

# **“What Would It Take for Me to Believe in God?”**

## **by Jim Heldberg**

At one of those dreary debates about “The Existence of God,” a young christian asked me, “What would it take for you to believe in god?” He meant a christian god, of course, not all the others.

It sounded silly, like asking someone, “Who would you be if you weren’t who you are?” I should have asked him, “And what would it take for you NOT to believe in god?” But I suspect he couldn’t have answered, and probably never even thought to ask himself his own question in reverse.

But when I pondered his question days later, it didn’t seem quite so silly. It’s a simple question, and perhaps it deserves a simple answer. After all, I’ve changed my mind before on many things. I’m not really that stubborn. Surely I’d be willing to change my mind on this, if... if... Well, if what?

After more thought, I had the answer. I’d change my mind if there were good reasons, with good data. I’m a realist, a scientist. The answer to “What Would It Take for Me to Believe in God?” is:

### **EVIDENCE.**

The evidence I want is simple. Here is a list of the “godly characteristics” of evidence I’ll need. This is an unusual list, but since I’m answering the question, I get to make the list.

#### **VISIBLE**

Christians say their god is “in the image of man (or woman).” That’s fine, and a big improvement over being invisible. So, show me the god. Visibility must be the first piece of EVIDENCE.

#### **SEXLESS**

Christians say their god isn’t a man or woman, despite their looks. That’s easy to check. If the god drops its pants for a thorough medical inspection, and has no sex organs, that’s more good EVIDENCE.

#### **IMMORTAL**

Christians say their god is immortal. That’s also easy to prove -- Superman did it in the movies. Bullets fired at this god should cause no damage, and many christians have a gun handy. Fire shouldn’t harm it, which can be proved in any kitchen, fireplace, welding shop or furnace room. It won’t drown, which can be verified at any bathtub, beach or bay. It should be immune to all diseases, which the National Center for Disease Control could prove, very carefully. It should be immune from death by old age, which would be hard to verify in one lifetime, but after it lived 2 lifetimes, or 3, or 10, that’s more EVIDENCE.

#### **LANGUAGE SKILLS**

Christians say their god knows all human languages. This would take a while to verify, but the number of languages is known, so the god's language skills wouldn't be difficult to prove. Oddly, the christian god can't write, so only spoken language can be used, but that makes it simpler for interviewers to get the EVIDENCE. A good explanation of why a god with great language skills is unable to write, and seldom even speaks, will provide more EVIDENCE.

#### COMMUNICATION

Christians say their god hears, and answers, multiple prayers simultaneously from remote worldwide locations. A simple 2-step process can verify this, with the naked god locked in a secret bank vault without communication equipment. While a large number of people speak audibly, or pray silently (their choice), to the god at the same time in various languages, the god tells interviewers what the pray-ers said. When the process is reversed, the god talks to pray-ers who tell interviewers what the god said. Since the god can't write, and usually communicates silently, that would have to be accounted for in the process, but it might still work. Standardized testing could confirm that messages sent both ways were accurately received, contributing to the EVIDENCE. Although prayer communication is commonly thought to be nearly instantaneous, delays measuring several years have been reported by christians. This needs to be explained, but does not need to be demonstrated as EVIDENCE.

#### CREATION SKILLS

Christians say their god can create universes and even life. In this area, I'd generously award full credit for only partial EVIDENCE. I'd give no credit for creating life, since man has already figured out how to do that, and no credit for creating a parallel universe, since I couldn't even tell. The god doesn't have to create something splashy, like a galaxy. Creating another moon around the earth would be EVIDENCE that could be verified by everyone. Creation of a new oil field would be very nice, and verified by geologists. An explanation of how these creations were achieved would earn extra credit toward EVIDENCE.

#### MIRACLES

Christians say their god can work a wide variety of miracles, from walking on water to moving mountains and restoring life to dead people. I'd score easy on this and not require all purported miracles to be proved. I'd allow the god to choose which miracles to perform, and accept a few samples as sufficient EVIDENCE.

#### ANSWERS

Christians say their god is all-wise. That's vague, but being wiser than men is easy to prove. The god could prove this by giving solid answers to major human questions, such as:

- COSMOLOGY: What happened at the big bang? What is dark matter and dark energy? What's inside a black hole? Can the universe expand forever? Is there life elsewhere in the universe? If so, where is it, and what is it like?
- BASIC SCIENCE: Is time travel possible? Is there a unified field theory? Is there any truth to string theory? What's inside the earth? What's inside a quark? Is there any limit to the number of elements that can be created? Is there a smallest atomic particle? Is the speed of light constant? Is light a particle or a wave? How can life be created quickly, without tedious evolution?
- HISTORY: What killed the dinosaurs? What killed the Neanderthals? Who killed JFK?

- MATHEMATICS: Does pi ever repeat? What's the next prime number?
- RELIGION: Identify the correct religion, if any, and close down the rest. Is every prayer heard, or only prayers repeated often by large groups? Explain how immaculate conception and resurrection work.

Those are big questions, but not un-godly large. Many other questions could be asked, but these should be sufficient. A god should get them all right, of course, with no partial credit for partial answers. I don't know how to check the accuracy of any of the answers, but universities could work on it. Probably the god could help verify the answers, in order to add to the EVIDENCE.

## SUMMARY

If the evidence showed a god passed these tests -- visible, sexless, immortal, communicated invisibly and simultaneously in all languages, created a moon, worked miracles, and answered major questions -- I would not only believe that it existed, I would probably even consider it a new species. Would I worship this weird new god-thing? Certainly not, but I might want it for a pet, so I could learn from it. Even better, I'd like to be its agent, and use it to make big money. I would give the god a better name than "God" because I wouldn't name a dog "Dog", or a child "Child." I couldn't be friends with it, any more than I could be friends with my cat or computer. Since it could never reproduce and was doomed to be alone forever, it might be tempted it to commit suicide, but could it do that? Only it would know. Should I insure it?