

Jasmine Young | CD702 | Interview of an Irreligious Person | March 4, 2023

On Sunday, February 26, I interviewed Herman King, an irreligious person who I identified myself to as someone preparing for ministry. I asked him about how he might want me to introduce God to his family and I learned a great deal about his life.

Herman has nicknamed himself 'Black', the barber, and spends most of his days working in his barbershop and entertaining much conversation about beliefs and perspectives. It's a field of relativism and think-pieces, sometimes contentious, and often non-factual. It's clear how new ideas can be introduced to people in such a context. As it turns out, Herman grew up in a Christian household, yet in his adulthood he assumed a completely irreligious posture. He didn't completely explain, but he seemed to suggest that tensions about injustices in the world shook his confidence in God, as Jesus is so often displayed as 'white'-- the same face of his alleged oppressor. If this idea prompted some soul searching in his younger years, it was fueled by a surge of ideas about the supremacy of man for their own destinies. You hear him refer to men as 'kings', and as created gods in their own right. If there was any 'higher' power then mankind is part of it, having the same fiber (literally, carbon) as every other created part of the universe. In my view, Herman acknowledges creation, but not the Creator. At best, the Creator is a historical benevolent force with no activity in the world today. At worst, the Creator is a myth altogether.

Herman is an unmarried father, too. I asked him how he might want God introduced to his family. He says that he wouldn't want God-stuff to poison their minds and their own thinking about the universe. He respects all people, and all their beliefs, but he is averse to the missional need to share the good news about God because he sees it as an imposition on others' free thinking. He shared that he does not support holidays and customary celebratory days (like

Valentine's Day) because they are steeped in this unfavorable religious rite that he does not identify with. He will celebrate historical holidays, like Juneteenth, that promote the plight of man and his liberty. He wouldn't want his children to succumb to the same thinking as everyone else and be fooled into believing that religion controls everyone and everything.

Herman often appeals to *reason* in his explanation, but I must admit his answers were not entirely coherent to me. Some of his argument involved how Africa is so I'll conceived yet is the center of the origin of mankind. He believes the Bible and all Christian history is white-centered, with some malicious agenda for control of others and their histories. Hiding a bigger truth, perhaps?

All in all, Herman was not very receptive to the idea of God being introduced to his family at all. He was more interested in being heard. He was not as much defensive as he was offensive, seeking to attract me to his view. I asked him what compelled him to share his views/beliefs if he identifies as an irreligious person. In other words, *whose agenda or mission is he promoting if he doesn't feel anyone is in control?* He seemed to agree with me, that his compulsion to share was not necessarily grounded in anything other than his own will to do so, and perhaps that was not quite enough to encourage others to 'follow' his thinking. We left the conversation with the amicable 'to each his/her own'.

I left the conversation wishing I could have done more to repair his soiled faith and to correct his misconceptions about history in the Ancient Near East. But what I now know is that the more urgent aim in such conversation is listening and instilling a true sense of trust with the person. Not only might that support a future dialogue, but it has also made me a better person by being more aware of the challenges of those around me who are irreligious or struggling with ideas that compete with faith.