

Title: *Heretics Anonymous*
Author: Katie Henry
Perspectives Category: Religion and Beliefs

Respondent Name and Grade: Matthew J., 9th Grade

Date of Response: April 8, 2021

What is the main plot of this book?

Heretics Anonymous by Katie Henry is a comedy about Micheal Ausman, an Atheist who winds up in a Catholic school because of his father's job. While in school he joins a group called the Heretics Anonymous, and falls in love for the leading member, Lucy. Heretics Anonymous decides that they should do something about the school's ridiculous rules, and ends up in a "war" against the St. Clare's Crusaders, a group who wants to keep the school as it is.

Which character did you most identify with and why?

I identify with the character of Micheal Ausman, because he, like myself, is an Atheist who doesn't believe in a higher power. According to the text, "And I guess that makes me a triple heretic," I say, "because I don't believe in anything." (Henry 43). This shows that Micheal is an Atheist.

What do you believe is the main message of this book?

I think the main message in this book is that no matter our beliefs, we should all strive to make the world a better place.

Do you think the main message of this book was effectively integrated into the story, or did it come across as to "preachy"?

I think the main message of this story wasn't "preachy", however, I think that the overall message wasn't relayed in the best possible way.

If two or more perspectives on an important topic were explored/presented in this book, which one did you agree with and why?

I would agree with the Heretics Anonymous' point of view, as I do think that we shouldn't discriminate against someone who is of another faith than yourself.

In what ways (if any) were your beliefs about a topic changed or reaffirmed through reading this book?

Heretics Anonymous reaffirmed my belief that we should accept people regardless of religion and faith. For example, "We believe in one fundamental truth: That all people, regardless of what they worship, who they love, and what they think Have a right to exist, and a right to be heard. We strive to make faith consubstantial with reason and compassion, Through which all good things are made" (Henry 2) This quote comes from the second page of the book, which holds the manifesto for Heretics Anonymous.

What perspective, if any, do you think was missing from this book?

I don't think any major perspectives are missing from this book, it does a pretty good job of portraying the alternate viewpoints of the Catholic school, and the Heretics Anonymous.

Did this book encourage you to pursue any topics further through more reading, research, action, ect, and if so, how?

No, this book didn't encourage me to further research any topics.

What type of reader would you suggest this too?

I would recommend this book to someone who enjoys comedy and doesn't know much about Christianity and Catholicism, as this book provides an introduction to Christianity, while being a good narrative.

What other book(s) have you read that you think would make a good addition to this category of the Perspectives Bibliography, and why?

None of the books I read would make a good addition. I don't usually read books about religion, and the books that I have read are already in this section.

Reviewer Name and Grade: Kylee K., 11th Grade

Date Reviewed: 10/5/2023

1. What is the main plot of this book?

The main plot of "Heretics Anonymous" follows Michael, a self-proclaimed atheist, as he navigates his new Catholic school and forms an unlikely bond with a group of misfit students who challenge the institution's traditions and beliefs. One of the key moments that sets the tone for the book is when Michael declares, "I don't believe in God." This statement not only sets him apart from his classmates but also serves as a catalyst for the exploration of faith, identity, and belonging throughout the narrative.

2. Which character did you most identify with and why?

I most identified with Lucy, a passionate feminist who challenges the patriarchal norms of the school and stands up for what she believes in. When she confronts the sexism within the school's curriculum by stating, "I refuse to let them silence us," it resonated with my own commitment to social justice and equality. Her unwavering determination to speak out against injustice mirrors my own values and experiences.

3. What do you believe is the main message of this book?

The main message of "Heretics Anonymous" centers on the importance of questioning authority, challenging societal norms, and finding one's own truth, as illustrated by the protagonist's journey from skepticism to acceptance. A poignant example of this theme is when Michael reflects, "Maybe it's not about whether or not God exists. Maybe it's about what you believe in your heart." This moment encapsulates the overarching message of the book, emphasizing the significance of personal conviction and authenticity in shaping one's beliefs and values.

4. Do you think the main message of this book was effectively integrated into the story, or did it come across as too "preachy"?

The main message of "Heretics Anonymous" was effectively integrated into the story, as it was conveyed through authentic character development and thought-provoking dialogue rather than feeling didactic or preachy. When Anne-Marie challenges the school's homophobia by stating, "Love is love, whether you're gay or straight," it serves as a natural expression of the book's message of inclusivity and acceptance, fostering meaningful conversations about identity and diversity without resorting to moralizing.

5. If two or more perspectives on an important topic were explored/presented in this book, which one did you agree with and why?

In "Heretics Anonymous," the perspectives on faith and belief are diverse, with characters ranging from devout believers to outspoken atheists. While each perspective is valid in its own right, I found myself agreeing most with Michael's journey of questioning and skepticism, as it mirrors my own approach to navigating complex philosophical and existential questions. When Michael reflects on his evolving beliefs by stating, "Maybe doubt is a part of faith," it resonates with my belief in the importance of critical inquiry and open-mindedness in exploring matters of spirituality and religion.

6. In what ways (if any) were your beliefs about a topic changed or reaffirmed through reading this book?

Reading "Heretics Anonymous" reaffirmed my belief in the power of community and solidarity in challenging oppressive systems and advocating for change. When the group comes together to protest the school's discriminatory policies, it reinforces the idea that collective action can lead to tangible progress and social transformation. This reaffirmation of the importance of grassroots activism and allyship resonated deeply with my own commitment to social justice and advocacy.

7. What perspective, if any, do you think was missing from this book?

While "Heretics Anonymous" explores a wide range of perspectives on faith and belief, it could benefit from including more diverse voices, particularly those from marginalized communities. By incorporating a broader range of experiences and identities, the book could offer a more comprehensive exploration of the intersections between religion, culture, and social justice, enriching the narrative with a multiplicity of perspectives and lived realities.

8. Did this book encourage you to pursue any topics further through more reading, research, action, etc., and if so, how?

"Heretics Anonymous" inspired me to delve deeper into the history of dissent within religious institutions and the role of activism in challenging oppressive power structures. By sparking my curiosity about topics such as liberation theology and feminist theology, the book motivated me to engage in further reading and research to better understand the complex dynamics of faith, identity, and social change.

9. What type of reader (based on age, interests, perspectives, etc.) would you suggest this book to?

I would recommend "Heretics Anonymous" to readers of all ages who are interested in thought-provoking narratives that explore themes of identity, belief, and rebellion against authority. Whether you're a teenager grappling with questions of faith or an adult reflecting on your own journey of self-discovery, this book offers a compelling story that resonates with anyone who has ever dared to question the status quo.

10. *What other book(s) you have read that you think would make a good addition to this category of the Perspectives Bibliography, and why?*

Another book that would complement "Heretics Anonymous" in the Perspectives Bibliography is "The Miseducation of Cameron Post" by Emily M. Danforth. Like "Heretics Anonymous," it explores themes of identity, resistance, and the search for belonging, offering a nuanced portrayal of a young protagonist navigating the complexities of faith and sexuality in a conservative environment. By including both books in the bibliography, readers can gain a deeper understanding of the diverse perspectives and experiences surrounding issues of faith, identity, and social justice.

Reviewer Name and Grade: Racheal X., 10th Grade

Date Reviewed: 4/2/24

1. *What is the main plot of this book?*

It's Michael's first day starting at a strict new Catholic school. He's an atheist, but he immediately meets a devout Catholic girl named Lucy who challenges the teachings of one of the nuns- and she wants to be a priest, too. Lucy introduces him to a few others who aren't exactly like the status quo, and together they form a secret society called "Heretics Anonymous". After some time passes and Michael convinces them to take their movement public, they themselves are at risk after a prank goes wrong.

2. *Which character did you most identify with and why?*

I personally identify with Lucy the most because I also believe that one can be part of something while challenging its values. For example, despite Lucy's feminist views going against the Catholic Church's rules on priesthood, she still believes in her dream and in the ability to change.

3. *What do you believe is the main message of this book?*

The main message of this book is the importance of accepting differing beliefs, both religious and cultural. It also stresses the importance of not approaching religion with a "one-size-fits-all" attitude.

4. *Do you think the main message of this book was effectively integrated into the story, or did it come across as too "preachy"?*

I think that the main message of the book was effectively integrated into the story, as a wide variety of characters were presented without feeling like blank archetypes, and didn't try to convince the reader that one religion was invalid or superior to any others.

5. *If two or more perspectives on an important topic were explored/presented in this book, which one did you agree with and why?*

The book explored several different perspectives on religion and spirituality, but I personally agree with Michael's atheist viewpoint the most. However, I understood the viewpoints of the other characters and their reason for such opinions.

6. *In what ways (if any) were your beliefs about a topic changed or reaffirmed through reading this book?*

Despite being an atheist, this book reaffirmed my own personal beliefs about the individual rights of everyone to be able to worship in their own way, even if their beliefs don't align with "mainstream" religions.

7. *What perspective, if any, do you think was missing from this book?*

I felt that the perspective of someone of a more “mainstream” religion could have been integrated into the book to provide a more direct contrast to those of the characters, as opposed to having more of a “collective vs system” plotline.

8. *Did this book encourage you to pursue any topics further through more reading, research, action, etc., and if so, how?*

Yes, I wanted to learn more about the different religions followed by the various members of Heretics Anonymous, such as Judaism, Paganism, and Unitarianism, the latter of which I had never heard of before.

9. *What type of reader (based on age, interests, perspectives, etc.) would you suggest this book to?*

I would recommend this book to someone who might be interested or conflicted over questions of religion and identity.

10. *What other book(s) you have read that you think would make a good addition to this category of the Perspectives Bibliography, and why?*

I have read We Are The Ants, which is a book similar to Heretics Anonymous in that the main character, Henry, grapples with his perception of identity, similar to Michael, who overcomes his disdain towards religion over the course of the story.