

# Why on Earth – Laughter?

Seminar Paper  
about Raymund M. Smullyan:  
*Planet Without Laughter*

Benjamin Pick  
*School of Biblical Christian Worldview* – Herrnhut, Germany  
University of the Nations

Tutor: Kim Sungwon Kim  
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# 1. Introduction

*A man was taking it easy, lying on the grass and looking up at the clouds. He was identifying shapes when he decided to talk to God. "God", he said, "how long is a million years?"*

*God answered, "In my frame of reference, it's about a minute."*

*The man asked, "God, how much is a million dollars?"*

*God answered, "To Me, it's a penny."*

*The man then asked, "God, can I have a penny?"*

*God said, "In a minute."<sup>1</sup>*

As this famous joke shows, humor is quite common in our western society and some Christian traditions. So the questions arise: Is humor biblical? Is it a necessary element of life? Wouldn't it be better if everybody was seriously devoted to God?

As a contrast, a short-story from Raymond Smullyan<sup>2</sup> tries to imagine a world where laughter has died out almost completely. Yet the dry tone, love of details, and colorful allusions to our own historical development makes it witty commentary on today's society; for that reason I chose it as subject of this paper.

Consequently, my research questions can be formulated as:

- *What is the worldview of the author?*
- *What is a biblical approach to humor?*

If you're interested about the role of humor in Christianity, this paper should be interesting to you. It also represents one of the first secondary sources on this story.<sup>3</sup>

While the author of the story emphasizes the question "Humor – yes or no?", I felt that the questions "how?", "why?" and "for which purpose?" equally deserve attention. That is why this paper is entitled *Why on Earth – Laughter?*

The purpose of a School of Biblical Christian Worldview (SBCW), of which I am a student, is to analyze world-views expressed in our societies, to contrast them with a biblical worldview, and to practically live out the biblical alternative. This corresponds to the structure of this paper: after describing the story and its context (ch. 2), analyzing its premises (ch. 3) and leading them to their logical conclusion (ch. 4), it will be compared with a biblical perspective (ch. 5) and an alternative will be developed (ch. 6) and applied (ch. 7).

## 2. Observation

The American author Raymond Merrill Smullyan (born 1919) is a professor of mathematics and philosophy<sup>4</sup>. He has written more than 20 books about taoist philosophy, logic puzzles or mathematic theories.<sup>5</sup> To further portray his personality, he is stage magician and pianist, chose the self-teaching path early in his education and enjoys to present complex mathematical problems in a way so simple that any amateur can understand.<sup>6</sup>

1 "Time and Eternity - God Jokes," *ChristiansUnite.com*, accessed August 27, 2014, [http://jokes.christiansunite.com/God/Time\\_and\\_Eternity.shtml](http://jokes.christiansunite.com/God/Time_and_Eternity.shtml). Based on Psalm 90:4.

2 Raymond M. Smullyan, *This Book Needs No Title: A Budget of Living Paradoxes*, 1st Touchstone ed, A Touchstone Book (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1986), 153–185.

3 I am not a literature student but I will try my best to be precise in my observation and interpretation.

4 J. J. O'Connor and E. F. Robertson, "Smullyan Biography," accessed July 31, 2014, <http://www-groups.dcs.st-and.ac.uk/~history/Biographies/Smullyan.html>.

5 "Raymond Smullyan," *Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia*, July 23, 2014, [https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Raymond\\_Smullyan&oldid=616045186](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Raymond_Smullyan&oldid=616045186).

6 Ira Mothner, "The Puzzling and Paradoxical Worlds of Raymond Smullyan," 1982,

His book *This Book Needs No Title*<sup>7</sup> was first published in 1980. It contains 77 short stories and essays which show how paradoxical life is when applying rational logic to moral behavior or other aspects of reality. These stories, sometimes as short as one paragraph, partly refer to each other; hence we will need to take inter-textual allusions into account when analyzing one particular text.

In this book, *Planet without laughter*<sup>8</sup> is the final and most elaborate story. It describes the historical development of a society where humor has become abnormal and the group of people that possesses humor, the so-called “Laughers”, are declared psychologically ill. During the story the reader discovers that humor is both origin and end-point of the development and plays a central, spiritual role, which will be analyzed in the next chapter. In order to distinguish the special meaning of humor within this story, we will refer to it as “Humor” with a capital letter.

The story combines different types of text: it includes a sermon about how to become a “Laughter”, a creation legend, and a dialog between God and his adversary. These texts are embedded in the main narrative.

There is no main character of the story, as it mainly talks about people as sociological groups through the progress of time. The only persons who possess a name are Adam and Eve within the creation legend, as well as one particular Laugh-Master called Bankoff who taught Laughing by amusing<sup>9</sup>. The adversary of God is called “Evil Animal”<sup>10</sup> and later “Nemod”<sup>11</sup>, which is probably a twisted version of the word “demon”.

### 3. Analysis of Presuppositions

Before discerning the core messages of the story, we need to ask ourselves whether the story is meant metaphorically: does the author describe a purely fictional world, or does he try to make statements about our own world? On one hand, the first sentences emphasize the fictional character by using phrases typical for a fairy tale and using an overly antiseptic tone. On the other hand, the parallels to our reality are obvious:

First of all, the periods of time correspond to real-world periods. They are treated in reverse-chronological order (see table 1).

Chapter	Title of the chapter	Time period described in that chapter
Ch. 1	The Modern Period	Modern Period
Ch. 2	The Middle Period	Middle Period
Ch. 3	A Sermon	Middle Period looking on ancient texts
Ch. 4	The Great Legend	Middle Period looking on pre-Ancient text
Ch. 5	Back to the Modern Period	Modern Period
	Epilogue in Heaven	After the Modern Period

Table 1: Overview of chapters and corresponding time periods.<sup>12</sup>

The “Modern period” (or “Sane Period”, seen from the modern perspective), is characterized by a materialistic, overly scientific view on the events, and by a marginalization of the phenomena of

<http://www.gphillymath.org/resourcedisks/Smullyan.pdf>.

7 Smullyan, *This Book Needs No Title*.

8 Ibid., 153–185. The story is available online: <http://www-cs-faculty.stanford.edu/~uno/smullyan.html>.

9 Ibid., 162f.

10 Ibid., 172.

11 Ibid., 181.

12 Ibid., 158f.

laughter. This can be seen as a parody on modern positivism which postulates that whatever isn't measurable, doesn't exist.

The "Middle Period" (or "Convalescent Period") was rediscovering the ancient texts and writing *about* laughter; in this time, laughter was a recognized and for many even desirable state of humanity. However, Humor started disappearing insofar as its existence could be denied by scholars, which formed the philosophic basis of the following period. This corresponds to the period of Renaissance where many philosophers rediscovered and glorified Greek and Roman ideas, and in this way built the foundation for our modern worldview. Smullyan compares Bankoff with the Zen-Master Bankei in a footnote<sup>13</sup>, who also lived during this time-period.

The "Ancient Period" ("Psychotic Period") is less clearly depicted in the story. We only know it as source of "paradoxical and allegedly 'irrational'"<sup>14</sup> texts, i.e. full of Humor. While being the ideal for the Laughers and Middle-Period scholars, ancient humanity was declared insane by Modern-Period scholars. In the same way, modern science often looks down on the archaic high-cultures (e.g. Babylon, Egypt, Greece, Rome) as barbaric, incurably religious and unknowledgeable. Philosophers of the Renaissance and Romanticism, however, viewed them positively as being the original nature or reality.

Second, the story contains many Christian symbols. The "Great Legend" (ch. 4) is a variation of the creation account (Genesis 1–3); Nemod is the rebellious opponent of God, as Satan is in the Christian tradition; the "Prodigal Son"<sup>15</sup> is referenced. This does not mean that the portrayed worldview is Christian, as we will see in the following chapters. Moreover, laugh-communities have religious characteristics: they worship in temples on a specific day<sup>16</sup>; they preach to unbelievers in monasteries<sup>17</sup>; they are persecuted and maltreated in the Modern Period<sup>18</sup>. Most importantly, Laughter itself is a religious experience without which one cannot understand Humor<sup>19</sup>. The author thus compares Humor to a religion.

We will now analyze the dogmatic assumptions of the story. In order to find out how the author views God, man and the world, we will use the *Four Subsidiary Philosophical Questions* by Glenn Martin<sup>20</sup>.

The first question to ask is the **ontological** question: "What is reality?" On the planet portrayed in this story, a spiritual world exists: the epilogue features a dialog between God, angels and Nemod as heavenly beings. This dialogue reveals that the concept of "free will" is only an illusion.<sup>21</sup> More concretely, although men can decide on their own, the desires and informations on which they base that decision are not within their realm of influence.<sup>22</sup>

The ultimate cause of reality, however, is not God, but "the Way",<sup>23</sup> referring to the eastern concept of Tao: it is the universal law, a "reality beyond all predicates, the abyss that was before the Creator

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13 Ibid., 162.

14 Ibid., 159.

15 Ibid., 185.

16 Ibid., 170.

17 Ibid., 162.

18 Ibid., 157.

19 Ibid., 160, 171.

20 Glenn R. Martin, *Prevailing Worldviews of Western Society Since 1500*, 1st edition (Marion, Ind: Triangle Publishing, 2006).

21 Smullyan, *This Book Needs No Title*, 182–185.

22 Ibid., 36, 62.

23 Ibid., 185.

himself.”<sup>24</sup> The way to show reverence to Tao is by imitating it.<sup>25</sup> Both God and Nemod submit to its reality.<sup>26</sup>

Secondly, it is important to know how to generate and validate knowledge (**epistemological** question). On this planet, however, reality is a joke of cosmic dimensions: in order to bring humanity to a greater maturity, God tricked himself as well as the whole created universe.<sup>27</sup> Pure logic, therefore, cannot be trusted.

The only way to discover truth is to look at what is there: Humor exists not because of reasoning or believing, but simply because it exists.<sup>28</sup> This philosophy, embodied in the story by the so-called Mystic-Humorists, can be compared to phenomenology. Other stories show that Smullyan favors self-education by direct involvement instead of learning *about* something in a formal setting.<sup>29</sup> The famous computer scientist Donald Knuth uses the concept of knowledge by experience of this story to explain the importance of prayer: “Some things are beyond rationality and proof, and I don’t think God wants them to be analyzable or provable .”<sup>30</sup>

Thirdly, the **axiological** question asks: “What is valuable?” The highest value in this story is Humor: the attitude of the Laughters is described positively in contrast to the overly scientific “sane” adults, and even God himself is submitted to the ways of Humor.

Apart from Humor, human life is also an important value. The narrator comments that the drug treatment of the laughers is inherently wrong<sup>31</sup> and that it wasn’t tried at a normal person for the sake of science.<sup>32</sup> This reaffirms the dignity of man that has been at the foundation of American society. Self-realization (to “go forth and amount to something”<sup>33</sup>) is also portrayed as worthy goal by both God and man. As one of his essays shows, Smullyan means an improvement of one’s talents as a by-product of enjoying one’s talent and practicing it.<sup>34</sup> The origin of these values cannot explained within the taoist framework; instead, they indicate a remnant of modern humanism in his philosophy, as defined by Schaeffer: “a value system rooted in the belief that man is his own measure, that man is autonomous, totally independent.”<sup>35</sup>

Finally, we will treat the **teleological** question: “What happens at the end?” At the end of the story, both the totality of humans<sup>36</sup> as well as all spiritual beings<sup>37</sup> have a sense of humor. This is the fulfillment of the prophecy in the Great Legend: God promised his return when the human beings recognize their need of God and thus submit to the Way.<sup>38</sup> This return, however, does not restore the relation between Man and God, but rather between Man and Tao.

In conclusion, we can see the supreme importance of Humor in this world that is (nominally) *Without Laughter*. For Smullyan, Humor is mainly an attitude to life: it is a perspective in which para-

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24 Clive S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man, Or, Reflections on Education with Special Reference to the Teaching of English in the Upper Forms of Schools* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001), 18.

25 Ibid.; Smullyan, *This Book Needs No Title*, 102.

26 Smullyan, *This Book Needs No Title*, 182, 184.

27 Ibid., 182.

28 Ibid., 160.

29 Ibid., 81, 85.

30 Donald Ervin Knuth, *Things a Computer Scientist Rarely Talks about*, CSLI Lecture Notes, no. 136 (Stanford, Calif: CSLI Publications, 2001).

31 Smullyan, *This Book Needs No Title*, 180 “blessed.”

32 Ibid., 156.

33 Ibid., 175, 182.

34 Ibid., 85.

35 Francis A. Schaeffer, *How Should We Then Live?: The Rise and Decline of Western Thought and Culture*, L’Abri 50th anniversary ed (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway Books, 2005), 60.

36 Smullyan, *This Book Needs No Title*, 181.

37 Ibid., 181, 183, 184.

38 Ibid., 176.

doxical phrases can make sense<sup>39</sup> and one cannot understand it without entering it.<sup>40</sup> In another essay, he describes this attitude as “following the line of least resistance”<sup>41</sup>, i.e. moving according to the movement of Tao.

## 4. Consequences

In the last chapter, we have extensively analyzed the author’s worldview, so that we can now draw conclusions. Our method assumes that a worldview is so ingrained in a human that he lives it out more consistently than he thinks he does.<sup>42</sup> Therefore we will now try to find out where his premises lead to in the final analysis, even if the author wouldn’t necessarily agree to these consequences.

We have seen that free will is illusion: how then can a person choose to care for others? It follows that relationships, family and society do not have covenantal character: there is no sense of moral responsibility with one another.<sup>43</sup> Instead they are mere mechanisms that sustain life; the implied ultimate goal, then, is survival. There is no other person or being that bestows value on this life; if the value of life, however, only comes out of the existence of life itself, then there is no way of knowing how valuable it really is – we are cast on our emotions and instincts to measure it.<sup>44</sup> That is why Smullyan recurs to humanism for giving dignity to man; but humanism ultimately only says “man is valuable because we believe he is.” If we cannot know what is ultimately good, then “progress” loses its meaning, and it is impossible to improve or “amount to something” – contrary to what the author says.

Furthermore, if free will is illusion, how can we be sure that this very statement (“free will is illusion”) is not an illusion as well? A body of knowledge where a statement can be both true and false at the same time inevitably leads to confusion: even if I do know something with certainty I cannot communicate it to others, because Tao, the real truth, is silent.<sup>45</sup> For this reason Smullyan chose the concept of Humor for explaining the nature of the world: one cannot explain the world, and one don’t have to explain Humor. However, humor without truth is shallow, they are only unexpected surprises (paradoxes).<sup>46</sup>

Finally, the story shows that the “return of the Lord” of the creation legend was realized when Humor had its way on Earth.<sup>47</sup> It did not involve a physical return or any kind of re-establishment of the relationship between God and man. As a consequence, it does not make a difference if one believes in God, it is only important that one understands the nature of Humor by living it. Religion then becomes a tool: instead of asking which beliefs are true, Smullyan asks which beliefs are useful.<sup>48</sup> Useful for what ulterior purpose, we might ask. But regarding this question, the author remains silent – consistent with his taoist philosophy.<sup>49</sup>

## 5. Comparison with a Biblical Christian Worldview

In this chapter, we will contrast the story to biblical teaching.

Firstly, the Bible shows that both God (Psalm 115:3) and men (Deuteronomy 28) have free will. Of course, “free will” does not mean “do whatever I want”. Man is not without influence when deciding: society, habits, and the spiritual world try to shape us anytime (Ephesians 6:12). Yet, Christians

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39 Ibid., 140.

40 Ibid., 145.

41 Ibid., 102.

42 Schaeffer, *How Should We Then Live?*, 19, 187.

43 Smullyan, *This Book Needs No Title*, 135, 142.

44 Ibid., 54.

45 Ibid., 20.

46 cf. *ibid.*, 162.

47 Ibid., 181.

48 Ibid., 73.

49 Ibid., 20.

always have the decision to live according to their own desires (flesh), or according to the love of Christ living in them (spirit) (Romans 6).

In a way, even God has limited his freedom of choice by making a covenant with us. We can read many stories where God was about to destroy his people because of their unfaithfulness, but then held himself back because of his covenant with them and his mercy for them (Ezekiel 20).

Secondly, God (not Tao or Humor) is the ultimate reality (John 14:6). The Bible emphasizes that God is the first cause and last goal of his creation (Colossians 1:16) and no other can even get close (Isaiah 40:12ff).

Thirdly, man is able to gain knowledge. Indeed, Whitehead argues that Christianity is the origin of science: because God is rational, the universe is ordered, and thus cosmic principles can be discovered.<sup>50</sup> Biblical understanding, personal revelation, communication with others, reflection, emotional and practical experience, measurement and history each can contribute to our quest for truth; the Bible, however, is the ultimate standard.<sup>51</sup> As man has a free will, acquiring knowledge ultimately becomes trusting God and listening to what he has to say through different channels.

Fourthly, God is more important than the Law that he gave. That is why Jesus could change the moral standard (Matthew 5:22 etc.) without violating the Law (Matthew 5:17f). For God, relationship is a very important value: his character is love (1 John 4:8), and all his commandments can be summarized into loving God and my neighbor (Luke 10:25–28). This relational perspective gives worth to us as individuals and communities, independently of what we are or do. Thus, a moral absolute exists: to honor God and one another, which means to gradually change our whole attitude to life in reflection of his character (1 Peter 1:16; Philippians 3:12).

Fifthly, at the end, God will return in person, in order to restore the relationship between God and man (II Corinthians 5:19), as well as between man and man (Malachi 4:6). He will establish what we call the “kingdom of God” where his Lordship is undisputed (Philippians 2:10f), where pain has ceased and life flows in abundance (Revelation 21:1–6). The seeds of this ideal state are already in today’s world (Mark 4:30–32; Luke 17:22) and the task of his believers is to proclaim that it is arriving (Luke 10:9). Satan, unlike Nemo, will remain evil and forever be bound (Revelation 20:10).

To conclude, there are substantial differences between the premises of the story and the Bible. Therefore we will now attempt to establish a Christian approach to humor.

## 6. Alternative Worldview

In German, there is a jovial phrase saying “Man thinks, God leads. Man thought, God laughed ...”<sup>52</sup> It appears that the notion that God has a sense of humor is deeply ingrained in our culture. In fact, no religion seems to be without any notion of humor at all.<sup>53</sup> So what is the role of humor in a Christian worldview?

Humor is only used in our today’s sense of a comical, amusing or absurd quality<sup>54</sup> since the 18<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>55</sup> so it is not surprising that the word doesn’t appear in the Bible. Thus, some theologians argue indirectly that if man has humor and is created in God’s image, God must have humor as

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50 Schaeffer, *How Should We Then Live?*, 133f.

51 Mark Wilson, “Modern Western Science” (Herrnhut, August 21, 2014).

52 orig. „Der Mensch denkt, Gott lenkt. Der Mensch dachte, Gott lachte ...“

53 Markus Bechtold, “Im Witz Vereint: Hat Gott Eigentlich Humor?,” *Evangelisch.de*, February 20, 2012, <http://www2.evangelisch.de/themen/religion/im-witz-vereint-hat-gott-eigentlich-humor58050>.

54 “Humor,” *Free Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, accessed September 3, 2014, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/humor>.

55 John Morreall, “Philosophy of Humor,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Spring 2013, 2013, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2013/entries/humor/>.

well.<sup>56</sup> Others observe nature and find curiosities like the platypus so amusing that they assume God as their creator must smile about it as well. These signs do not inform us about the origin, though: it would be interesting to know if humor was created before the fall, came into existence because of the fall or given by God after the fall.<sup>57</sup> We do know, however, that God showed delight in himself, in creation and in mankind before the fall (Proverbs 8:30f). Additionally, we can see that God is creative and relational, which both are prerequisites for a sense of humor.

The Bible records several instances where God is laughing (Psalms 2:4, 37:13, etc.); however, in these instances God is laughing at his enemies in order to express his unquestionable superiority. We can also see frequently that he rejoices (Luke 10:21; 15:7,10) and invites us to join in – this is one of the reasons why God ordered Israel to feast regularly (Deuteronomy 16:14). The Bible narrative contains several humorous passages: we can find world plays (Isaiah 30:16), mocking voices (Isaiah 44:14–17, I Kings 18:27, Galatians 5:18), situational irony (Jonah 4), exaggeration (Matthew 7:5), and an abundance of surprising turnings (Numeri 22:28–30). God even named the son promised to Abraham “Laughter” (Isaac, Genesis 17:19).

Humor can be found in some church traditions as well. The state churches in Germany have the custom of Easter Laughter (*risus paschalis*):<sup>58</sup> on Easter Sunday, the preacher makes the congregation laugh in order to express God’s superiority to death (see I Corinthians 15:55). Laughter can be a form of praise (Psalms 126:2); some Christians believe that laughing can be a manifestation of God’s presence through the Holy Spirit.<sup>59</sup> There are other traditions though that reject all forms of humor as not conducive to worship or leading to a life-style of immorality,<sup>60</sup> or, more moderate, declare a sober life more important than humor. This attitude reflects the Greek philosophy of Stoicism than man need to be serious and responsible, instead of seeking pleasure first (Epicureanism).

We can conclude that God enjoys humor, or at least allows us to enjoy humor. However, godly humor is not without limits. Ephesians 5:4 tells us that obscene jokes, silly or empty words, as well as witticism, are not to be used. This raises the question: where exactly is the border? In order to evaluate our words, the criterion that Jesus gave can be used: are they “idle” (Matthew 12:36)? Or do they glorify God?

Is a good sense of humor a necessary for life? It is instructive to observe how God treats his followers when they are in a depressive mood. He does not tell them to “cheer up” or makes them laugh, but he provides, confronts with truth, comforts, takes away burdens and then gives new perspectives (cf. I Kings 19). If it was an essential and timeless trait of Christian life, we could assume more teaching about it in the Bible. Happiness, then, is not an “unalienable right”, as the American Declaration of Independence states, but a by-product of righteous living (John 15:9–11).

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56 Frank Rudolph, “Hat Gott Humor?,” accessed August 21, 2014, <http://www.f-rudolph.info/ansprachen/hat-gott-humor/>.

57 Abraham Binny, “God And Humor,” 2004, <http://binnyva.tripod.com/bible/articles/humor.html>.

58 “Osterlachen,” *Wikipedia*, April 7, 2014, <https://de.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Osterlachen&oldid=129309668>.

59 “Is Laughing in the Spirit A True Holy Spirit Manifestation?,” *Bible Knowledge*, accessed August 30, 2014, <http://www.bible-knowledge.com/laughing-in-the-spirit/>.

60 Morreall, “Philosophy of Humor.”

## 7. Application

In order to apply the results of my research, I will now prepare a lesson for a church youth group (age 15–20 years). The goal of this lesson is to reflect about the effects of humor in relation to our faith, and will take around 60 minutes (see time estimates).

To start the program, the group plays a funny game (see Appendix for a suggestion and possible alternatives). Through this game, they can experience humor first-hand and try out different kinds of humor.<sup>61</sup> (15 min)

After (hopefully) a good portion of corporate laughter, the group meets in a circle and an informal, semi-guided reflection of the game follows (What did you like most? What worked well? What else could you have done/are there other forms of humor?). (5 min)

Then split up in small groups of 3–5 people. Each group receives a written assignment that approaches the topic from a negative direction (non-humor) (cf. Appendix). You can choose one of them for all groups or give different assignments to different groups. (10 min)

Get back together as a group. If you get the impression that the concept of humor is not clear yet, start by asking what kinds of humor they like or dislike, and why. Try to point out the positive<sup>62</sup> or negative<sup>63</sup> effects on an individual and on a group. Alternatively, ask directly what effects humor can have on us. (10–15 min)

We are now transitioning to a more theological aspect. You can show one the cartoons (cf. Appendix) or write the following question on a white-board: “Can God laugh?” Probably the notion that God has humor will sound absurd or funny at first. Insist that it is an important question and follow up with other questions, such as: Does God have emotions? Can God be sad, angry, affectionate etc.? Does God like us? What does God think when you laugh? Try to recall biblical stories from their memories as well as personal experience. Choose some bible verses from the previous chapter if there is confusion about some points. (15–20 min)

Close in prayer, for example: “Thank you for what we have learned today. Thank you for the gift of humor, and help us use it wisely. Amen.”

## 8. Conclusion

We have now analyzed the short-story, developed a Christian alternative and shown how it can be applied in a church context. The application is ready to be tried out in a real setting – as I drew on experience from similar discussion sessions about other topics, I am confident that it should be interesting for most participants. Other possible application possibilities would include designing and leading a flash-mob that reflects God’s character, or writing a short-story as a Christian rebuttal of *Planet Without Laughter*.

Let us now review our research questions. Firstly, this paper analyzed the worldview of the author and found it to be taoist in nature. Of course, a deeper analysis would require reading his other books and researching for more biographic information which might be available outside of the internet – this paper focused on *This Book Needs No Title*.

Secondly, the paper sketched a Christian approach to humor which is informed by both biblical truth and opinions of other Christians. This part would benefit by more elaboration: one could compare the attitude of Christian who have humor as their profession, e.g. Fabian Vogt (an author), the Skit guys (comedians) and Daniel Kallauch (a hand puppet player). What is their motivation? How

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61 e.g. jokes, life-stories, grimaces, unexpected behavior etc.

62 e.g. physically healthy, feel more motivated, encourages crazy ideas, laughing together can help bonding

63 e.g. making fun of others, violating the dignity of others, making others feel excluded because they can’t understand the joke, devalue important questions or comments that were meant seriously

do they view the relationship between humor, theology and daily life? These questions should also be asked in a historical context: how did theologians and philosophers view humor?<sup>64</sup>

During the writing process of this paper, I consciously tried to combine scientific research, emotional experience, personal listening to God, discussion with peers, and previous knowledge in order to reach conclusions. This was moderately successful: while all channels contributed thoughts and inspiration, I need to practice more how to combine them in a fruitful way.

I have practiced how to use Martin's method as a tool for interpreting a text and found it useful if the research question is worldview-related.

The part of the process that was most interesting to me was reflecting about humor within the framework of my faith. I can now understand both positions, regarding humor as either unnecessary or basic to life, and find myself somewhere in-between. Personally, I am getting the impression that humor is overly emphasized in our current, western society. Entertainment, as every other activity, can easily become idolatry. But if idolatry is a vain copy of the original, how does the original look like?<sup>65</sup> If we seek him first, we might receive humor as well – as a “good gift” coming from the Father (Luke 11:10–13):

*Laughing at the presence of God seems, well, blasphemous. But it is the presence of God that opens us to laughter in the first place. [...] Laughter testifies to our confidence that one way or another, sooner or later, God's will shall indeed be done.*<sup>66</sup>

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64 cf. Ursula Homann, “Das Christentum Und Der Humor,” 2002, <http://www.ursulahomann.de/DasChristentumUndDerHumor/komplett.html>.

65 cf. Bettina, “Hat Gott Humor?,” Forum, *Jesus Freaks Deutschland*, (2011), <http://jesusfreaks.de/netzwerk/gruppen/>.

66 Catherine M. Wallace, “Laughter and the Presence of God,” 1997, <http://www.catherinemwallace.com/Home/lectures/laughter-and-the-presence-of-god>.

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## 10. Appendix: Material for Application

### **Game: Mensch-lache-nicht ("Do-not-laugh")**

Farbige Teppichquadrate deuten ein großes Mensch-ärgere-dich-nicht-Feld an. Die Jugendlichen werden auf die 4 Startpunkte aufgeteilt. Jeder bekommt eine Murmel als Startkapital; wer am Ende am meisten Murmeln hat, gewinnt (es gibt also keine Teams). Die Spieler würfeln (Schaumstoffwürfel) reihum; sie müssen keine 6 würfeln, um „aus dem Haus“ zu kommen, sondern können gleich die gewürfelte Zahl an Feldern gehen.

Wenn sie auf einem Feld landen, das bereits besetzt ist, treten diese Spieler miteinander in den Wettkampf: derjenige, der gewürfelt hat, muss etwas sagen oder tun, um den Anderen zum Lachen oder Lächeln zu bringen (Kitzeln verboten). Wenn ihm das gelingt, muss der Andere ihm eine Murmel geben; wenn nicht, bekommt er eine Murmel. Wer keine Murmel mehr hat, darf wieder zurück zum Start gehen und sich eine neue Murmel nehmen.

Das Spiel endet, wenn ein Spieler das Ziel erreicht oder eine vorher ausgemachte Zeit überschritten wird (z.B. 15 Minuten).

*Alternative games:* Armer Schwarzer Kater, Zeitungsschlagen

## Small Group Assignments

Wie würde eine Welt ohne Humor aussehen? Male oder beschreibe sie.

(How would a world without humor look like? Draw or describe.)<sup>67</sup>

Du bist ein Diktator, der Humor abschaffen möchte. Was würdest du machen? Erkläre.

(You are a dictator who wants to abolish humor. How would you do it? Explain.)<sup>68</sup>

## Cartoon: Does God make jokes?



Image 1: Does God make jokes?

(But God is far too serious to make jokes. – Am I?)



Image 2: Moses in the desert<sup>69</sup>

Or read a Christian joke<sup>70</sup>.

67 e.g. gray, boring, mechanic, ...

68 e.g. forbid laughing, destroy funny books, inflict pain, ...

69 John Cook, "A Time to Laugh: Christian Cartoons," May 7, 2009,

<https://web.archive.org/web/20130409093334/http://atimetolaugh.com.au/cartoons.php?c=j95>.

70 see for example <http://jokes.christiansunite.com/>, <http://www.christliche-witze.de/>