fairly accurate depiction of what heaven is imagined to be. However, what Twain would not be surprised to find but many Christians would, is that this description of heaven is not completely consistent with what is found in the Bible. In fact, the Bible does not give a description of heaven nor does it say that Christians will have a place there. The Bible promises eternal life for followers of Christ, and it promises a new heaven and new earth, where God will reside among His people (NASB, Revelations 21). No scripture promises that, after death, souls are commanded to heaven where they enter pearly gates on streets paved with gold. While depictions of the throne room have angels singing praises (NASB, Isaiah 6:1-3), there is no promise that Christians will reside there.

Twain is able to point out to his readers that this heaven—largely based on myth instead of anything found in canonized scriptures—is not something that man would desire. Cherubs playing harps and floating on clouds have no basis whatsoever. Endless, mindless, eternal singing is not described. While Twain points out that sexual intercourse will not be present in man’s heaven, the Bible does not. In fact, some sects of Christianity—such as the Latter Day Saints—teach that family and social relationships that exist on Earth will exist in the after-life. That is why instead of a simple “marriage,” Mormons perform sealing ceremonies, in which families are bound together for eternity (Mormon.org).

Twain’s *Letters* provide a vivid description of what Christians imagine heaven to be, but there is very little description to be found in the Bible. Perhaps the Biblical explanation of what happens to the soul after its time on Earth can be best described by 1 Corinthians 2:9, “Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered into the heart of man, All that God has prepared for those that love Him” (NASB).

Characteristics of God

“...The Lord, The Lord God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren...” (NASB, Exodus 34:6-7)

Letters focuses greatly on the nature of God and suggests conflicts in His nature. In fact, it suggests that if God is truly responsible for creating everything, then it is a slander against his character for inventing heaven—which we know to be a repulsive place in *Letters*—and the torment of hell, as well as the cruelties of the world such as disease, sickness, death, and war. “The implied villain: an uncaring, unjust, and thoroughly cruel God who created the human race seemingly only to make it suffer, a race whose only offense appears to be that it behaves in ways that accord with the manner in which it was made” (Berkove and Csisila). John Ditsky addresses Twain’s Calvinism and its presence in *Letters*: “Equating fore-knowledge with premeditation, Twain solves the Problem of Evil by fixing the blame squarely on God, or man’s faulty idea of Him” (17). Twain’s view of predestination has seeped into *Letters* as well as into his personal life.

Twichell recalled of Twain: “He once broke out in a letter I had from him: ‘Oh, this infernal Human Race! I wish I had it in the Ark again—with an auger.’”

Twain himself canceled two lines in his 4 November 1904 letter to Twichell, where he refers to man as “that noble race which was made out of the excrement of angels.” Twain added a postscript to follow the deleted comment above, however: “That erasure was an ungentle slur at the human race. Ungentle, and unfair. I retract it. I wish I could learn to remember that it

is unjust and dishonorable to put blame upon the human race for any of its acts. (Masset 396)

God is criticized for warning Adam and Eve not to eat the fruit of the forbidden tree, despite the fact that the world's first humans could not comprehend the punishment of death, with which they had no experience. Of course as the story goes, Adam and Eve did eat from the tree of good and evil, and as the Serpent says, "you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (*NASB*, Genesis 3:5). The couple receives knowledge of morality. Additionally, being omnipotent and the grand architect of the world, shouldn't He have seen this one coming?

Twain points out the irony that this knowledge that God did not wish for man to have, moral sense, is the thing that today's Church prides itself upon the most. While his claim is likely true, it is another flaw in Christianity that Twain satirically reveals. The Church and Christians are not called to teach right and wrong. In fact the biblical verse that's probably most often quoted out of context is Matthew 7:1, "Do not judge so that you will not be judged" (*NASB*). The earliest Christian church, as accounted in the book of Acts, is described as teaching about the life of Jesus and grace. It's purpose was more for communal living than for preaching hellfire and brimstone: "And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of them claimed anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common property to them" (*NASB*, Acts 4:32). However in Twain's time (and now), the primary function of the church is to judge actions in weekly services, where "Of all the men in a church on a Sunday, two-thirds are tired when the service is half over, and the rest before it is finished" (Twain 16). If, as Jonathan Swift says, satire is supposed to point out flaws that man can correct, then the flawed

purpose of the Church that Twain portrays in *Letters* is something in dire need of improving.

Letters provides many attacks about how God allows diseases, famine, sickness, cruelty, and so many bad things in the world that He created and controls. While Twain accuses the Church of spilling more innocent blood than all the wars of nations, God has mercilessly killed even more. Twain writes,

Nothing could be more characteristic of him [God]. He created all those infamous people, and he alone was responsible for their conduct. Not one of them deserved death, yet it was certainly good policy to extinguish them...But at the same time there could be no justice, no fairness, in any favoritism. (Twain 25)

Twain's major case against God in *Letters* is,

God is the devil, while Satan is the bitterly ironic sympathizer of man. God sends forth Adam and Eve "under a curse—a permanent one". And it was of the consequences of this curse that Mark Twain wrote and over which he agonized much of his creative life. (Brodwin 213)

In continuing his description, Twain suggests that when men utter praises of God as merciful, just, and loving, they are inadvertently uttering "sarcasms," as those cannot truly be the attributes of God (Twain 14). However, Twain is not alone in these harsh implications of the Holy Father. Consider what Job—whom God described: "There is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning from evil" (NASB, Job 1:8)—said regarding God allowing such cruelties in His world:

They drive away the donkeys of the orphans; They take the widow's ox for a pledge. They push the needy aside from the road....Others snatch the orphan from the breast, And against the poor they take a pledge...The murderer arises at dawn; He kills the poor and needy, And at night he is as a thief....But He drags off the valiant by His power; He rises, but no one has assurance of life. He provides them [the wicked] with security and they are supported.
(NASB, Job 24)

While Job here also points out all the cruelty that God allows, making Him out to be a harsh, callous deity, the story continues with a defense of the Creator which we must allow for: In Job 38-39, God asks Job a series of questions describing His power and works, often miraculous and grand in scope.

Twain's criticism exacerbates the age old, "Why do bad things happen?" argument that people may ask in dark times, but the Bible responds by pointing out that while man criticizes, it is not possible for man to do better. In fact, it is impossible for man to perform the acts and duties of God.

Interestingly enough, Twain's narrator, Satan, never treats the God of man to be the same Creator that he watched make the stars in the opening chapter of *Letters from the Earth*. This suggests that while the presence of a deity that created the stars, the planet, the animals, and man exists, mankind has developed a persona of God that does not conform to what "God" actually is. While some may be tempted to just accuse Twain of being a raging, liberal agnostic, it is a fair point for Twain to suggest that organized religion has created its own god separated from the One who created the universe.

Tell me what I want to Hear

“But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves.” (NASB, 1 Peter 2:1)

Much more can be taught about the Bible if we teach ourselves. As pointed out throughout this discussion, Twain was able to point out many Christian teachings that do align with the Bible. However, people like to hear a more preferable version of the truth, as Twain points out. “He thinks he is going to heaven! He has salaried teachers who tell him that” (Twain 15).

Twain is critical of how Christians uphold Church leaders without ever questioning them. He often writes about church members blindly listening to “the pulpit” as the ultimate authority. Twain, of course, practices what he preaches. The man that he called his pastor, a close friend and Hartford clergyman named Joe Twitchell, was often the recipient of many letters challenging his sermons and religious beliefs. Take this example of what Twain wrote to Twitchell:

I can’t understand it! You are a public guide and teacher, Joe, and are under a heavy responsibility to men, young and old; if you teach your people—as you teach me—to hide their opinions when they believe the flag is being abused and dishonored, lest the utterance do them and a publisher a damage, how do you answer for it to your conscience? (Masset 391)

He also takes a scathing review of priests who misuse their authority for the seduction of women during confessionals—and perhaps we should be grateful that *Letters from the Earth* was written before the modern-day sex scandals of the Church, or this section would

be much more graphic. Twain has an excellent, though exaggerated point: if the purpose of Christianity is to fight against one's nature to conform to morals, then those in church leadership are men, thus also fighting their own, immoral nature. Church leaders should be questioned. They should be challenged, as Twain has done with this work. Church leaders are not infallible, but they are too often treated as if they are without imperfection.

Conclusion

Hopefully this explication has saved the reputation that Twain's daughter was so worried about. While Twain has been dead for over a hundred years and we will never know his true feelings on religion, from his writing, we can successfully conclude that he found, at the very least, room for improvement within organized religion. Going back to what Jonathan Swift wrote about satire, it is safe to say that Twain agreed that "In him, the Fault is in Mankind" (Swift Verses). Mr. Berkove and Mr. Csisila conclude:

Here is a man who passionately would have preferred to believe in sentimental justice: wrongs being righted, virtue being rewarded and vice being punished, suffering being brought to an end and happiness taking its place, the natural goodness of the common man and woman, prayers of the righteous being answered, and the reformation of hypocrites and evildoers. But instead he set out to describe reality as he saw it in practice and not as he wished to see it--and what he saw was terribly painful for him, all the more so because he was doubly disillusioned: by the reality and by the need to strip away illusion and expose the hoax in order to see the truth.

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