

# God and The Simpsons

## The Religious Life of an Animated Sitcom

*By Gerry Bowler*

The Simpsons is a satire using the cartoon format to disarm the viewer and to encourage a slightly askew but ultimately clearer look at the world; this is the same tool that earlier American social satires such as Walt Kelly's Pogo or Al Capp's L'il Abner used. [2] The targets of the show include the American family as portrayed by television, the nuclear power industry, politicians, the public school system, tabloid TV (indeed all of television itself), the American medical system and religion. Despite the show's continued popularity with millions of viewers, critics have been many, particularly among the religious. Presidents seeking to court the religious right [3], preachers from their pulpits and defenders of traditional family values have all attacked The Simpsons. [4] I, too, was once among their number and for a time forbade my children watching the show until my daughters insisted that I watch a few episodes before issuing an irrevocable edict on the subject. What I discovered was the genesis of this paper, in which I will examine how religion, especially Christianity, is treated on the program and why the reputation of the show amongst the faithful is so poor.

The first thing one might notice about the series is just how many of the characters are religious. Most of the cartoon cast attend the First Church of Springfield, a middle-of-the-road Protestant church, [5] presided over by the Reverend Timothy Lovejoy, but other characters are Jews[6], Catholics [7], Hindus [8], Hare Krishnas and snake-handlers[9]. The children of the town go to Sunday School -- usually unwillingly [10] and Bart (an anagram for brat) has to be frisked for weapons -- but theological issues interest them there. When the teacher announces that the day's topic is Hell, Bart is delighted. "All right! I've sat through Mercy and I sat through Forgiveness; finally we get to the good stuff!" [11] Bart often plagues his Sunday School teacher with questions about the life hereafter: Wouldn't you get used to Hell, like in a hot-tub? Will there be pirates in Hell? Will an amputated leg be reattached in Heaven? Will there be animals in Heaven? What about cavemen? Robots with a human brain? What if a ventriloquist goes to Heaven, will his dummy go too? (Answers: no, yes, yes, no, I don't know and no.) Finally the teacher breaks down pleading: "I don't know! All these questions! Is a little blind faith too much to ask?!" [12] In one tantalizing scene we are shown the Sunday School classroom just as a very important moral point has been made and, to our disappointment, we only hear the teacher conclude with "...and that's why God causes train wrecks."

The Bible is referred to frequently: on TV, the radio, in counselling the troubled, in the pulpit. Ned Flanders, the evangelical next-door neighbour of the Simpsons has a large collection of versions in his house -- including the Aramaic Septuagint, the Vulgate of St Jerome, the Living Bible and the Thump-Proof Bible. Homer, however, finds the book expensive, preachy ["Everybody's a sinner," he complains, "except this guy!" [13]] and largely irrelevant ["If the Bible has taught us nothing else -- and it hasn't -- it's that girls should stick to girls' sports such as hot-oil wrestling, foxy-boxing and such and such." [14] When the Simpsons argue they turn to

the Bible for guidance: for example, in trying to decide whether to let bus-driver Otto stay in their house Marge says, "Doesn't the Bible say, 'Whatsoever you do to the least of my brothers, that you do unto me?'" Stuck for a suitable Biblical reply Homer improvises: "Yes but doesn't the Bible also say, 'Thou shalt not take...moochers into thy...hut?'" [15]

In fact, Homer's Bible ignorance is pretty comprehensive. Reverend Lovejoy tells him: "Homer, I'd like you to remember Matthew 7:26, 'A foolish man who has built his house on sand.'" Homer: "And you remember...Matthew...21:17!" Lovejoy: " 'And he left them and went out of the city into Bethany and lodged there?'" "Yeah ..think about it!" Homer also refers to the time when God teased Moses in the wilderness and believed that Hercules and the Lion was a Bible story. [16] It should be noted that Lovejoy is not above a little Biblical forgery himself when in order to justify Springfield's traditional snake massacre, Whacking Day, he claims to have found in Scripture the verse: "And the Lord said, 'Whack ye all the serpents that crawl on their bellies and thy town shall be a beacon to others.'" [17]

Grace seems to be a regular part of meal-time at the Simpsons household; though piety is sometimes lacking on the lips of the young [Bart: "Dear God, we paid for all this food ourselves, so thanks for nothing"[18] ; or "Rub-a-dub-dub, thanks for the grub."] the family elders often use it as an occasion for more heart-felt messages to the Almighty. [Homer: "Dear Lord thank you for this microwave bounty, even though we don't deserve it. I mean...our kids are uncontrollable hellions. Pardon my French, but they act like savages! Did You see them at the picnic? Of course You did; You're everywhere, You're omnivorous. O Lord! Why did you spite me with this family?!" [19] ] When Krusty the Clown visits the Simpsons he gives the blessing in Hebrew: "Baruch atah adonai, eloheinu, melech ha'olam hamotzi lechem min ha'aretz". Homer's reaction is: "Heehee! He's talking funny talk!" [20]

Prayer of all kinds abounds on The Simpsons. Bart, who had denied the existence of the soul, thought he was taking advantage of a chump when he sold his to friend Milhouse for \$5.00 but he grows increasingly restless when not having a soul seems to make a difference. He tries to buy it back from Milhouse but discovers that his pal has already traded it for Pogs. Growing desperate Bart prays: "Are you there God? It's me, Bart Simpson. I know I never paid too much attention in church but I could really use some of that good stuff right now. I'm afraid some weirdo's got my soul and I don't know what he's going to do with it." [21]

Homer has an interesting slant on prayer. When Marge wants to tell him that she is pregnant with their third child, Homer interrupts: "Can't talk now, praying. Dear Lord, the gods have been good to me and I am thankful. For the first time in my life everything is absolutely perfect the way it is. So here's the deal: you freeze everything as it is and I won't ask for anything more. If that is OK, please give me absolutely no sign. [pause] OK, deal. In gratitude, I present you this offering of cookies and milk. If you want me to eat them for you, please give me no sign. [pause] Thy will be done." [eats food]. When trying a new hair-restoring product Homer prays: "Dear God, give the bald guy a break. Amen." [22]

Marge's prayer will strike home to all those who have attempted to bargain with God or those who have cleaned out the back of the pantry in response to canned food drives: "Dear Lord, if you spare this town from becoming a smoking hole in the ground, I'll try to be a better Christian. I don't know what I can do...Mmm...oh, the next time there's a canned food drive, I'll give the poor something they'll actually like instead of old lima beans and pumpkin mix." [23] Moreover prayer is almost always efficacious -- any regular viewer of The Simpsons will note that God answers his petitioners almost immediately. God saves Todd Flanders who is playing the role of baby Moses in the basket but is swept away by the rushing river. [24] He knocks down a bowling pin for the all-Christian bowling team, the Holy Rollers. [25] Here is Homer on football and petitionary prayer: "God, if you really are a God, you'll get me tickets to that game." Right away the doorbell rings and there is Ned Flanders: "Heidely-ho neighbour, want to go the game with me? I've got two tick.." Homer slams the door: "Why do you mock me O Lord?" [26]

The reason that characters on The Simpsons have such frequent recourse to prayer is that God, the Devil, Heaven, Hell and angels are all treated as having objective reality. If the old war-time saying is true, that there are no atheists in the foxholes, there are certainly none either in Springfield. Homer, in fact meets God. He and the Creator of the Universe discuss Homer's decision to stay home from church and God admits that he Himself is not a big fan of sermons or of Reverend Lovejoy, to whom He thinks He will give a canker sore. [27] Later, when Homer has agreed to go back to church and he falls asleep in the pew, he has another vision of God of whom he asks the meaning of life. God reveals that he knows that old joke: God: "Homer I can't tell you that. You'll find out when you die." Homer: "I can't wait that long!" God: "You can't wait six months?"

Homer and Bart both have encounters with the devil as well. After a traffic accident, Bart goes to Heaven but because he did not hold on to the handrail of the escalator taking him to the Pearly Gates, and for spitting over the edge, he is sent to Hell -- but Satan has to tell him that a mistake has been made.

**Devil:** Boy, is my face red...According to this you're not due to arrive until the Yankees win the pennant. That's nearly a century from now.

**Bart:** Say, is there anything I can do to avoid coming back here?

**Devil:** Oh, sure, yeah, But you wouldn't like it.

**Bart:** Oh, OK. See you later then.

**Devil:** Remember! Lie, cheat, steal and listen to heavy metal music!

**Bart:** Yessir!

Homer sells his soul to the devil for a donut and in a parody of "The Devil and Daniel Webster" Marge wins it back in a trial by showing that Homer had already romantically pledged his soul to her.

I hope that by this point I've demonstrated that Springfield possesses a rich religious life and that the satiric Simpsons program takes religion's place in society seriously enough to do it the honour of making fun of it. What does the show make fun of in religion? Christians are criticized for being too judgemental: Maude Flanders, who actually went away to church camp to learn to

be more judgemental, says: "I don't judge Homer and Marge. That's for a vengeful God to do." [28] When (in a vision of the future) Lisa's wedding is called off at the last minute, Reverend Lovejoy intones: "Oh, this is very sad news and it would never have happened if the wedding had been inside the church with God instead of out here in the cheap showiness of nature." [29] At an Alc-anon meeting where he has just encouraged alcoholic Homer to feel free to tell the group anything as there was no judgement there, Homer confesses: "The other day I was so desperate for a beer I snuck into the football stadium and ate the dirt under the bleachers." Lovejoy: "I cast thee out!" [30] After Ned has been arrested for a traffic offence he approaches church the next Sunday with trepidation but his wife assures him, "Oh don't worry Ned, this is a house of love and forgiveness." Naturally when he enters he is greeted with: "There he is, Ned Flanders...the fallen one...the evil one...bet he's the one who wrote 'Homer' all over the bathroom." [31] When Krusty the Clown is falsely accused of a crime, it is Lovejoy who leads a mob burning the merchandise of Krusty whom he terms "the clown prince of corruption". [32]

Christian clergymen are derided for their hypocrisy. Though he preaches against "Gambling: the 8th Deadly Sin" Lovejoy's church holds Bingo, Reno and Monte Carlo Nights. Bart and Milhouse buy a MAD magazine with its famous folding back page asking the question: "What is it that television evangelists worship the most?" "I'll say God," says Bart; "I'll say Jesus", opines Milhouse. Folding the page reveals the answer: "Money." [33] The commercialism of Christmas is also a target. An advertisement reads: "In honor of the birth of our savior, Try-N-Save is open all Christmas". Lisa and Bart are watching a show where Krusty advertises Christmas merchandise:

**Lisa:** Hey, I thought Krusty was Jewish.

**Bart:** Christmas is a time when people of all religions come together to worship Jesus Christ. *A loud television advertisement comes on; the house starts to shake; an aggressive "Santa" crashes through the wall while the reindeer growl and rear at the kids.*

**Kids:** Heelllp!

**Santa:** You want excitement?! Shove this up your stocking! [He uses a bazooka to shoot a cartridge into the video game console]

**Bart:** [happily] Whoa!

[on TV, the kids play a violent video game]

**Lisa:** [skeptically] Hmm, that looks entertaining.

**Bart:** [drooling] Oh, yeah.

**Santa:** So tell your folks, "Buy me Bonestorm or go to Hell!"

*So Bart goes to the department store to check out the very expensive game.*

**Bart:** Hmm. Maybe if I stand next to the games looking sad, someone will feel sorry for me and buy me one.

*[Bart goes inside, puts his hand through a hole in the display case window and holds a copy of Bonestorm; his arm gets crushed by an employee opening the case for a woman and her child.]*

**Woman:** Gavin, don't you already have this game?

**Gavin:** No, Mom, you idiot! I have Bloodstorm, and Bone Squad, and Bloodstorm II, stupid.

**Woman:** Oh, I'm sorry, honey. We'll take a Bonestorm.

**Gavin:** Get two. I'm not sharing with Kaitlin!

**Bart:** [dreamily] That must be the happiest kid in the world.

*After Bart is caught stealing the video game, Homer draws the connections between religion and morality:*

**Homer:** How could you?! Haven't you learned anything from that guy who gives those sermons at church? Captain Whatshisname? We live in a society of laws. Why do you think I took you to all those Police Academy movies? For fun? Well, I didn't hear anybody laughing! Did you?! Except at that guy who made sound effects. Where was I? Oh yeah: stay out of my booze. [34]

The final satiric jab at Christianity is found in the depiction of family life as it might appear in a Mormon television advertisement. The Flanders family is just too good to be true. The children play "Clothe the Leper", "Good Samaritan" or "Build the Mission" -- "Finally the villagers have a place to pray." [35] What's for dinner? Liver. "Oh, boy!... Iron helps us play." [36] They vie to anoint a vagrant's sores and are disappointed when told it's someone else's turn. [37] Though they have satellite tv, 216 channels are locked out and the children watch only The Jim Nabors Show [38] -- the boys used to watch Davy and Goliath but the notion of a talking dog was too blasphemous.

Ned and Maude Flanders go to a marriage counsellor. Ned explains why: "Sometimes Maude (God bless her), she underlines passages in my Bible when she can't find hers." Muttering Homer: "Oh, lucky they don't keep guns in the house." [39] When one of the boys (influenced by Bart) swears, Ned sends him off without a Bible story, causing the child to cry. His wife asks if that wasn't being a bit harsh but Ned replies: "You knew I had a temper when you married me." [40] As satires go, these criticisms are not overly harsh and indeed most Christians would find much truth in them. Certainly religion gets off much more lightly in The Simpsons than do the nuclear power industry as exemplified by Mr Burns's Springfield Nuclear Power Plant, a Chernobyl-in-the-making, or lawyers as personified by the incompetent and crooked Lionel Hutz. Can these harmless satiric jabs be what makes Christians uneasy about The Simpsons? What about the irreligion of two of the chief characters Homer and Bart?

Though he claims to be a Christian [41], Homer is essentially a pagan. Religion for him consists of placating or bribing an angry god or gods. Marge, listening to "You Light Up My Life", reminds Homer that this was their song. Homer replies that the guy she was singing about must have been real happy but Marge says that the song was about God. Homer: "Oh well, He's always happy. No wait, He's always mad." [42] When his house catches fire while he is at home skipping Sunday church service, Homer draws a conclusion about the nature of God. "The Lord is vengeful. [He falls on his knees]. O Spiteful One, show me who to smite and he shall be smoten!" [43]

Bart is the archetypal Bad Little Boy, a literary tradition that goes back to the Katzenjammer Kids, Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer, Buster Brown, Dickens's Artful Dodger and beyond. It is a device to highlight the conflict between the rebel and the restrictions that society seeks to place on its growing, young people. And certainly Bart is a dangerous and anarchic figure whose pranks and bad language seemed to be celebrated by early viewers of the show. "Eat my

shorts", "I'm Bart Simpson, who the Hell are you?", "Don't have a cow, man" were all catch-phrases that made it on to T-shirts, millions of which were sold in the early 1990s.

If these two characters -- Homer and Bart -- were allowed by the writers and directors of The Simpsons to triumph on each show, it could be argued that the program was morally objectionable and as worthy of our derision as that other "ornament of civilization" produced by the FOX Network Married...With Children. But in fact they do not. Homer's stupidity and greed never pay off (as when he gains so much weight in order to be considered disabled and allowed to work at home) and Bart's pranks are either thwarted or turn to ultimate good (as when he prompts a teachers' strike and has to bring them back to the bargaining table in the end.)[44] Moreover Bart and Homer are balanced by the observant Christians Marge (who tells Homer never to make her choose between God and her man because he just can't win) and Lisa (who refuses to watch pirated cable TV because of her wish to honour the 8th Commandment and win Heaven). They represent the voices of sanity and piety and they always (or almost always) triumph in the end. Most importantly, in the person of Ned Flanders The Simpsons has given us television's most effective mortal (i.e., non-angelic) exponent of a Christian life well-lived. He is self-sacrificial (he twice drags Homer from a burning building [45], gives up his place in his own bomb shelter when a comet threatens Springfield with destruction [46], and donates a kidney and a lung in case anyone might need them [47]), even-tempered [48], law-abiding (he reports the cash value of football tickets that he has won to the tax authorities [49]), a loving father and husband, a community volunteer (he works at the Helter Shelter, founded by the Reverend Helter), evangelically-minded [50] and a great neighbour. If he is a little too pious or over-conscientious this only serves to draw the viewers' attention to the fact that the best person on the show is an evangelical Christian, one whose license plate reads JHN 143. [51]

So, again the question: if this is a show with attractive Christian characters, where good usually triumphs, where the family virtues are always affirmed in the end, why are Christians put off by it? My answers to this will deal partly with Christian evangelical culture and partly with the nature of humour in the late 20th century.

**1.** Christians, and Protestants in particular, manifest a certain tension on the question of humour and religion. It has long been a strand in Christian thought that Jesus never laughed and that levity, particularly levity about religion, is something a devout believer will avoid. Even Bible jokes or inter-denominational jokes cause some grimaces when told in some Christian circles. The attitudes to The Wittenberg Door, now The Door, reflect this as do the hopelessly anodyne cartoons or quips in most Protestant publications. Dare I mention the reaction of many non-charismatics to the recent "Holy Laughing" manifestations of the Toronto Blessing and its off-shoots? In the mind of these critics, laughter was not a way that God would choose to manifest Himself. [52]

**2.** The ideologically-charged believer on any side of a question finds humour difficult to deal with and often inappropriate. This is why professed atheists have as much trouble coming to grips with The Simpsons as do Christians. Last year on the Internet I followed a debate in

various news-groups on the topic of whether The Simpsons bashed Christianity. The opinion of many Christians was that, yes, it did. [53] Atheists on the other hand either agreed and said it was a darn good thing too, as religion generally was a menace to the world -- Hitler, for example was a Christian, as were many molesters and perverts. [54] But some atheists replied that The Simpsons did not bash religion enough and that they had stopped watching the show because it was resembling more and more a Sunday School -- the character of Ned Flanders was alluded to here. [55]

**3.** The humour of The Simpsons is difficult to get in its entirety. It is unquestionably the most culturally-literate show on television, except for perhaps Jeopardy. Each episode contains dozens of references to film culture, literature, rock and roll (thus the rapping rabbis who sing "Don't eat pork, even with a fork; can't touch this"), politics, history, philosophy and above all television culture itself-- Bart and Lisa many times refer to the damage that television has done to their memory or patience or imagination [56] and the FOX Network is always highlighted as a purveyor of junk TV. Because many evangelical Christians do not swim in this culture the humour and cultural literacy manifested will often pass them by leaving only images of a drunken father and a rude little boy.

**4.** Finally, the question of irony and late-20th century humour. There are many kinds of irony but The Simpsons relies on the ability of the audience to take the characters absolutely at face value and find humour in matching their actions to a cultural stereotype. For example when Bart is enrolled against his will in a ballet class, he finds that he likes it and is good at it. In that same vein the school bullies watching his performance find they like ballet too and express their emotions openly -- one thug confesses that he hasn't been as moved since The Joy Luck Club. What the audience finds amusing isn't that the characters are saying one thing and doing another (which is another kind of irony) but that they are openly stating things contrary to cultural stereotypes they will have seen in other movies or books. Then, all of a sudden, The Simpsons will reverse polarity and return things to normal causing the mob to pursue Bart in order to beat him as a sissy. This is difficult stuff. Almost too difficult, I submit, for many viewers who are either incapable of getting the cultural references or maintaining the double perspective that irony requires. [57]

There is one more thing that The Simpsons can tell us. If, as I suggest, it is among the most religious programs on television it can only mean that religion is very badly served on that medium. Overtly Christian programming has failed to find an audience among secular viewers and, according to media watcher Quentin Schultze, may even be counter-productive in effectively reaching the unchurched. But where else is religion to be found on television? Where do the denizens of Friends go to church? What do we know about the spiritual life of Roseanne or Frasier? Are the doctors on ER or Chicago Hope ever moved to pray or consider God? Religion's invisibility in prime-time programming speaks volumes about how the entertainment industry views its place on the scale of human activity and until that changes we may have to make do with Ned Flanders as our televised spiritual mentor.

## NOTES

1. This is a copy of a paper delivered to the Symposium on The Media and Family Values held at Canadian Nazarene College, Calgary in October 1996. A version with more developed footnotes will be printed in the 1997 volume of the journal North American Religion. The author's thanks are due to the tireless contributors to The Simpsons Archives (especially Dave Hall and Andrew Mutchler) whose work over the past years has assembled the material without which an essay of this sort would have been impossible. The fruits of their labour are available on the Web at <http://www.snpp.com/episodes.html>.
2. This is a device used by practitioners of both and high and low culture. Voltaire used the utter innocent Candide to similar purpose, while on television the slack-jawed yokels of the Clampett family were the foils of the writers of The Beverly Hillbillies.
3. In a speech to religious broadcasters and again in his 1992 State of the Union Address, George Bush said that what was needed was a nation closer to the Waltons than the Simpsons. I
4. E.g., Michael Medved, Hollywood Versus America (New York: 1992), 81-82.
5. Reverend Lovejoy is married, wears a cassock and though his sermons inveigh against gambling the church has Bingo and Casino nights. Lovejoy's theology tends toward the liberal but the congregation also includes nominal Christians (Homer and Chief Wiggum) and zealots such as the Flanders family.
6. Krusty the Clown canvasses for the Jewish Clown charity and his father is Rabbi Hyman Krustofsky.
7. Archbishop McGee (though he may be Episcopalian) and Monsignor Kenneth Daly who is Krustofsky and Lovejoy's colleague on the religious radio program "Gabbin' About God."
8. Apu who is particularly devoted to Ganeesha.
9. Moe Szylack the bar owner.
10. In Bart's Girlfriend the town's children are rounded up in the way the humans are roped and lassoed in The Planet of the Apes.
11. Homer vs. Lisa and the 8th Commandment.
12. In The Telltale Head Bart is eventually banned from Sunday School for unnamed crimes against the hamster, though in a spirit of forgiveness and with a reference to the Prodigal Son he is later allowed back in.
13. Itchy and Scratchy Land.
14. Lisa On Ice.
15. The Otto Show.
16. One must also add Homer's inability in Duffless to remember any Bible verse beyond "Thou shalt not...".
17. Whacking Day. When asked by Lisa to show her the passage he quickly puts the Bible away.
18. Two Cars in Every Garage, Three Eyes on Every Fish.
19. There's No Disgrace Like Home.
20. The prayer means "Blessed are you Lord, our God, king of the universe, who brings forth bread from the earth." Like Father Like Clown.
21. Bart Sells His Soul.
22. Simpson and Delilah.
23. Homer Defined.
24. A Star is Burns.
25. Team Homer.
26. Homer Loves Flanders.
27. Homer the Heretic.
28. Home Sweet Home-Diddly-Dum-Doodily
29. Lisa's Wedding.
30. Duffless.
31. Homer Loves Flanders.
32. Krusty Gets Busted
33. Team Homer.
34. Marge Be Not Proud.
35. Bart the Lover.
36. Lisa's First Word.
37. Brother Can You Spare Two Dimes.

38. The joke here, or one of them at least, is that Jim Nabors, despite his hymn singing and Gomer Pyle persona, has been identified as gay. Bart the Lover.
39. War of the Simpsons.
40. Bart the Lover.
41. When he is asked his religion Homer says "You know the one with all the well-meaning rules that don't work out in real life. Uh...Christianity." Homerpalooza.
42. I Married Marge.
43. Homer the Heretic.
44. The PTA Disbands
45. Homer the Heretic.
46. Bart's Comet
47. Homer's Triple Bypass.
48. In Dead Putting Society, Homer returns home after a disagreement with Ned and describes the altercation to Marge.  
**Homer:** Lousy bragging, know-it-all show-off...  
**Marge:** What exactly did he say?  
**Homer:** Get this. He said, uh, he said...Well, it wasn't so much what he said, as how he said it.  
**Marge:** Well, how did he say it?  
**Homer:** Well he....  
**Marge:** Was he angry?  
**Homer:** No.  
**Marge:** Was he rude?  
**Homer:** OK, OK, it wasn't how he said it either.
49. Homer Loves Flanders
50. Ned converts the star quarterback of the Springfield Atoms who notes gratefully: "I used to party all night and sleep with lingerie models until Ned and his Bible group showed me I could have more." Snorts Homer: "Professional athletes -- always wanting more!" Homer Loves Flanders.
51. Homer Loves Flanders. This could be a reference to either John 1:43 where Jesus says "Follow me" or John 14:3 where He promises to prepare a place for us and return.
52. Mark Twain, certainly no Christian, thought that there was no humour in Heaven because the source of humour was not joy but sorrow.
53. Robert M. Ficke (rficke@runet.edu) wrote: "I was really offended when in the Homerpalooza episode, Bart asked Homer what religion he was and he said: 'The one with all those well-meaning rules that don't work out in real life...Christianity.' If they said something like this about Islam or Buddhism [sic] they would be flamed and a controversy started, but I guess it's open season on Christians. I've seen this same attitude [sic] before in the show, which is a shame because it is otherwise such an excellent show. Anybody know how to get in touch with Fox?"
54. In the newsgroup alt.religion.sexuality one fernandoo@embassy.res.rmit.edu.au wrote: "Christians are the ones that rape, molest, beat their wives and commit other atrocities [sic]. Hitler was a Christian. Just see the Simpsons for proof." In reply another atheist, malcom@pigsty.demon.co.uk, offered the opinion that research showed that all religion was bad in terms of inciting violence.
55. In the soc.atheism newsgroup on May 16, 1995 patrickc@direct.ca wrote: "The Simpsons is becoming more of a Sunday School program than ever. The central message of that show, I've noticed, is that the only good people are religious and that those who are not are immoral. Some episodes (particularly the one where Homer skips church) really hammer the point home. And the true religious fanatics in that show (The Flanders) are portrayed as the most moral, ethical people around. I've stopped watching it in disgust a long time ago."
56. Here is an example from I Married Marge:  
**Lisa:** It's not out fault our generation has short attention spans, Dad. We watch an appalling amount of TV.  
**Homer:** Don't you ever, EVER talk that way about television.
57. Contrary to popular opinion I do not believe that Gen X possesses the preternatural irony they are said to. I'm beginning to believe it is only a media-induced wariness and cynicism as evinced in this, the last of my

Simpsons clips. Two teens are talking at a rock concert. Says one: "Here comes that cannonball guy. He's cool." Teen 2: "Are you bein' sarcastic dude?" Teen 1: "I can't tell anymore." Homerpalooza.

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