"99 nuns giggle, 1 nun gasps:"
The not-all-that-Christian natural class of Christian jokes[1]

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Abstract

Encouraged by the existence of the folk label for the group of "Christian" or "religious" jokes, this paper assumes Christian humor as a subgenre in its own right. This assumption is supported by an exemplary analysis of these jokes as a group of texts that are intended or perceived as similar, thus constituting a natural class. *Within this class the status of truly Christian jokes in terms of script oppositions (Raskin 1985) will be defined, and for Christian jokes in terms of family resemblance (Wittgenstein 1953). An internal hierarchy within this joke class will also be proposed and justified based on their analysis in terms of the General Theory of Verbal Humor (Attardo and Raskin 1991) and in relation to prototypicality effects. One central finding is that the joke class of Christian jokes is* shallow, *in the sense that very limited knowledge of specifically Christian scripts makes them Christian and is necessary to appreciate them.*

Keywords: Humor; religion; Christianity; joke classification; GTVH.

Introduction

The fact that Larry Wilde has published *The Official Religious/not so Religious Joke Book* should be reason enough to identify a group of jokes that deserves closer attention as a separate category. But also any larger Internet joke collection has a section reserved for "religious jokes," "Christian jokes," or similarly titled subsections (see, for example, cybercheeze, jokeserver, randomjoke). And if we assume Christian humor as a subgenre in its own right, we are encouraged to do so by the very existence of the folk label.

But not every joke that contains a haphazard mention of matters Christian is a Christian joke. Consider the following non-Christian, non-religious joke:

(1) There were two *church-going* women gossiping in front of the store when a dusty old cowboy rode up. He tied up in front of the saloon, walked around behind his horse, lifted its tail and kissed the horse full on its rectum.
Repulsed, one of the women asked, "That's disgusting, why did you do THAT?"
To which the cowboy replied, "I've got chapped lips."
Confused, the women continued, "Does that make them feel better?"
"No, but it stops me from licking them!"
(my italics; www.jokesplus.com; listed there under "religion")

If those women had just come from their crochet group, it would serve just as well to set them up as the properly disgusted audience for the cowboy's behavior. But these jokes in which Christian elements are rather marginal are the exception in those collections.

In general, "religious joke" collections turn out to contain predominantly jokes that fulfill the criteria for Christian jokes to be analyzed here. What is usually thrown in is the occasional nonspecific ethnic joke, Jewish joke, and jokes about interdenominational competition. In what follows, it will then be our task to define the concept of *natural class* of jokes, a concept borrowed from phonology, and do an exemplary analysis of Christian jokes as such a class. The internal organization of a natural *joke* class will require most of our attention in this paper, and will also be found to cut across other previously analyzed subgenres, namely political jokes and ethnic, in particular Jewish, jokes.

Within Christian humor itself, there are not only specific sexual and ethnic traits. Röhrich, for example, identifies the following characteristic elements for what he calls "the denominational joke" (1977: 195): antidenominational, or, in general, antireligious, tendency, dealing with nuns, orders, celibacy, confession, priests, and the Pearly Gates. While this is a good enumeration of motifs, one of the features of natural joke classes we will define are membership criteria for "truly" Christian jokes in terms of script opposition (Raskin 1985) — not in terms of their relation to Christian scripture or dogma, of course — and in terms of family resemblance (Wittgenstein 1953). The other task will be to propose and justify an internal hierarchy within joke classes based on their analysis in terms of

the General Theory of Verbal Humor (Attardo and Raskin 1991) and related to prototypicality effects. This will be supported by the analysis of and examples from a corpus of currently 431 jokes. Several motifs will emerge as constitutional for Christian jokes, and a shared central element, a necessarily Christian incongruity, will be identified for a more restricted subclass of truly Christian jokes.

Religion and humor

Right at the outset we are faced with the practical problem of *religion* as a comparative concept applied to anything other than Christian religion (or possibly monotheistic scripture-based religions). It is almost always a Christian religion that serves as the criterion for most Western approaches to comparative phenomenology in religious studies, ethnology, ethnography, anthropology, etc.

This problem also holds for the respective religious jokes for which Davies observes: "There is no [corresponding] uniformity of ethnic jokes about religion or sex, which seem to differ from culture to culture as widely as the beliefs, mores, and taboos that have given rise to them" (1990: 30). Religion as a valid concept can neither be founded on a universal notion of "God" or "the holy," nor on the basis of a common function within various cultural systems (for overviews of the diverse theoretical approaches to religion see, e.g., Elsas 1985: 253–82; Stolz 1988: 9–33). No attempt will be made to enter into the controversial discussion about the nature, structure, function, or form of religion itself (cf. Motzki 1976; Seiwert 1981).

This practical and philosophical problem is avoided here by using only examples that have been contextualized and labeled by their respective collectors as "religious" jokes (based on their obviously "Christocentric" notion of religion) or — more correctly — "Christian" jokes. That we will find that our analysis of these jokes finds Christian elements, albeit shallow ones, in a prominent position in these jokes, confirms that the approach chosen is valid here.

Anthropological or ethnographic studies show that humor has been intimately connected with religion in many cultures (e.g. Apte 1985: 151). Corroborating the fertile role of religion for humorous incongruities, Pollio confirms that "taboo topics evoke a larger laugh than non-taboo topics" (1983: 217). The reason is that the oppressing forces which are counteracted by the laughter are stronger. Taboos divide clean from unclean, holy from

profane, to protect the two spheres from each other (Douglas 1966: 8). The importance lies in the division itself more than in the content of the two spheres, and this division is reinforced through its use in humor. Jokes have to bring two spheres, or scripts, together which were previously perceived to be separate. These taboo topics include most prominently sexual, excremental, and dietary uncleanness. And a central element of Christian religious jokes is, accordingly, the prominent position of sexual content in connection with celibacy and the sacred/profane (as sexual) contrast.

Humor theory

This paper is based largely on the linguistic theory of humor as developed in Raskin's Semantic Script Theory of Humor (SSTH) and its revision by Attardo and Raskin, the General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH). Although some aspects of these will have to be outlined in more detail, the reader is assumed to be familiar with, at least, Raskin (1985) and Attardo and Raskin (1991).

Having started with script opposition as the only element of analysis, the revised SSTH (Attardo and Raskin 1991) encompasses six knowledge resources (KRs) that are used when a joke is generated, and a tentative hierarchy among them: *script opposition*, the highest KR in the hierarchy, the opposition of two overlapping interpretations of the joke; *logical mechanism*, the faulty, local logic of the joke; *situation*, what the joke is about; *target*, the optional butt of the joke; *narrative strategy*, its narrative genre; and *language*, the actual words used in the joke. The expansion leads to the semantic theory becoming founded in linguistics at large. This theory is the main tool with which we analyze our corpus and relevant parts of it will be illustrated further where appropriate.

Christian jokes

Interestingly, our notion of identifying truly Christian humor is not far from what this compiler of "religious humor" on the Internet demands of submissions:

"What is Religious Humor?
Anything that [sic] funny that happens in a church?

Only humor which requires the religious part *to make sense* or *be funny* is welcome here. If one has to explain why the [joke] is religious [...] OR if one merely changes the characters or setting to "make" it religious (i.e. Why did the *priest* cross the road?) the humor is still outside the religious boundaries [...]." (www1.ecunet.org/ecunet/eculaugh/)

There must be some religious, in our case Christian, element in the joke that cannot easily be removed, is integral to the joke. Accordingly, our criterion for truly Christian jokes is based on and formulated in analogy to Raskin's concept of truly ethnic jokes (1985: 205–209):

(2) a joke is Christian iff the main opposition(s) involves one truly Christian script, i.e., the joke is not funny without the Christian script (and replacing the script with an otherwise compatible, but not Christian one, changes or eliminates the joke's funniness)

   Let us look at an example that appears to fall in between the prototypical categories of Jewish humor and Christian humor. Already a superficial inspection reveals it to be a generic ethnic joke about stupidity, neither a Christian nor a Jewish joke:

(3) A *minister*, a *priest*, and a *rabbi* went into the Sahara Desert. The *minister* took a bottle of wine, the *priest* took an umbrella, and the *rabbi* took a car door. A stranger noticing this asked why they were taking the things they were carrying. The *minister* said, "In case I get thirsty." The *priest* said, "In case it rains." And the *rabbi* said, "Because if it gets hot I can roll down the window." (Tapper and Press 2000: 16; my italics)

There is nothing particularly religious about the joke apart from the three main characters, which can be safely replaced by members of groups that have varying stereotypical stupidity scripts assigned to them. This could be Ostfriesländers in Germany or Poles in the United States, and the joke might actually be funnier than in its current form in which Jews are the target, who are not stereotyped as stupid, rabbis least of all.

   The discussion so far has revolved around the central question for our discussion: If jokes like the one in example (3) are not Christian jokes, because they do not contain the necessary Christian script, what then *are* Christian scripts and how are they encoded in the text of truly Christian jokes? In the next section, we will begin to approach an answer to this question by looking at related joke genres.

Christian, ethnic, and Jewish jokes

The two joke categories most directly related to Christian jokes are generally identified as natural classes, witnessed by the fact that they have a name. These are ethnic and Jewish jokes, of which the latter are special instances of the former. We will try to identify (as far as possible) what delimits these categories in terms of KRs and use the results to take the next step toward delimiting Christian jokes. The connection between Christian and ethnic jokes lies in the fact that ethnic and religious groups are often coextensive and ethnic and religious boundaries coincide (cf. Davies 1982: 51). This coincidence is reflected mostly by the targets of Christian jokes, as will be shown below. In our corpus of jokes, targeted minorities are different Christian denominations. As mentioned above, Judaism is obviously erroneously perceived as a Christian denomination.

Truly ethnic jokes and truly Christian jokes

Since so many Christian jokes are closely related to the tried and tested field of ethnic jokes, it seems appropriate to discuss in more depth the research on ethnic jokes. Certain pan-human, primordial emotions and attitudes, such as ethnocentrism, in-group adulation, outgroup resentment, prejudice, and intolerance of the life-styles of others, seem to constitute the broad base for the development and popularity of ethnic humor (Apte 1985: 148). There certainly is aggression in ethnic jokes, but it is a special form of aggression already embedded into sociable context and channeled through the joking context. Ethnic jokes are "in-group communications, not inter-group confrontations" (Schutz 1989: 165). Dundes (1971: 188) emphasizes the connection between stereotypes and "social reality" rather than between stereotypes and "objective reality." Davies has repeatedly shown that ethnic humor is not simply aggressive humor against stereotyped ethnicities: "Jokes about canny Scotsmen are vastly popular in many parts of the world, but there is no ideology of anti-Caledonianism to sustain them nor even a widespread casual dislike of Scots"(1991: 417).

   Raskin illustrates the same issue with the failed attempts to create ethnic jokes around fictitious groups (cf. Raskin 1985: 205f). He distinguishes truly ethnic scripts (cf. (2) above) from pseudo-ethnic scripts, the latter only mentioning ethnicity as an enhancing but optional element of the joke. The main feature of ethnic jokes are then the ethnic scripts which "are

conventional, fictional and mythological" (Raskin 1985: 180). In the realm of humor, the overproportional genital size of Texans is as true as Jesus' hike on the lake (cf. Matt. 14, 22–33) is in the religious (and humorous) one.

Truly Jewish jokes and truly Christian jokes

For many people the numerous jokes from well-documented "Jewish humor" come to mind (cf. e.g. Landmann 1963, 1997; Raskin 1985: 209–221) when they hear the label "religious jokes." But Landmann (1997: 9) correctly observes that knowledge of "Yiddish, Hebrew and possibly even Aramaic, the talmudic-scholastic debate and rabbinic jurisdiction, the Jewish cult and rites and Jewish history" [my translation] are indispensable for an adequate understanding and a serious analysis of the Jewish joke. While her list is not intended to be complete, most jokes in her collections indeed have one *truly* Jewish aspect to them without which they would be neither jokes nor Jewish. That is, if they are truly Jewish jokes, deleting or replacing the parts that make them Jewish also deletes the part that makes them jokes, as the Jewish element is a necessary part of the script opposition.

Is then the following a Jewish joke?

(4) A yeshive-bokher,[2] who wants to be admitted to the semikhah, hands in an exegetic exercise to the rabbi.
The rabbi: "That is not sufficient, you are not good enough to become a rabbi!"
The bokher, indignantly: "Rebbe! I have studied at two yeshives!"
The rabbi, unmoved: "So what? Once there was a calf that was nursed by two cows. What became of it: A calf twice the size!" (Landmann 1997: 68; my translation)

This joke, although presented as Jewish, has a general situation *examination* and can be translated into any examination context, as in example (5).

(5) A graduate student, who wants to be admitted to the final PhD exams, hands in a paper to her mentor.
The mentor: "That is not sufficient, you are not good enough to become a PhD!"
The student, indignantly: "Professor! I have MA degrees from two universities!"
The professor, unmoved: "So what? Once there was a calf that was nursed by two cows. What became of it: A calf twice the size!"

Hence, example (4) is not a truly Jewish joke, but rather a free-floating put-down joke, not inextricably connected to a stereotype about a specific ethnicity.

The next example, on the other hand, only works in view of specific Jewish rites on the Sabbath, Tisha-b'Aw, respectively Yom Kippur.[3]

(6) A Christian maid is working for a Jewish family for the first time. An acquaintance asks her how she likes her new job:
"It's fine," she says, "but the people have funny habits: Once a week they eat at the table and smoke in the toilet, once a year they eat in the toilet and smoke at the table, and once a year they smoke and eat in the toilet ..." (Landmann 1997: 69)

Its transfer into other contexts obviously fails, rendering it — at the most — absurd.

(7) A French maid is working for a British family for the first time. An acquaintance asks her how she likes her new job:
"It's fine," she says, "but the people have funny habits: Once a week they eat at the table and smoke in the toilet, once a year they eat in the toilet and smoke at the table, and once a year they smoke and eat in the toilet ..."

So example (6) is a truly Jewish joke, the understanding and analysis of which require the knowledge of specifically Jewish scripts.

The criterion for truly Christian humor (cf. (2)) formalizes these observations analogously, and the following joke presents a first attempt to transpose the previous discussion to Christian humor. This joke functions only in view of the parody of "repent and sin no more" creating a Christian sacred/profane script opposition. It is not possible to replace the final pun such that it remains essentially the same joke, but not a Christian one any more.

(8) A Minister had a group of trustees over to paint the parsonage. It was getting late and it looked like they were going to run out of paint, but by that time the paint store was closed. The pastor looked and noted that it was water based paint, so they added water to thin the paint and finished the job.
That night it rained cats and dogs. The pastor worried that the paint which wasn't dry would be washed from the house. Sure enough, in the morning all the paint to which they had added water was washed from

the house. At that moment the clouds parted and the pastor heard a voice from above. It said "Repaint and thin no more."

Since joke categories as construed here are not mutually exclusive, a joke that contains both truly Christian as well as truly Jewish elements lies in the intersection of both categories. Yet, despite the prominence of "minister, priest, and rabbi" jokes, few of these necessarily involve both Christian and Jewish elements in their script opposition; and many are mere interdenominational competition jokes in which Judaism is mistaken for a Christian denomination. In contrast to these, the following example is both a truly Jewish and a truly Christian joke, and — despite being a particularly badly told variant of a popular joke — fits into either category:

(9) A minister, a priest, and a rabbi go into the jungle to do missionary work, and they're given a jeep to get around in.
Before they get in, the minister says, "Bless this jeep."
The priest sprinkles on some holy water ...
And the rabbi cuts six inches off the tailpipe.

We need to have the rather trivial knowledge that Catholic priests, in contrast to Protestant ministers for whom words are more important, prefer rituals. Circumcision is a Jewish symbolic ritual featuring prominently in the popular mind.

There is a further cause for convergence of Christian and Jewish jokes. As all Christian religions are based on the "new covenant" between Christ and all mankind, which in turn is based on the "old covenant" between God and the chosen Jewish people, there is sufficient overlap to create incongruities. But it is, for example, usually not highlighted by Christians that Jesus was Jewish, just as his parents were, or that a large part of the Old Testament, namely Pentateuch, Prophets, and Writings, are translations of various kinds of the Jewish scriptures referred to collectively as *Tanakh*. This potential for script oppositions is underutilized in the shallow examples found in the corpus and very little knowledge is assumed on the part of the listener of Christian jokes, as will be shown below.

Knowledge resources and natural joke classes

In the next, most central, sections we use linguistic humor theory for the attempt to identify what makes Christian jokes particular so that they are included intuitively by lay people in collections that bear the label

"religious," or "Christian." But before we can do that, we have to define the concept of natural joke class that has already been mentioned repeatedly. This was not a necessity for the Christian jokes discussed so far. These *truly* Christian jokes shared an element that characterized them, namely a Christian script opposition. For the jokes discussed in this section, we cannot identify such an essential criterion, although they are still included in the same natural class.

While for truly Christian jokes we have an essential condition formulated in (2), for "non-truly" Christian jokes, family resemblance (Wittgenstein 1953: 31ff [§§65ff]) seems to be the most useful concept in the light of the very lack of essential criteria.[4] In short, there is no essential feature or no necessary and sufficient conditions that could justify the inclusion of a joke in this category. The same holds for the articulatory and other features of a phonological natural class that denotes a group of sounds that are perceived as sufficiently similar to behave identical in identical environments, for example, in historical change. The phonological natural class is far from a simple shared conjunction of features on a single level of analysis (cf. Clements and Hume 1995). Because of this analogy, the phonological concept inspired the label for the concept of natural joke class postulated here.

Much rather, a "Verwandtschaft" in both senses as "family relationship," as well as "common usage" of those who collect such jokes, points to the natural class of Christian jokes, not a sharp boundary. Now, this relationship seems to have an underlying essence, namely the mention in the joke of any matter Christian. But not any such mentioning qualifies it as we have seen in example (3). And what function this Christian element has or what position it occupies — and this is usually a very marginal one as we argue here — can not be reduced to a single strand that unifies them all, but is rather a single fiber in the thread, overlapping with many others, but not necessarily running through its whole length (Wittgenstein 1953: 32 [§67]). Finally, based on the analysis of the sample corpus, we will aim to identify features that are statistically more prominent, "central" for the category, and less frequent, "marginal," to find more and less prototypical Christian jokes.

Anecdotal evidence for intuitive identification of features of family resemblance are the two cover illustrations of Wilde's (1976) collection: We see Adam and Eve grinning knowingly and pulling away each other's fig leaves, as Adam tosses behind him the apple from which he just took a bite. The incommensurability of (uncontrolled) sexuality and the moral control institutionalized in the Christian religion and especially in its constitutional

myths (read: Bible) are a fertile source for script oppositions. A variation on this theme is found on the back cover. The failed religious professional as the target of Christian jokes is exemplified by a male minister or priest who drops a Bible from his hands as he is idiotically staring at a buxom blonde in a small red dress, while God's hand is taking the halo away from above his head.

As in these examples, we should expect targets in ethnic jokes to be the residence of information that defines a joke's genre. The target surely serves to name natural classes of ethnic jokes. But note, again, that only a necessarily involved script opposition makes a joke a true member of its category.

Let us turn to a more systematic investigation of knowledge resources. Paolillo finds the following redundancies among them: "if the opposed scripts are fully described, one of them tends to be the same as the [situation]. [...] Where [language] is important, it will generally be involved in one of the two opposed scripts" (1998: 269). This corresponds to Attardo and Raskin's group of "content knowledge resources": script opposition, target, and situation (1991: 321). Content knowledge resources (KRs) are what the joke is about, while the tool KRs of logical mechanism, narrative structure, and language are used to express this content. This is relevant for our analysis in that the content KRs should be considered our primary hunting grounds for Christian elements. And it seems indeed hard to conceive of a Christian logical mechanism. Similarly, the only narrative structure we can think of as being particularly Christian would be parodies of, for example, certain biblical styles (or rather their translations) as well as preaching and prayer formulae. But they would necessarily be part of the script opposition, too, as parody would contrast the original religious use with its profane travesty in the joke. If narrative structure were the only Christian KR, in terms of prototypicality, the joke would indeed be only marginally a Christian joke.

Many natural jokes classes cannot be characterized by one prominent KR only, let alone as single script opposition categories. Elephant jokes, for example, have (pseudo-)riddle narrative structure and big/small script opposition, while *do-it* jokes have the 'do it' narrative structure (language) element and overt/implied sexual scripts. What is typical for natural categories of jokes is that they take their name from the contents of the joke, i.e., elements from the content KRs script opposition, situation, and target. Psychological categories employ mostly the more abstract KRs script opposition and logical mechanism. Linguistic joke typologies

often work with syntactically and lexically describable criteria, which fall essentially under the KRs narrative structure and language.

For Christian jokes we have proposed that they are truly Christian if they have a Christian script opposition, and that they are Christian and most prototypically so, when they have Christian situations and targets, the types of which will be discussed below. Accordingly, the least prototypical Christian jokes are those that have only one of those KRs filled by a saliently Christian element. Intermediate cases are more prototypical the more KRs are Christian and the higher these KRs are in the hierarchy established by Attardo and Raskin (1991) and (partially) confirmed by Ruch, Attardo, and Raskin (1993). For example, a joke with a Christian script opposition and situation is more central to the natural class than one with only a Christian target.

In the following we will apply these hypotheses:

(10) a. only jokes with a Christian script opposition are truly Christian jokes (cf. (2))

  b. jokes with Christian content KRs are Christian (but not truly Christian if they don't fulfill *a.*) in various degrees of prototypicality

  c. prototypicality is defined by number and hierarchical rank of KRs that are Christian: the more and the higher, the more prototypical

Analysis

Note on the sample corpus of Christian jokes

The currently 431 jokes coded for their KR structure, with special emphasis on the content KRs, come from various sources, among them Internet collections (see list of sources) and printed collections (e.g., the "Truly Tasteless" series), which feature a special section of religious jokes, as well as joke collections that by their very title restrict themselves to religious, i.e., Christian, jokes — namely 123 examples from Ward (1968) and 131 from Wilde (1976). This covers a broad range of the Christian joke lore in circulation to support our initial findings, while at the same time being unified in coming from specific source types found in the United States of the latter twentieth century.[5] It must be noted, that his latter restriction obviously also limits the results to these source types.[6]

Table 1. *Prototypicality hierarchy of the 431 jokes analyzed*

		Script Opposition	Situation	Target	#
		1	•	•	•	91

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	Script Opposition	Situation	Target	#
1	•	•	•	91
2	•	•	—	57
3	•	—	•	66
4	•	—	—	44
5	—	•	•	52
6	—	•	—	58
7	—	—	•	31
8	—	—	—	32
				431

Christian jokes { truly Christian jokes { rows 1–4 }; non-Christian jokes { row 8 }

increasing prototypicality

Key: Dots indicate a Christian KR, dashes the lack thereof.

What is the "more" prototypical Christian joke?

In terms of the prototypicality scale introduced above, we can set up the following hierarchy among the Christian jokes analyzed, in descending order of prototypicality:

Among the jokes labeled as Christian jokes, the variation in terms of content KRs containing Christian elements is simple: Any mention of matters Christian makes a joke a Christian joke (rows 1–7), which accounts for a total of 399 (92.58%) of the 431 samples. But only a Christian script opposition makes a joke a truly Christian joke, which accounted for 258 (59.86%; rows 1–4). This more restricted subset fulfills the criterion set forth in (10a.). 44 (10.21%) had a Christian script opposition only (row 4). 123 (28.54%) had a Christian script opposition in combination with another Christian KR, which usually pertained to one of the scripts in the script opposition (rows 2 and 3). 91 (21.11%; row1) had all a Christian script opposition, situation, and language and are considered the most prototypical. 141 of the 431 (32.71%) jokes analyzed had only a Christian situation or target and are non-truly Christian jokes and at the low end of the prototypicality scale (rows 5–7). Only 32 (7.42%) have no foregrounded Christian element in any of their content KRs. And indeed most of them are truly Jewish jokes in the sense defined above or other ethnic jokes that strayed into the collections from which the corpus was built. None of the latter is a truly Christian joke.

At this point, let us support the prototypicality hypothesis with examples from these eight groups. The following is one joke from each of the KR

Table 2. *Figures from the sample corpus*

Script Opposition		Situation		Target	
1 religion (other)	3	1 biblical (other)	23	1 clergy (general/other)	24
1a sacred/profane	177	1a creation	9	1a female: nun	32
1b sacred/profane non/sex	55	1b nativity	3	1b male: priest/minister	51
1c divine/human	16	1c miracle	7	1c Pope	14
1d heaven/hell	1	1d crucifixion	7		*121*
1e non/sin	6	1e second coming	4		
Christian Script Oppositions	**258**	1f Paradise	15	2 denomination (other/multiple)	9
		1g flood	6	2a Catholic	30
0 other	13		*74*	2b Protestant (generic)	13
2 non/sex	25			2c Episcopalian	4
3 dumb/clever	45	2 afterlife (other)	1	2d Jehovah's Witness	2
4 non/money	4	2a pearly gates	15	2e Presbyterian	3
5 life/death	7	2b reward in heaven	7	2f Methodist	3
6 good/bad	51	2c punishment in hell	3	2g Quaker	2
6a non/excrement	5	2d encounter in heaven	5	2h Baptist	7
7 high/low	23		*31*	4 Christian (general)	10
	173				*83*
		3 church life (other)	4		
total	**431**	3a confession	14	7 God	15
		3b prayer	15	7a Jesus	16
		3c collection	6	9 churchgoers	5
		3d service/mass/sermon	19		*36*
		3e talk to clergyperson	15		
		3f Sunday school	7	**Christian Targets**	**240**
			80		

Table 2. *Figures from the sample corpus (continued)*

Script Opposition

Situation		**Target**	
12 mission	3	8 other	51
4 interfaith competition	57	5 men	12
5 cursing	2	6 women	11
6 Vaticanum II	3	0 n/a	88
7 initiation	3	3 ethnic	2
8 conversion	5	3a Jew	25
	73	3b Black	2
			191
Christian Situations	**258**	total	**431**
4a golf	3		
4d marriage	6		
10 (alcohol)	8		
0 n/a	23		
9 sex	26		
11 other	107		
	173		
total	**431**		

Key: Numbers that precede the names of subcategories are those used in the database.

distribution groups in the table, randomly picked from the corpus. The examples represent the groups from Table 1 in the same order, that is, descending from most Christian joke to least Christian joke:

(11)   100 nuns live together in a convent. One morning the head nun gets up to make an announcement.
"Sisters," she says, "I have terrible news: There has been a man in the convent."
99 nuns gasp, 1 nun giggles.
"Still more," says the head nun, "we have found a condom."
99 nuns gasp, 1 nun giggles.
"The worst news is," says the head nun, "we have found a hole in the condom."
99 nuns giggle, 1 nun gasps.

(12)   The Three Wise Men were on their way to Bethlehem. All of a sudden, one of them ground his camel to a halt.
"Now listen, fellows," he said to the other two, "remember, no mentioning how much we paid for the gifts." (Wilde 1976: 57)

(13)   What do you have when you sign up a hooker and two nuns for your football team?
One wide receiver and two tight ends. (Knott 1989: 93)

(14)   A socially ambitious woman, asked to a big public dinner, found herself seated between a noted bishop and an equally famous rabbi. She was determined to be witty, though everybody was engrossed in serious conversation.
"I feel as if I were a leaf between the Old and the New Testaments," she said at one point. One of the clergymen turned to her and answered, "That page, Madam, is usually blank." (Ward 1968: 33)

(15)   A dissatisfied old lady gave this account of her pastor and his ministrations: "Six days a week he's invisible, and on the seventh he's incomprehensible." (Wilde 1976: 26)

(16)   So God calls to Adam and says, "Adam, I have some good news and some bad news. What do you want to hear first?" Adam replied, "The good news."
God answers, "Well, the good news is I gave you a penis and a brain. The bad news is I gave you only enough blood to operate one organ at a time." (cybercheeze)

(17)   "Excuse me for interrupting you, sir," said the caller to the cleric, "but I am collecting for the poor. Do you happen to have any old clothes?"

"Yes," answered the minister.

"Would you be willing to give them to me? I can assure you that they will be put to a worthy use."

"I cannot give them to you."

"What do you do with them?"

"Each night I brush them carefully, fold them, hang them over a chair, and each morning I put them on again." (Wilde 1976: 24)

(18)   What do you throw at a wedding where the bride is pregnant?
       Puffed Rice (Alvin 1985: 90).

In the following sections we will discuss in more detail the individual fibers of the thread that runs through Christian jokes, that is, the Christian fillers of the KR slots that constitute their family resemblance.

Christian targets

Target distinctions are the most descriptive and characteristic for ethnic jokes. Explicit targets can be found also in political jokes (cf. Raskin 1985: 222ff) which aim at single prominent political figures. When confronted with an ethnic joke, we usually call it a joke about Poles, Scots, etc., not a joke about uncleanliness (script opposition), figure-ground reversal (logical mechanism), funeral (situation), or triple structure (NS). When someone tells us a joke about a politician, it is perceived as being about, for example, Al Gore or George W. Bush, not about persistent/stubborn or dumb/clever (script opposition). Target is the most descriptive KR for ethnic and political jokes, but also a KR largely restricted to these subgenres. Having said this, we must assume Christian jokes to overlap with or be a subgenre of ethnic jokes, when we consider the large number of anticlerical jokes. In the next subsection we will show that these are indeed ethnic jokes, but because Christian jokes encompass other subcategories as well, overall they are not a proper subset of ethnic jokes.

Clerics as failed professionals

Consider the following example:

(19)   A sweet young thing was telling the evangelist Jimmy Swaggert [sic] that she had been sleeping in another bedroom since she had caught her

husband sleeping with the neighbor. "It's your duty to forgive him, my child," intoned Swaggert as he patted her hand, and she fell into his arms, gently sobbing. "But," he added as his grip tightened, "how'd you like to get even with the S.O.B. first?" (Tapper and Press 2000: 165).

It targets a specific Christian celebrity and is analogous to political jokes that target specific politicians. This observation holds true for anti-Papal jokes (cf. example (25) below), a clerical and political figure at the same time. But it also works like an ethnic joke, attributing some more or less mythical trait of professional failure to the individual or group. And this is analogous to political humor, intended to denigrate and expose incompetence (Raskin 1985: 233).

For clerics, professional failure of the mildest form is merely delivering a boring sermon, annoying or sending to sleep the whole congregation:

(20)   The pastor at a church was asked how many persons could sleep in the church building in case of an attack.
"I don't know," replied the pastor, "but we sleep four hundred every Sunday morning." (Wilde 1976: 21)

Stronger forms of failure consist of sinful behavior in open breach of vows of chastity for Catholic clergy and dietary rules, especially abstention from (hard) alcoholic beverages. This reminds us of the medieval ancestor of these clerics, beautifully personified in Rabelais's Frère Jean. Davies' observation that American anti-Scottish/Irish "[e]thnic jokes about alcohol are related to the central opposition between work and non-work" (1998: 60) confirms our analysis of jokes about drinking members of the clergy as failed professionals. The nun who drinks (example (21)) and must be so desperate about being sexually inactive that even rape is desirable sex for her (example (22)) appears frequently in Christian jokes. Another target topos of these jokes are homosexual male members of clergy as in the rather elaborate example (23), sometimes involving altar boys, but usually heterosexual relationships with the obligatory maid.

(21)   Two nuns walk into a liquor store and one asked the clerk for the biggest bottle of Irish whisky [sic] he had.
The clerk replied "heck no sister, you're nuns and aren't supposed to drink that stuff!"
The nun said "Well my son it is not for us you see, it is for Mother Teresa," then the nun whispers "She has the constipation."

The clerk said "Oh, in that case, it's on the house. Here's the biggest jug we have."

The nuns thank him, bless him, and leave.

A few hours later, as the clerk is leaving, he sees the same two sisters in the parking lot, rolling around and drinking the Irish whiskey. Appalled he goes over to them and says "You ladies lied to me! You told me it was for Mother Teresa for her constipation!"

One of the nuns takes another swig, looks up at him and says "You wanna know something buddy? She sure will shit when she sees us!" (cybercheeze)

(22) Two nuns were taking a stroll through the park at dusk when two men jumped them, ripped off their habits, and proceeded to rape them.

Sister Gregory, bruised and battered, looked up at the sky and said softly, "Forgive him, Lord, for he knows not what he does."

Sister Theresa looked over at her and said, "Mine does." (Knott 1982: 67–68)

(23) An unwed pregnant girl went to the doctor for an abortion, but found to her dismay that things were too far along. "Don't worry," said the kindhearted doctor, "when your time comes, go into the hospital and have the baby. There's sure to be someone in for a gallbladder operation, and we'll give her the baby and tell her it wasn't her gallbladder after all."

She followed his plan, but when the baby was born the only gallbladder case in the hospital was a middle-aged priest. What the hell, thought the doctor, I'll give it a try. So he presented the baby to the priest, who was overjoyed. "This is an act of God," he exclaimed happily and took the infant home. They lived a contented life together for twenty years, until the priest found himself on his deathbed.

He called the boy in and said, "My son, I must tell you something. I'm not really your father — I'm your mother. The bishop is your father." (Knott 1983: 93)

A classic Christian and Jewish joke about members of clergy as failed professionals is the following one, more common variants of which end in the punch line "better than ham, isn't it?"

(24) A priest and a rabbi were having breakfast. The host offered his friend some bacon, which was refused. Then the priest gently chided the rabbi, "When are you going to be broadminded enough to

eat bacon?" His guest answered, "At your wedding, Father, at your wedding." (Ward 1968: 60)

Let us repeat, that the misunderstanding of Judaism as a Christian denomination underlies the faulty analogy of Protestant denomination, Catholicism, and Judaism. Of course the analogy of the joke is faulty, because chastity (Matt. 19.12; 1 Cor. 7.32–35) is only prescribed for Catholic clergy, while the dietary taboos defining what is kosher and what isn't (Deut. 14.3–20; Lev. 11.2–42) are binding for any observant Jew.

Denominations as ethnicities

The main idea of this subsection has been advanced throughout this paper. Let us briefly repeat the main point and add a few specific observations here. At the latest, since Davies' numerous studies mentioned before, we know that the constellation of joke teller and target is often that of members of closely located majority and minority. Accordingly, Protestants make jokes about Catholics in areas dominated by Protestants. This observation for the jokes from our corpus, collected in a predominantly Protestant, Northern American context, is corroborated. "Those who tell such jokes [about dumb Catholics] typically have a national myth whose basis is Protestant, sexual or even anti-clerical" (Davies 1998: 61–62). Humorous anti-Catholic sentiment is often directed against the Pope:

(25)   What happened to the Pope when he went to Mount Olive?
       Popeye almost killed him.

But we also have competition between various shades of Protestantism:

(26)   Said a Baptist to a Methodist, "I don't like your church government. It has too much machinery about it."
       "Yes, but then you see," said the Methodist, "it doesn't take nearly so much water to run it." (Ward 1968: 31)

Targets of anticlerical jokes who are not identified by name can be considered ethnic groups as well, who fail professionally as a group.

The described manifestations of perceived ethnicity are relevant for Christian jokes in that ethnicity is accompanied and/or constituted by religion or denomination. What supports the analysis of these denominational competition jokes as ethnic jokes — while at the same time complicating

it — is that sometimes, denominations are not targeted for their own sake, but used as additional markers for ethnicity. This can take the constellation of targets with Irish or Italian names being also "ultramontane" Catholics. In the following joke it is used to lead us astray with our assumption that all Irishmen must be Catholic.

(27)   There is an Irish man getting ready to jump to his death from a bridge when a Priest walks past. The man turns to the Priest and says, "Don't try to stop me father, I'm going to jump."
"Don't jump!" says the Priest, "It can't be that bad. Think of the life you have yet to live."
"That's one of the reasons I'm jumping!" Says the man.
"Well if that won't stop you, think about your family!" says the Priest.
"That's another reason!" says the man.
"Well think about your job!" says the Priest.
"There's another reason!" says the man.
"Well if that won't stop you think about St. Patrick!" says the Priest.
"Who's that?" asks the man.
"Jump, you Protestant bastard!"

To sum up our discussion of the prominence of Christian jokes that are analogous to political and ethnic humor, let us point the reader the figures summarized in Table 2. Of the 431 jokes, 121 (28.07 %) have members of clergy as their target, and another 83 (19.26%) members of different Christian denominations.

Christian situations

The situation used in jokes is secondary, and dependent largely on the other KRs of the joke. It can enhance the funniness in combination with the determining script opposition or furnish one of its scripts. This indicates that instances of situations are necessitated by other KRs, primarily the script opposition, which in turn could be considered characteristic for the respective joke subgenres. This holds, for example, for the arrival at the Pearly Gates situation in Christian jokes like the following:

(28)   St. Peter stood at the Pearly Gates, waiting for the incoming. He saw Jesus walking by and caught his attention. "Jesus, could you mind the gate while I go do an errand?"

"Sure," replied Jesus. "What do I have to do?"

"Just find out about the people who arrive. Ask about their background, their family, and their lives. Then decide if they deserve entry into Heaven."

"Sounds easy enough. OK."

So Jesus waited at the gates while St. Peter went off on his errand.

The first person to approach the gates was a wrinkled old man. Jesus summoned him to the examination table and sat across from him. Jesus peered at the old man and asked, "What was it you did for a living?"

The old man replied, "I was a carpenter."

Jesus remembered his own earthly existence and leaned forward. "Did you have any family?" he asked.

"Yes, I had a son, but I lost him."

Jesus leaned forward some more. "You lost your son? Can you tell me about him?"

"Well, he had holes in his hands and feet."

Jesus leaned forward even more and whispered, "Father?"

The old man leaned forward and whispered, "Pinocchio?"

In these jokes the conditions of entrance have to be negotiated with St. Peter, who is the gatekeeper of Heaven. The popular interpretation of "And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 16.19) assigns this office to him. While these jokes have a "pearly gates" situation, this — and commonly a triple NS ("three lawyers/husbands/etc. die and go to heaven ...") — usually only forms the backdrop for a non-religious script opposition. In the example, on the other hand, the script opposition is also Christian, namely sacred/profane.

For biblical situations parodied or used as the backdrop for Christian, truly Christian, or other jokes, very little actual knowledge is taken for granted: The use of Biblical figures provides a good impression of the situation that these jokes require to be known by their audience. In the sample corpus we find the following few Sunday school celebrities: Adam, Eve, Methuselah, Noah, Jonah, Daniel (lion pit), Abraham, Moses, Lot's wife, Jesus, and Pilate. The same holds for events described in the Bible, of which we find the following featured in the jokes, mostly from the life of the Christ: Nativity, miracles, Sermon on the Mount, and the Crucifixion; also the Exodus; the giving of the Ten Commandments; the parting of the Red Sea; the Flood; and Sodom and Gomorrah.

Here is a typical example (see also (16)):

(29)   Eve asked Adam, "Do you love me?"
       Adam answered, "Who else?" (Wilde 1976: 34)

Many of the jokes involving Adam and Eve revolve around the analogy between Adam and Eve as the first couple and married couples under the strains of ordinary marital life, resulting in a high/low, sacred/profane script opposition.

   A third group of shared situations in the corpus are events that are part of the church service, like the sermon, confession, collection, or prayer, or other church-related events, like Sunday school. Typically, they ridicule the cleric as a failed professional through a holy/profane and/or non-sex/sex script opposition, like the following example:

(30)   The priest found himself incredibly attracted to a beautiful young woman who came to him confessing that she's been unable to resist a man's advances. He put his arm around the girl's shoulder and asked, "Did the man do this, my dear?"
       "Yes, Father."
       The priest kissed her. "Did he do this?"
       "Yes, and worse."
       The priest lifted up her skirt and fingered her precious jewels. "Did he do this?"
       "Yes, Father, and worse," the girl said.
       The priest had lost control by this time. He threw the girl down to the floor and stuck his dick in her up to the hilt. "Did he do this?" the priest panted.
       "Yes, Father, and worse."
       "How could he do worse?" the priest demanded.
       "He gave me gonorrhea," the girl said. (Knott 1992: 57)

Christian script oppositions

With the analysis of Christian script oppositions, we enter the realm of truly Christian jokes, as script opposition is the least removable KR creating the highest dissimilarity in jokes that differ only in this respect (Ruch, Attardo, and Raskin 1993). While other KRs, when filled by a Christian slot-filler, not necessarily make a joke a Christian joke, (10) defines jokes with a Christian script opposition as truly Christian. Accordingly, the discussion of further Christian joke subcategories will close with this KR.

Raskin (1985) identifies subgenres of jokes according to different script oppositions, distinguishing sexual jokes, ethnic jokes, and political jokes. These three types are themselves natural classes with existing labels. For sexual jokes Raskin identifies the following main types: First, jokes that have overt and unspecified opposition of scripts with general sexual inference, i.e., explicitly/implicitly sexual, which is the default implicature if no other is readily available in a joke (1985: 150). Second, jokes with specific sexual scripts, e.g., genital size and forbidden sex. This latter category overlaps with that of Christian jokes as sex is regulated through religiously based taboos, as well as specifically excluded for celibate Catholic clergy. We have discussed this above and will return to it in the subsection on sex/non-sex opposition.

Holy/profane script opposition

As noted above, like all human societal endeavors, religions work through symbolic systems, most prominently language. Just listing a few Christian symbols reveals their humorous potential: a fish stands for Christ, wine stands for the blood of Christ (itself a symbol for redemption), a dove stands for the Holy Ghost.

Like for all symbols, one object from one script represents another from another script. Whatever logical mechanism links them, it is accepted that mentioning one (fish, wine, dove, or milk) includes signifying the other (Christ, redemption, purity, or a good meal).

Gilhus presents three beautiful examples of religious script oppositions, which she calls "incongruities between two spheres" (1991: 262f): The Vedic *Hymn of the Frogs* which presents Brahmin priests as frogs; secondly, the duality of man as a bodily and spiritual being, who, for example, often expresses spiritual realities through bodily metaphors (heart, spleen, etc.); and lastly she quotes the following joke from Legman (1978: 886), which creates an overlapping opposition between being sinless in general, Mary's immaculateness in particular, and an abnormal conclusion from the two premises (1991: 263):

(31)   The town whore in Jerusalem is being stoned. When Jesus says, "Let whoever is without sin among you cast the first stone" (John 8.7), an old lady struggles over with an enormous rock, drops it over the town whore's head, and polished the bitch off. Jesus looked down and said, "You know, Mother, sometimes you really piss me off."

And we could confirm in this pilot study that among the KRs that contain what makes truly Christian jokes, the most prominent script opposition is that between sacred and profane. This opposition surfaces in the form of the several scripts, most prominently, sexuality. The next subsections will discuss the most important instantiations of Christian holy/profane script oppositions.

Sex/non-sex

Sexuality in general is most opposite to holiness — both abstract and as manifested in religious authorities — in that it is symbolically linked to dirt (cf. Douglas 1966: 35) and incompleteness (cf. Bakhtin 1965: 357ff), which is also expressed in the natural category name 'dirty jokes.'

The sharp contrast between sexuality and holiness in the Christian world is manifested in the boundary between clergy and laity that serves as the basic oppositeness of many religious jokes. "The key institution that marked this apartness was the celibacy of the priesthood" as Davies observes (1982: 62). Since celibacy is still practiced today, the forbidden sex script in this context makes many jokes Christian jokes. An instance where both ethnic and sexual contents are the basis of religious jokes is the "close connection between the existence of strongly maintained religious boundaries and of strong sexual taboos" (Davies 1982: 52).

Legman presents many Jokes with religious situation or target. Their script opposition is sexual and the religious situation or target serves to enhance the funniness by adding the taboo element of clerical sexuality in view of celibacy (1968). This makes them also Christian jokes. In general, all forms of sexual contents are perceived as opposed to religious beliefs, institutions, or authorities and may occur in religious jokes; preferred is forbidden sex in view of celibacy. Several examples have been discussed above: (19), (22), (23), and (30).

Other high/low script oppositions

In terms of script oppositions, ethnic and sexual elements already cover most instances of Christian jokes. This subgenre also shows accumulation of typical instances of other KR-related elements.

Humor is often a part of religious ceremony and in this role has been extensively studied by anthropologists (for a list see Apte 1985:151f and notes there). The aspect of the burlesque of rituals and people in authority or foreigners summarizes two essential strands in what will be called Christian humor here: the targets in tendentious religious humor (people in religious authority, people with a different religion) and the sacred/profane (often sexual) contrast in Christian humor in general.

Part of ceremony is usually the recitation of texts. "If any set phrases or stereotyped linguistic formulas are to be used on ceremonial occasions, they must be accurately produced" (Apte 1985: 195). The conscious distortion produces the enhanced humorous effect, like in the reformulation of "hoc est corpus meum" as "hocus-pocus."

Another truly religious script opposition in Christian jokes is the play between actual/worldly and non-actual/afterlife. The mapping of one onto the other in the sacred/profane sense is a prominent motif that makes for truly Christian humor.

In the following example it is instantiated as the life/afterlife. (Wilde 1976: 21)

(32) The minister attempted to upbraid the doctor. "You should be in church regularly."
"Look here, Reverend," said the M.D.
"Let's make a friendly arrangement. I'll do all in my power to keep you out of heaven if you'll do all you can to keep me out of hell."

Possible targets have been discussed in connection with Christian jokes as ethnic jokes (see above): Non-ethnic Christian jokes aim at religious authorities and officials and can be understood as political jokes. But these people may also be anonymous representatives of ethnic groups like priests and nuns.

Summary

We have analyzed Christian jokes as a natural class of jokes in terms of the General Theory of Verbal Humor. On the basis of this analysis, we were able to identify three major types that occur under this category: Truly Christian jokes with a Christian SO, other Christian jokes with different degrees of prototypicality, and non-Christian jokes, included in the collection by false association. It should also have become clear that the

natural class of Christian jokes, comprising the first two types, is a shallow category. Among the jokes labeled as Christian jokes, the variation in terms of content KRs containing Christian elements is simple: any mention of matters Christian makes a joke a Christian joke, which account for 92.58% of the corpus. A more restricted subset of these Christian jokes are *truly* Christian jokes that conform to the criterion set forth in (10a.) and represent 59.86% of the jokes analyzed. Thus, our results, summarized in table (1), confirm that the General Theory of Humor is a useful tool for the analysis of jokes, and, in particular, that the hierarchy of its knowledge resources reflects the relative importance of joke elements.

But we need to be as cautious as Davies is when he observes that "[t]he orderly patterns that can be perceived when large number [sic] of jokes are analyzed are not the result of any deliberate design; they are akin [...] to the spontaneous order of a competitive market or of language itself" (1998: 52). Another caveat needs to be repeated as well: When we say that the Christian scripts must be endorsed by the hearer, i.e., established and believed in, this is true only for the sake of the joke. For the purpose of humor, Poles are as dumb as Germans are solely preoccupied with sausage. It is not anti-religious, or specifically anti-Christian, sentiment that is expressed in these jokes. What also makes religion a topic of humor is that "the mocking of sacred rules reinforces their sanctity" (Pollio 1983: 218). But the fact that most religious KRs are picked from the most colorful, yet considerably unimportant parts of the lore, illustrates the shallowness of the category. The following is a rare example, where the central Christian motif of neighborly love is mocked. But witness the crudeness in which it is done:

(33) Peter the Fisherman was stopped by a bunch of hoodlums in an alley. "Is it true that your Master tells you to turn the other cheek?" asked the head of the riffraff. "Is that in the Bible?"
"Yes," answered Peter.
"Okay, here's a slap in the kisser. Now what about the other cheek?" Then he slapped Peter the second time, on the other cheek. As the ruffian raised his hand to strike for the third time, Peter picked him up and threw him over the fence.
"It also says in the Bible," Peter reminded them, " 'Thou shalt not tempt the Lord.' " (Wilde 1976: 52)

Our momentary suspense of disbelief, accepted as part of the non-bona-fide mode of communication that is the realm of joke-telling, is really strained by this example: Peter the Fisherman, another Sunday-school celebrity, knows

what is written in the Bible, to be compiled and canonized several hundred years after his lifetime. He disobeys his "Master's" teachings (Matt. 5.39), justifying that through a false analogy between God and himself as His instrument, misquoting what Jesus said to the Devil tempting him (Matt. 4.7: Luke 4.12). Just as Polish jokes aren't about real citizens of Poland, most Christian jokes, like the final example, aren't really that Christian at all.

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Notes

1. We would like to thank Salvatore Attardo, Miriam Klein, Mari Myksvoll, and Victor Raskin, as well as the two anonymous readers, for extremely insightful comments on earlier versions of this paper.
2. Student (*bokher*) of a Talmud school (*yeshiva*); *semikhah* = ordination
3. The joke condenses them to: Sabbath: eat, but not smoke; Tisha-b'Aw: smoke, but not eat; Yom Kippur: neither.
4. It has to be noted, accordingly, that the use of family resemblance here is a metaphorical extension of Wittgenstein's metaphor, just as is our simplified use of the prototypicality concept (cf. Lakoff 1987: 39–48).
5. An initial check against Tapper and Press's (2000) collection yielded largely from Internet joke collections showed that of their 177 jokes 98 (55%) had already been included in identical or sufficiently similar form in our corpus. By sufficiently similar we mean that a KR analysis shy of including LA would constitute a paraphrase of the joke analyzed. The validity of the natural class of "Christian jokes" is illustrated by the continued circulation of the very material Wilde and Wade took a snapshot of in 1976 and 1968. (The low number of duplicates (32) found among the jokes in the corpus has so far not been weeded out.)
6. I am grateful to Elliot Oring for pointing this out to me on occasion of the presentation of an earlier version of this paper at the 2001 International Humor Conference of the International Society of Humor Studies in College Park, MD.

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