

So, you say you are an atheist?

Well, I don't believe you.

No, I'm not angry with you, and I don't want to debate all the classical arguments for the existence of God; you've probably considered them all already and rejected them because of your own personal thoughts.

And no, I'm not going to use the familiar line "God doesn't believe in atheists" as a premise here.

It's just that you, as an educated person, should know the virtual impossibility of proving a negative, especially a universal negative. To claim to do so implies omniscience, and frankly, neither of us have that. We haven't been everywhere in the material universe, nor have we explored the entire world of thought.

It's as if one were to say, "There is no such thing as a leprechaun, or a unicorn." To be sure, none of us have seen such creatures, but one documented sighting by an otherwise credible person would be enough to disprove such a sweeping universal negative. And one documented encounter with Deity from an otherwise credible person is sufficient to disprove the universal negative "There is no God."

But there have been far more than one such encounter; millions of otherwise credible people, many of them the best people in their community in terms of human relations, the founders of hospitals, schools, mercy missions by the hundreds, the kind of good neighbors all of us love to have, all have claimed such "close encounters of the main kind." Now, a claim to have seen a unicorn from someone on heavy narcotics wouldn't impress me a great deal, and the fact that the Authorized Version of the Bible uses the word isn't final evidence; checking the Hebrew results in another term ("wild ox" in some versions, though I still like the song where God tells Noah, "And don't forget My unicorn.") And an Irishman heavy into his celebration of St. Pat's with the "drinkin' of the green" might not be the most credible witness concerning the "little people." But when you have multiplied thousands of witnesses, many of whom would be clinchers on the stand in any court case, over all 7 continents, over thousands of years, all with the same testimony, there is surely a presumption in favor of their words.

Which, of course, leads to the relatively small number of self-professed atheists, agnostics, and skeptics (a recent national "Atheist's Convention" drew some 500, according to the

news). More cautious thinkers prefer the terms "free-thinker" or "agnostic" and simply state, "I haven't been able to find God," and with Confucius may say, "We do not yet understand man; how then can we understand God? We do not yet understand this life; how then can we understand another?" Interestingly enough, this is precisely what at least three writers of the Judeo-Christian Scriptures also said.

Isaiah, in the last portion of that book (55:8-9) quotes God as saying, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways," says the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are my ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts." The writer of Psalm 139 states (in v. 6) "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; It is high, I cannot attain it." And Paul, in Romans 11:33, concludes an in-depth discussion of God's character with the doxology, "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!" Evidently these Bible writers believed that for man to search out God on his own was not to be expected, and that God to be known must choose to reveal Himself.

Thus the agnostic is correct in stating that he has not found God, but the real question may be, are we willing to be found by Him? As Augustine once said, as if it were God speaking: "Fear not, for thou would not seek Me if I had not found thee."

My reason for writing this brief discussion is not to seek an argument, or to try to win a debate; it is intended to help honest doubters think their way through the most serious issue of life. If God exists, then all else is insignificant in comparison to that truth. If there is no God, then nothing else really matters; life is ultimately, in the poet's words, "a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." One thinker wrote that he could not have the atheist's humility, to consider life insignificant. As a believer in the One Creator and Sustainer of the universe, it is my prayer for you that this brief essay will help create in your mind a desire to enjoy that sense of meaning in life that can come in knowing the One Who is beyond knowledge. Feel free to contact me if you want to talk about these matters.

R. Charles Blair
pr.eprayer@ethixs.com.