

Giving up blogging for Lent

By [Steve Thorngate](#)

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I've decided to give up blogging for Lent this year. Not blogs themselves so much as "blogging"—let me explain.

Back when Lewis Lapham was at *Harper's*, I read his monthly "Notebook" with delight and frustration. His writing was incisive, hilarious and scornful—with much of the scorn aimed at Christians. I once wrote to the editors lambasting Lapham for "alarmist screeds like May's Notebook, with its familiar formula of smug elitism, crude hyperbole, and triadic lists culminating in caustic punch lines." I was proud of my style-aping sentence but at the same time alarmed that I was taking so much pleasure in clever ridicule—Lapham's own stock-in-trade.

Lapham's [moved on](#), but Notebook's biases and tone—now in the hands of a large stable of writers—as often as not remain. This month Mark Slouka [focuses](#) on the ignorance of the U.S. electorate, especially conservative Christians (subscription required):

Forty percent of us believe God created all things in their present form sometime during the last 10,000 years. Nearly the same number—not coincidentally, perhaps—are functionally illiterate.

Then there's this sarcastic creed, aimed at former President Bush as well as the people who voted for him:

Belief and knowledge are separate and unequal. Belief is higher, nobler; it comes from the heart; it feels like truth.

And Slouka blames both Bush and the ignorance of the faithful for what he calls an "unpleasant fact":

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significant number of our fellow citizens are now as greedy and gullible as a boxful of puppies; they'll believe anything; they'll attack the empty glove; they'll follow the plastic bone right off the cliff.

I began this post intending to quarrel with Slouka's ideas about belief and knowledge, as well as to call him out for hypocritically labeling as ignorant people he clearly doesn't understand too well. But that's about as far as I got before a more repentant mode took over. Every solid point and clever turn of phrase I came up with seemed to implicate *me*, not Slouka, as condescending and snarky—transforming my corrective into just another step in an escalation of hypocrisy, a vicious cycle driven by the myth of redemptive blogging.

Last week I was blogging elsewhere and attracted some negative feedback. I ended up in a comments-field skirmish—in this case with my religious-right flank, not my secular-left one—which I soon moved to email. I crafted a couple lengthy and thoughtful responses to my commenter but then found myself frustrated that no one else would read them. I had to admit that my real desire was not to broaden my perspective and his through a thoughtful exchange, but to outdo him publicly, so that others would think I'm smart and funny and right.

So I'm giving up blogging for Lent. To be clear, I'm using "blogging" as shorthand for a style of communication that's particularly tempting in an unfiltered and interactive environment. I'm not avoiding the blog medium itself; I'll keep writing posts and commenting on others. But I won't sarcastically put down people's ideas, on a blog or anywhere else. Come Easter, I hope to have grown in my preference for edifying dialogue over entertaining bomb-throwing.