

**CREDO CAFE - Comedy and Christianity - No laughing matter? – April 2009**



**The MP3 of part of the evening is available here**

**Elements of Comedy**

Six elements are required for something to be humorous:

- 1) Wit – comedy works on an intellectual level, not emotional (hence a joke on minorities or an insult?)
- 2) It is mechanical – i.e. inflexible – we laugh at inflexibility in humans – carrying on in a certain way when we know the circumstances have changed – incongruity. Incongruity can be achieved through
  - Literalism (give us a hand)
  - Reversal (the opposite of the expected response)
  - Exaggeration
- 3) It reflects humanity – even funny animals are only funny because they remind us of ourselves
- 4) There need to be understood society or personal norms – a shared culture – within which the joke can work – if they are unknown you won't 'get' the joke, and explaining it involves explaining the predicates which reveals the mechanism of the joke and is not funny!
- 5) The joke / comedy subverts these societal or personal norms – it is counter-cultural and deals with the unexpected (Feast of fools – a brief societal revolution) Important societal norms are Taboos, we don't routinely discuss sex, bodily functions and death, so jokes about these things are immediately more subversive.

6) It is perceived by the observer as harmless or painless to the participants. (Falling over is funny – until we realise someone has broken their leg – not funny).

Shorter definition of humour – 'an error that doesn't matter (with an element of surprise)'.

So are religious people less given to humour – do they take life 'more seriously'?

## **The Bible and Humour**

Numbers 22 – Balaam's donkey

Acts 20 – Eutychus 'falls' asleep

Proverbs 19 and 27 – A nagging wife is like the 'dripping of a leaky roof'

Song of songs 4 – 'Your teeth are like a flock of ewes...none of them is missing' – wordplay as shekullum (all of them) sounds like shakullah (missing)

Ecclesiastes hevel translated as 'Vanity' can be translated as 'irony' or 'it's funny how...'

<http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/economic/friedman/bibhumor.htm>