

Onion brings us a laugh in national time of tears

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Leno and Letterman couldn't do it. Bill Maher tried but failed. "Saturday Night Live" tiptoed around it. And the talented comedians who appeared on a live, all-star telethon didn't even bother.

So it was up to The Onion to try to wring some laughter out of America's response to the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. While most comedians have steered safely clear of the tragedy, the popular satirical Web site was the first to offer a comprehensive, humorous take on the topic that has dominated the American psyche since the tragedies occurred.

After posting a collection of previously prepared stories the day after the attacks, The Onion (www.theonion.com) launched a new edition Sept. 26 entirely dedicated to the terrorist attacks. It was a risky decision that presented staff writers with countless possibilities for failure. But they succeeded wildly, mixing irony and anger into a hilarious parody that validates the Internet's role as a breeding ground for brave content no traditional media outlet would touch.

The Onion has its roots in traditional media, beginning life as a satirical newspaper published in Madison, Wis. Although the print edition still circulates, the publication gained fame with a Web site that parodies the news media and the subjects it covers.

The Onion's brand of dry, edgy humor isn't for everyone. The site will offend people who think it's inappropriate to have fun with religion, race and other cultural taboos. The writers also favor language that isn't even allowed on "NYPD Blue."

But if you're the sort who's amused by headlines like "Mother Teresa Sent to Hell in Wacky Afterlife Mix-up,"

the ONION 26 September 2001

God Angrily Clarifies 'Don't Kill' Rule

NEW YORK—Responding to recent events on Earth, God, the omniscient creator-deity worshipped by billions of followers of various faiths for more than 6,000 years, angrily clarified His longtime stance against humans killing each other Monday.

"Look, I don't know, maybe I haven't made myself completely clear, so for the record, here it is again," said the Lord, His divine face betraying visible emotion during a press conference near the site of the fallen Twin Towers. "Somehow, people keep coming up with the idea that I want them to kill their neighbor. Well, I don't. And to be honest, I'm really getting sick and tired of it. Get it straight. Not only do I not want anybody to kill anyone, but I specifically *commanded* you not to, in really simple terms that anybody ought to be able to understand."

Worshipped by Christians, Jews, and Muslims alike, God said His name has been invoked countless times over the centuries as a reason to kill in what He called "an unending cycle of violence."

"I don't care how holy somebody claims to be," God said. "If a person tells you it's My will that they kill someone, they're wrong. Got it? I don't care what religion you are, or who you think your enemy is, here it is one more time: No killing, in My name or anyone else's, ever again."



Above: God.

The Onion parody included a news conference in which God restates, "Thou shalt not kill."

The stories manage to extract laughs from the terrorist attacks without diminishing their horror or the significance of our loss.

"Basketball Star Blames God for Defeat" or "Collectible-Plate Industry Calls for Tragic Death of Streisand," then The Onion is your kind of newspaper.

The latest edition satirizes news coverage of the terrorist attacks, right down to an expletive-laden "Attack on America" logo that shows the entire country on fire.

The top story, "U.S. Vows To Defeat Whoever It Is We're At War Against," details the search for someone—anyone—to punish. "With any luck, they'll have uniforms of some sort," U.S. Sen. John McCain is quoted as saying. House Speaker Dennis Has-

tert is shown wondering whether Congress can declare war against "maybe three or four Egyptian guys, an Algerian, and this other guy who kind of looks Lebanese but could be Syrian," and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld is quoted as pining for a more traditional war.

"We were lucky enough at Pearl Harbor to be the victim of a craven sneak attack from an aggressor with the decency to attack military targets, use their own damn planes and clearly mark those planes with their national insignia so that we knew who they were," he says.

That story and others manage to extract laughs from the terrorist attacks without diminishing their horror or the significance of our loss.

One story, "Hijackers Surprised To Find Selves In Hell," brutally skewers the terrorists' apparent belief that killing thousands of innocent people would win them a free pass to eternal paradise.

Other headlines speak for themselves: "Not Knowing

What Else To Do, Woman Bakes American-Flag Cake," "Dinty Moore Breaks Long Silence On Terrorism With Full-Page Ad" and "God Angrily Clarifies 'Don't Kill' Rule."

That last one is perhaps the best story on the site, featuring coverage of a post-attack news conference with God. "Get it straight," He says. "Not only do I not want anybody to kill anyone, but I specifically commanded you not to do so, in really simple terms that anybody ought to be able to understand."

The site features banner ads appealing for donations to relief funds, and a note explaining that a portion of proceeds from this edition will be given to New York firefighters. But the site already has made a valuable contribution to the relief of millions of Americans inundated by news coverage of the horrifying tragedy.

At a time when many of us feel ready to cry, The Onion was brave enough to try to make us laugh.

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