

Why YOUR religion?

You have come to me suggesting that I accept that your religion is the one true religion. But why YOUR particular religion? There are many other religions, and many variations even within Christianity; the members of all other religions believe unquestionably that THEIRS is the one true religion, not yours.

You were probably born into and raised with your current beliefs. It is most likely that your religious beliefs are the only ones you have ever known. In reality, had you instead been born in India or Japan or Yemen, most likely you would have fully accepted the beliefs in your culture, of your family and friends, as your true religion. The fact is that you believe in the religion you have accepted now because it was offered and reinforced in you by people who are close to you, who are like you and who you love and respect. Why would you question the advice of people around you who you know and trust? And so you don't question your faith.

As a former Christian, I have spent a lifetime studying other religions and their holy texts and find religions belief, a belief in god, severely lacking believability.

The Word of God (“holy” texts)

Most people who believe the Bible believe it to be the word of god. But theologians, men and women who study for the seminary, will tell you that it is the “inspired” word of god; inspiration that came about within the minds of mortal men. But there are many inspired books; how are we to trust that those claiming to know the mind of god are not just making up what they want to be true?

We don't know who wrote the Bible; the first books of the New Testament (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) were written at least 40 years after Jesus' supposed existence. We know the apostles did not write them; they were working men, there were no public schools at that time. Reading and writing were technical skills reserved for only a privileged few. The earliest texts of the Bible are written in Greek even though the people of that time, in that part of the world, spoke Aramaic. Only the rabbis and priests spoke in Hebrew.

The Bible has been copied thousands of times over and over by hand; mistakes have been made both

accidentally and intentionally. Did you know, for example, that the story of Jesus forgiving the adulterer (“...*let he who is without sin cast the first stone.*” John 8:3-11) was added centuries later?

The stories of the resurrection are just that – stories. They are not first-hand accounts by direct witnesses but tales which were handed down by word-of-mouth until (someone) committed them to writing. Compelling stories are not evidence. In a court of law this type of testimony is called hearsay and would not be admitted as evidence or proof.

There are books about King Arthur and Robin Hood; but were they real people? No. Did George Washington chop down his father's cherry tree? No. Did the angel Moroni appear to Joseph Smith and tell him where to find the sacred gold plates? We have only Smith's word; we don't have any proof such as the gold plates. These are all made-up stories.

Heaven

It sounds like a nice place, doesn't it? We all love life – and now religion tells us that it never needs to end. In heaven we are told we will see our deceased loved ones, we will never get sick or die and everything is perfect. But when your elderly friends and relatives died, will they look elderly in heaven as well; or will your grandmother look like the pretty young teen-age girl when you see her? Will you even recognize her, or your great great great grandmother?

What will you do in heaven? In life, many people find personal fulfillment and joy in helping others here on earth, trying to make things better for people who need help. A heart surgeon, for example may find joy and purpose in life through his skills. This joy will be denied him in heaven because no one needs his help. If you find joy in helping others and making things better, this will be denied to you in heaven. You can do nothing to make heaven a better place, it is already perfect.

What about the other things you love to do such as your favorite leisure activity? Fishing or golf or hiking – could you do that day after day, year after year, millennia after millennia? Will there be beaches and mountains in heaven; with no rotating earth and no sun, will there even be night and day? Eating good things is a joy of life; will you need or want to eat in heaven?

Atheists do not find comfort in the idea of living for eternity. In fact, we feel it is the ultimate finality of life that makes it so important, so valuable and so precious. If you don't put much thought into it, heaven sounds like a lovely place. But think about what it would be like every day. It doesn't sound very desirable way to spend a never ending existence.

Prayer

Many people pray to god out of appreciation or thanks. But many pray for the health and safety of loved ones. But if god has a plan for our lives, aren't you asking god to change his plan?

Many people who are sick have been prayed over then get better; but many still get worse and die. In fact a study conducted of heart patients, some of whom were prayed over and others not, showed that the people who were prayed over actually got worse. The fact remains that if you take god and prayer out of the equation, statistically some people can be expected to get better and some get worse. The results of prayer are no different than the statistical outcomes one would expect were there no god. In fact, the statistical findings are a good indication that there is no god.

Miracles

Many people believe that miracles happen. Often they cite some relative who was very ill and not expected to live or get better, only for them to experience a remarkable recovery. But most often this happens while they are also being given medical treatment and pharmaceuticals. Isn't it interesting that people who do not receive medical treatment experience fewer miracles? And if an otherwise healthy person dies unexpectedly, does the lack of miracles then indicate that there is no god?

The human body evolved to attempt to heal itself. Our immune systems are part of our normal bodily functions designed to make every effort to cure what ails us. If you accidentally cut your finger, it will still heal whether or not you pray for it to do so.

Why is it always the case that people experience a miracle that you cannot actually see? For example, why has no one ever reported that their missing limb, eye or even a tip of a finger, ever regenerated? Are god's skills in medical miracles limited?

Why do we never see an airplane suspend in the air briefly before crashing so some chosen people can first escape? Why is it the miracles in the Bible, such as the sun stopping mid-sky for

a day or the parting of waters, not happen today? These are stories, they are not, and never were, true.

The 10 Commandments and morality

Should the commandments be the law of the land? The first five have only to do with god's demands for us to worship him. The remaining commands are common sense; don't kill, don't steal and lie, don't lust after your neighbor's wife. But the commandments left out telling us not to own slaves or to not sexually abuse children; does that mean those actions are okay?

In fact a child could easily come up with additional and better commandments which are missing from the list. If the Ten Commandments could be so easily improved on, you have to ask yourself: is this really the best work of a perfect god?

Do we need religion or god to be moral people? Are you kind to others simply because you want selfishly for yourself to get into heaven? Do you avoid hurting others because you fear god will punish you if you do? Does god treat us like our pet dog; rewarding us for being good and punishing us when we are bad?

So then if you accepted that there was no god and no heaven, would you then kill and steal for your own benefit and gain? Atheists know that humans naturally have a sense of justice and empathy. We treat people with kindness and charity because that is the way WE wish others to treat us. For example, we have decided that slavery or child abuse is wrong because it harms other people. There is nothing in the Bible to tell us these are wrong; we accept these things because it is how we wish to be treated.

Is America Christian nation?

Many people mistakenly believe America was founded as a Christian nation. This is not true. A great many of our founding fathers were not religious and highly suspicious of organized religion. Most were Deists; meaning that they believed there was a creator god but they distrusted religion.

In the thirteen original colonies different religions dominated within the different states. In many of these, the local churches were also the seats of government power and authority. Visiting ministers from other areas

were often imprisoned or fined for preaching a religion that was not sanctioned by that particular state.

Because of this, the Baptists came to Thomas Jefferson for help. Jefferson was not a Baptist and he viewed all religions with suspicion. But he proposed the 1st Amendment to the constitution establishing that the government would not recognize one particular religion as the "official" American religion over another.

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution

Where did the universe come from?

Many people believe that nothing existed before the Big Bang; so therefore, god must have created the universe. However in the recent decade science has discovered that the products of the Big Bang that we can see (stars, planets, nebula, gasses, elements and atoms, etc.) represent only a tiny part, just 1% of the total mass of the universe.

The discovery of Dark Matter and Dark Energy which make up the remaining 99% of the cosmos, explains why the galaxies are racing away from each other at an accelerated pace. These conditions existed prior to the Big Bang and therefore must have existed before for the Big Bang to even happen. In his recent book, *"The Grand Design"*, physicist Stephen Hawking had shown how god is completely unnecessary to explain the origin of our universe. And besides, a lack of knowledge is not knowledge of god.

Can you prove that god doesn't exist?

Science cannot prove a negative; we cannot prove that something does not exist – not unicorns or fairies or gods. The burden is upon those making the claim that god exists to prove their claim.

Isn't Atheism a religion or belief itself?

Stamp collecting is a hobby. So then is NOT collecting stamps also a hobby?

I completely understand why you want and need to believe. We love life and we love our families and friends and we don't want life to end. It would be wonderful if the party could last forever, but it must end. We want people who do bad things to not escape justice and suffer the consequences of their actions in ultimate justice.

We mostly believe because we WANT to believe; we want very badly for the stories to be true. It is comforting to believe and to be in the presence of people who believe like you do.

But the universe is a remarkable place as it is – do you really need god to make your life worth living? Are the things now in life that give you joy not enough? Can you not find enough joy in a life with people who love you and who you love and want to help?

As one of my Christian friends once admitted: *"The more you think about it, the harder it is to believe"*.

I completely agree.