

of belief are not appropriate. These might include public school rooms, discussions of the law, and business or workplace situations.

But thinking that religion does not belong in certain places is not a sign of intolerance for religion. Believing that schools should not teach creationism alongside evolution has nothing to do with being intolerant of religion and everything to do with respecting science. Asking a judge to remove a copy of the Ten Commandments from the courtroom wall isn't about discarding Christian morality, it's about upholding the U.S. Constitution. Stopping someone from handing out religious tracts at work is not oppressing religion, but maintaining an equitable workplace.

In many of these situations, theists would protest if roles were reversed, They would not appreciate demands that religion change in the face of science, and would complain if atheist tracts were handed out at work. Before accusing others of intolerance, you had best be sure you are free of it yourself.

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## ARE ATHEISTS INTOLERANT?

A Question of Moral Atheism

from [blog.iamanatheist.com](http://blog.iamanatheist.com)



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But declining an invitation to participate in something that doesn't mesh well with one's philosophy isn't an insult. If an atheist passes on an opportunity to say the blessing before dinner, it's because atheists don't believe in blessings, not because the atheist wants to insult the meal, publicly reject your deity, or spoil the moment. Declining the invitation is not intended as an insult to theism any more than the invitation itself was intended as an insult to atheism. Sure, it might make people feel a little uncomfortable when the person invited to say the blessing declines, but odds are good that the atheist felt rather uncomfortable when the invitation was offered. There is plenty of social awkwardness to go around. And while it's true that the atheist could have just delivered a blessing so that there would be no conflict, it's also true that the religious people could have skipped the blessing for the same reason. "Give me equal time!" Atheists often think that there are certain places and situations in which religious thought and expressions participating in religious ceremonies.

ARE ATHEISTS INTOLERANT of religion and religious beliefs? In large part, that depends on how you define "intolerant." Some religious people equate disagreement with intolerance. They might respond to "I doubt that Jesus performed miracles" with something like "How dare you say such a thing!" or "Are you calling me a liar?" But an atheist who disagrees with religious beliefs is just disagreeing with religious beliefs. She isn't saying those beliefs are ridiculous, denying someone's faith, or calling them stupid. If you're religious, you disagree with plenty of other peoples' beliefs. Do you think that all of those people you disagree with are fools? If so, it sound like you are the one who's intolerant. "If you're not with me, you're against me!" Atheists may decline to participate in some activities that are explicitly religious or are based on religious traditions. These might include saying prayers, taking oaths that involve God, singing religious songs, or participating in religious ceremonies.

ARE ATHEISTS INTOLERANT of religion and religious beliefs? In large part, that depends on how you define “intolerant.”

*“How dare you disagree with me!”*

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But an atheist who disagrees with religious beliefs is just disagreeing with religious beliefs. She isn’t saying those beliefs are ridiculous, denying someone’s faith, or calling them stupid. If you’re religious, you disagree with plenty of other peoples’ beliefs. Do you think that all of those people you disagree with are fools? If so, it sound like *you* are the one who’s intolerant.

*“If you’re not with me, you’re against me.”*

Atheists may decline to participate in some activities that are explicitly religious or are based on religious traditions. These might include saying prayers, taking oaths that involve God, singing religious songs, or participating in religious ceremonies.

But declining an invitation to participate in something that doesn’t mesh well with one’s philosophy isn’t an insult. If an atheist passes on an opportunity to say the blessing before dinner, it’s because atheists don’t believe in blessings, not because the atheist wants to insult the meal, publicly reject your deity, or spoil the moment. Declining the invitation is not intended as an insult to theism any more than the invitation itself was intended as an insult to atheism.

Sure, it might make people feel a little uncomfortable when the person invited to say the blessing declines, but odds are good that the atheist felt rather uncomfortable when the invitation was offered. There is plenty of social awkwardness to go around. And while it’s true that the atheist could have just delivered a blessing so that there would be no conflict, it’s also true that the religious people could have skipped the blessing for the same reason.

*“Give me equal time!”*

Atheists often think that there are certain places and situations in which religious thought and expressions

of belief are not appropriate. These might include public school rooms, discussions of the law, and business or workplace situations. But thinking that religion does not belong in certain places is not a sign of intolerance for religion. Believing that schools should not teach creationism alongside evolution has nothing to do with being intolerant of religion and everything to do with respecting science. Asking a judge to remove a copy of the Ten Commandments from the courtroom wall isn’t about discarding Christian morality, it’s about upholding the U.S. Constitution. Stopping someone from handing out religious tracts at work is not oppressing religion, but maintaining an equitable workplace. In many of these situations, theists would protest if roles were reversed. They would not appreciate demands that religion change in the face of science, and would complain if atheist tracts were handed out at work. Before accusing others of intolerance, you had best be sure you are free of it yourself.

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# QUESTIONS OF MORAL ATHEISM: INSTRUCTIONS

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We appreciate your interest in helping us spread information about moral atheism! To make copies of this pamphlet for your own use or to share with friends, follow these simple steps:

1. Print pages one and two of this document, one on each side of the same piece of paper (if you don't have access to a duplex printer, print page one, put the page back in the paper tray upside down, and print page two — depending on the type of printer, you may have to experiment a bit).
2. Cut the printout in two, using the thin rules across the middle of the page as a guide.
3. Fold the two pieces of paper in half, making a pair of small pamphlets.
4. Keep one of the pamphlets to read, and give the other away to an interested friend or stranger.

That's it! If you have any questions, suggestions, or comments, we invite you to share them by leaving a comment on [blog.iamanatheist.org](http://blog.iamanatheist.org). Thanks!

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