

EVERYONE IS A SKEPTIC

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By James A. Haught

Are you a religious believer or a doubter? Let's find out. I'll cite some sacred, holy, divine, religious tenets, and you tell me if you believe them.

Aztec priests sacrificed about 20,000 people a year to many gods including an invisible feathered serpent. Do you think an invisible feathered serpent wanted human lives offered to it? Or are you a skeptic?

Muslim suicide volunteers who flew airliners into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon left behind a testament saying they were martyrs for Allah and would go instantly to the "women of paradise." Do you think the 9/11 terrorists are now in heaven with beautiful female houri nymphs? Or are you a doubter?

Mormons teach that Jesus came to America after his resurrection? Do you agree - or are you a skeptic?

Time after time, Catholic throngs report seeing apparitions of the Virgin Mary (although she never appears to Jews, Muslims or Protestants). Do you think a divine Virgin Mary makes herself visible occasionally to Catholics? Or do you doubt it?

In ancient Greece, even at the time of the great philosophers, priests sacrificed thousands of sheep, goats, pigs, dogs, horses, bulls and other animals to gods on Mount Olympus. Do you think a mountaintop Pantheon wanted animals killed? Or are you a doubter?

Today, Florida's Santeria worshippers sacrifice dogs, goats, chickens, etc., and toss their bodies into waterways. A Miami police water patrol fishes out the corpses. Do you think Santeria gods want animals killed? Or are you a skeptic?

Millions of Hindus pray over the linga, a stylized model of Shiva's erect penis. Do you think an invisible Shiva wants his phallus venerated? Or are you a doubter?

The Unification Church preaches that Jesus visited Master Moon and told him to convert all people as "Moonies." Do you believe it - or are you a skeptic?

Jehovah's Witnesses believe that, any day now, Jesus will descend from the sky with an army of angels, and Satan will emerge from the ground with an army of demons, and they will fight the Battle of Armageddon, which will kill most of humanity. Do you agree - or are you a doubter?

A central belief of Catholicism is that when bells are rung and prayers are chanted, the communion host wafer magically turns into the actual flesh of Jesus, and the communion wine miraculously becomes his physical blood. Do you believe this Doctrine of Transubstantiation, or are you a skeptic?

The Bible says that everyone who works on the Sabbath must be put to death. Do you think Sunday workers should be killed - or do you doubt this holy scripture?

Millions of American Pentecostals spout the "unknown tongue," which they contend is the Holy Ghost speaking through them. Do you think the third member of the Trinity makes these noises? Or are you a skeptic?

Scientologists say that each person has a soul that is a "Thetan" that came from another planet millions of years ago. Do you believe this religious doctrine, or doubt it?

In China in the 1850s, a Christian convert said God appeared to him, told him he was a divine younger brother of Jesus, and ordered him to "destroy demons." He launched the Taiping Rebellion, which killed an estimated 20 million people. Do you think the insurrection leader really was a deity - or are you a skeptic?

During the witch hunts, inquisitor priests tortured thousands of women - perhaps millions - into confessing that they flew through the sky, changed into animals, copulated with Satan, and the like. Then the confessors were executed under the Bible's command that "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live." Do you think the church was right to obey this sacred scripture? Or are you a doubter?

Ancient Phoenicians sacrificed little boys to Adonis - and ancient Canaanites sacrificed children to Moloch. Do you think an invisible Adonis and Moloch want children killed in their behalf? Or are you a skeptic?

Tibet's Buddhists believe that when an old Lama dies, his spirit enters a baby boy just being born somewhere. The faith remains leaderless for several years, until searchers find the boy who received the old Lama's spirit, and reinstall him as the old Lama in a new body. Do you believe that dying Lamas fly into new bodies? Or are you a doubter?

Evangelist Pat Robertson said his prayers deflected a hurricane from his headquarters at Virginia Beach - and faith-healer Oral Roberts said a 900-foot-tall Jesus appeared before him. Do you believe these reports by holy men, or are you a skeptic?

I could go on - through the Hare Krishnas who chant to Lord Krishna - and the Supreme Truth members who planted nerve gas in Tokyo's subway - and the Flagellants, who whipped themselves bloody in an attempt to soften divine wrath - and the Swami Rajneesh followers who put salmonella germs in Oregon salad bars - and the Millerites, who waited on mountaintops for the end of the world - and the Thugs, who strangled victims for the goddess Kali - and "channelers" who spout voices of the dead - to Jonestown and Waco and Appalachian serpent-handlers, etc.

I assume that everyone in this room rejects each of those sacred, divine, religious beliefs that I listed - beliefs that have been holy to many followers. So you're all skeptics like me. Moreover, if the same questions were put to almost any church congregation, a similar reaction would occur. Believers generally think that other people's gods and miracles are bogus, but their own gods and miracles are genuine. So, everyone is a skeptic, at least about sacred claims that are alien to them.

Now let's go to the bottom line: The heart of religion is worship of supernatural invisible spirits, plus belief in an afterlife in supernatural invisible heavens. Priests call these dogmas the great religious "truths." Do you think spirits and heavens really exist? Or are you a skeptic?

Some educated modern theologians blow a smoke screen around church creeds, contending that they're merely symbolic, not literal. They say God actually is the unknown force of the universe. Well, I don't know what caused the Big Bang and put awesome power inside atoms - but I don't assume that I should worship it. Or theologians say that God actually is the innate affection residing inside human hearts: God is love. I'm glad that humans have more kindness than sharks and rattlesnakes and cheetahs and hawks do - but I figure it stems from psychology that evolved through eons. The smokescreen obscures the clear, plain words of creeds. I don't think Jesus was talking about atom power or human goodness when he told followers to pray to "our Father, which art in Heaven."

Occasionally, an erudite believer tells me: You're too literal-minded. Church members don't really believe in gods, devils, heavens, hells, angels, miracles and all that magic. Creeds and scriptures are just allegorical, never meant to be taken literally. But this approach boggles me. Why would people say one thing but mean something else? Why would billions subscribe to faith, knowing that it isn't factually true?

A final point: Logic proves clearly that there cannot be a loving, merciful, powerful, fatherly Creator as espoused by most churches. If an "intelligent designer" made everything in the universe, he devised breast cancer for women, leukemia for children, Down Syndrome and all the other horrible diseases. He devised earthquakes, tornados, tsunamis and similar killers - including the future star death that will incinerate Planet Earth. He designed owls to rip rabbits apart, and boa constrictors to crush pigs, and spiders to trap flies. No human would be cruel enough to invent all these horrors. If a god did it, he's a fiend, not a loving, merciful, all-powerful father.

In philosophy, this is called the Problem of Evil. It first was articulated by Epicurus, who wrote: "Either God wants to abolish evil, and cannot - or he can, but does not want to. If he wants to, but cannot, he is impotent. If he can, but does not want to, he is wicked. If, as they say, God can abolish evil and God really wants to do it, why is there evil in the world?"

The Problem of Evil doesn't disprove the existence of a hateful, vicious God - but it disproves the kindly omnipotent Creator proclaimed by churches.

So, you see, it's obvious that everyone on Earth is a skeptic, even though billions worship daily - and it's obvious there can't be a loving Creator.