

CONTENTS

	<i>Introduction</i>	9
1	The Banana and American Atheists, Inc.	11
2	The No-Audience TV Version	19
3	The Banana Clip	29
4	Putting on the Cloak	35
5	What Harm Could Come?	43
6	Making Sense of the “Senseless”	51
7	Taking a Risk	63
8	The Banana Man Interview	75
9	Facing Bullies	81
10	Penn Jillette	89
11	A Basket Case	99
12	The Bibliophile	107
13	Casting Pearls	115
14	If It’s Not Your Knee	129
	<i>Notes</i>	139
	<i>Resources</i>	143

INTRODUCTION

It was early in March 2017. I had just spent twenty minutes pleading with a young lady who seriously wanted to commit suicide. I was interviewing her for an upcoming film on the subject of suicide and depression, and almost everything she said shocked me.

She even said that she would be forever resentful toward her parents for bringing her into this futile life.

When I asked Amanda about her beliefs in God, she told me that she was an atheist. God definitely didn't exist.

Because she was so strong in her convictions, after the interview ended I hesitatingly asked, "Do you know who I am?" When she said that she didn't, I meekly said, "Banana Man."

Her face immediately lit up and she exclaimed, "You're Ray Comfort!!! I went to a Halloween party last year as 'The Flying Spaghetti Monster,' and there was someone there dressed as you—Ray Comfort!"

Her words didn't surprise me. I knew how renowned Banana Man had become. His story is fascinating and one that I'm excited to share. This book looks behind the peel. I think it will encourage you and hopefully inspire you to be a little bolder in your faith, and to joyfully wear the mantle of humiliation that comes with being a biblical Christian.



CHAPTER 1

THE BANANA AND AMERICAN ATHEISTS, INC.

*“For a great and effective door has opened to me,
and there are many adversaries.”*

—1 CORINTHIANS 16:9

Would you have the courage to face me in a debate in front of 250 atheists at our national convention?”

These were the words of Ron Barrier, the national spokesperson for American Atheists, Inc.

It was February 2001. A week or so earlier, I had been sitting in my office when I had an idea. I had written a book on atheism, published a booklet called “The Atheist Test” that had sold close to a million copies, and spoken on the subject of atheism hundreds of times. I figured that might qualify me to speak to American Atheists, Inc. So I sent them an email stating the above and asking if they would consider me as a guest speaker, but leaving out the fact that I was a Christian author and preacher. My thought was that

BANANA MAN

if God could open the Red Sea, He could easily open atheist doors.

They respectfully declined my offer.

But then I began getting emails from Ron Barrier. It was rather strange. He didn't want me to speak to atheists, but he wanted to start a dialogue with me. In retrospect, it was possibly God putting thoughts into his atheist mind. We emailed back and forth a few times before he suddenly challenged me to a debate at their annual convention in April. After I replied that I would *love* to debate him, and would even pay my own airfare from Los Angeles to Orlando, Ron said that it was on.

To ensure he had enough debate material, I sent him a copy of my book *God Doesn't Believe in Atheists*. A week later he pulled out of the debate. I presumed that he read the book. I was a little disappointed, because it looked like God didn't want me to speak at the American Atheists' National Convention after all.

OFF AND ON

I soon began to get emails from irate atheists when they learned that the debate had been canceled. One of them accused me of being a "chicken" for pulling out of the event, but I pointed out that it was Ron who deserved that title. A short time later, Ron issued the following statement (his capitalization):

Without going into detail, the answer to the burning question on everyone's lips is, YES, I DID INITIALLY ASK HIM TO DEBATE AND, YES, I DID WITHDRAW

RAY COMFORT

THE INVITATION AFTER I READ HIS IDIOT BOOK “gOD DOESN'T BELIEVE IN ATHEISTS.”

Apparently embarrassed by the incident, he renewed the debate offer and “sweetened the pot” by flying me to Orlando at their expense.

It was Friday the 13th, 2001. Good Friday. I had taken an associate with me, and as we entered our plush hotel room in Orlando, we noticed a generous gift basket with a welcome card. My associate picked up a bunch of grapes, popped one in his mouth and said, “Wow! And I didn’t think atheists were such ni—” Suddenly he grabbed his throat, choked, and fell to the floor. (He was just kidding, of course.) The basket was a very nice gesture.

The next day, about forty Christians showed up from around the country, including a reporter, the publisher of *God Doesn't Believe in Atheists*, and a film crew from CrossTV. I was concerned that their permission to film the debate was a bit flimsy. All I had was an email from Ron Barrier that simply said, “I don’t care what you do!”

When the crew quietly entered the convention hall to set up, a security guard asked them what they were doing. She turned out to be a Christian and said that she would be in prayer for the debate.

We then went into the atheists’ bookstore where they kindly gave me a table on which I could place free copies of my book. While we were in the store, Ellen Johnson, then president of American Atheists, introduced herself and asked if the three large cameras in the convention hall were ours. When I said that they were, she replied, “Good. We will make sure we give you plenty of time to set up.”

BANANA MAN

It was like a dream come true. Not only had I been given permission to fill their convention with Christian literature, but I would be presenting my case for God's existence to around 250 atheists, as well as filming it, and the debate—along with the gospel—would be broadcast live over their website.

*It was like a dream
come true . . . I would
be presenting my case
for God's existence to
around 250 atheists.*



banana parody off and on for about twenty years and always got a laugh from Christian audiences. But this was going to be different.

I was a little nervous because I was about to do a parody that made fun of atheism, and I wasn't sure if I could get my listeners to crack a smile. Atheists don't see atheism as worthy of being parodied, because they don't think it's ridiculous to believe that everything made itself. Christians think differently. I had been doing the

THE COKE-BANANA PARODY

I started by giving some statistics about Elvis impersonators in the United States. Here is the transcribed opening, from the "BC/AD" ("Barrier-Comfort Atheist Debate") recording:

I would like to share, firstly, some life-changing statistics with you. So please listen carefully. According to an unofficial account, in 1960 there were 216 Elvis impersonators in the United States. In 1970, 2,400. In 1980 there were an estimated 6,300. In 1992, 14,000! Which

RAY COMFORT

means by the year 2010, *one in four people in the US will be an Elvis impersonator.*¹

Thankfully, they laughed. It was Bette Midler who said, “If somebody makes me laugh, I’m his slave for life.” I didn’t have 250 slaves for life, but I was thankful to be able to break the ice. So I picked up the Coke can and began:

Millions of years ago there was a massive explosion in space. It was a big bang. No one knows what caused it, but from this bang issued a huge rock, and on the top of the rock formed a sweet, brown, bubbly substance. Then, over millions of years aluminum crept up the side of the bubbly substance and formed itself into a can, then a lid, and then a tab. Millions of years later, red paint and white paint fell from the sky and formed itself into the words “Coca-Cola, trademark, 12 fluid ounces.”²

Then I said that anyone in his right mind knew that if the Coca-Cola can was made, there *must* be a maker. If it was designed, there *must* be a designer.

That’s when I produced a banana and said,

Behold, the atheist’s nightmare. If you study a well-made banana, you’ll find on the far side there are three ridges. On the close side, two ridges. If you get your hand ready to grip a banana, you’ll find on the far side there are three grooves, on the close side, two grooves. The banana and the hand are perfectly made, one for the other.

You’ll find the Maker of the banana, Almighty God, has made it with a non-slip surface. It has outward indicators of inward contents: green, too early; yellow, just right; black, too late. If you go to the top of the

BANANA MAN

banana, you'll find, as with the Coca-Cola can, the makers have placed a tab at the top, so God has placed a tab at the top. When you pull the tab, the contents don't squirt in your face.

You'll find that the wrapper is biodegradable and has perforations, usually three or four. Notice how gracefully it sits over the human hand. Notice it has a point at the top for ease of entry. It's just the right shape for the human mouth. It's chewy, palatable, easy to digest, and it's even curved toward the face to make the whole process so much easier. That's if you get it the right way around.³

Some thought that it was funny. And they hadn't just cracked a few smiles. They *did* laugh, although not as enthusiastically as Christian audiences had so many times before. Of course, their laughter may have been cynical.

After a lively question-and-answer time, Ron Barrier came over and we shook hands. He even let me give him a hug. Some angry atheists came up to the platform and spat out a little sarcasm, while a number of others asked me to sign their books, which was unusual but kind of nice.

Andy Butcher, the reporter who attended the debate, published his account in a well-known Christian magazine:

Evangelist Ray Comfort stepped into the lion's den armed with a can of Coca-Cola and a banana . . .

Comfort's humor drew laughter and applause at first—but the reception got decidedly chillier as he went on to challenge evolution and atheism's foundations and when he quoted Scripture.

He produced a Coca-Cola can and presented his "theory" of how it came into existence—formed by chance over millions of years. To believe that was "to

RAY COMFORT

move into an intellect-free zone,” he said, “to have brain liposuction.” Then he pulled out from his jacket pocket what he called “the atheist’s nightmare”—a banana.

Comfort said the banana, like the Coca-Cola can, had been cleverly designed for human use—and, unlike the can, was biodegradable . . .

Some members of the audience laughed and booed as Comfort spoke about sin and the need for salvation. In the question-and-answer sessions one man challenged Comfort to eat some strychnine-laced peanuts he offered, to prove the veracity of the gospel passage that claimed Jesus’ followers would be able to drink poison and not be affected. Comfort declined, but said: “I know where I’m going if I do eat them.” . . .

Later Comfort said that he had been grateful for the warm reception he had received. “Getting in there was no problem, it was getting out I was worried about,” he laughed. “[But] they were very gracious. It was an opportunity to give God’s Word uncompromisingly to some who usually wouldn’t listen.”⁴

I didn’t know it then, but the reporter’s observation that “Comfort’s humor drew laughter and applause *at first*” would prove to be noteworthy some years later. Yes, God had graciously opened atheist doors to the gospel—and now the adversaries were about to come pouring in.