

Unity Through Difference

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When we were little, we were encouraged to believe in Santa Claus, the Easter bunny and the Sandman. Around age ten, we began to question the validity of these characters, especially when we saw Dad eating the cookies for Santa, or seeing that our parents somehow knew where all of the Easter eggs were placed. Growing up in a Christian household, we were taught to believe in God. Have you ever questioned this faith?

I have come in contact with many people who believe everything they have been told. A recent example of this is the "Power Balance" bracelets that originated in Australia. Vendors at public events or in malls would call up a few people to their tent and demonstrate through a variety of "tests" that with the balance bracelet on, a person's balance, strength and flexibility would increase. Call me a realist, but for my senior project in statistics, I easily proved these bracelets to be hoaxes. The real thing that increases these peoples' balance was their mind. This is known as the placebo effect.

By no means am I tying the placebo effect to faith. Faith is a very sensitive topic for many people, but let me ask this: does everyone know why they believe what they believe? If you grew up in a non-religious household, would you still believe in God? Would you need a god?

I must say that religion helps people keep, or get, their life together. Criminals who have committed horrible crimes somehow find God while they are in prison. Senior citizens realize that their time is near, and take faith more seriously than ever before. When you're a child and religion is everywhere around you, you don't have much of a choice but to believe in it.

Often, the true religious people I encounter have higher morals and standards for themselves than those who take religion less seriously. I have also met atheists who have the same morals, and act in a similar manner to Christians. I used to think atheists were weird just because they were different. Now, I'm beginning to realize that they're questioning what they were being taught. I've also seen people who think this way be shot down by those who have

faith in God.

One of the teachers in my class this week asked something along the lines of, "Have you ever heard of a real culture of atheists?" as in some way discounting their validity. In Canada, about 19-30% of the population holds an atheistic or agnostic viewpoint. In America, it's hard to measure this number because of how unwilling nonreligious people are to admit their view; most atheists would rather not bring attention to the fact that they don't believe in God. If atheists had a group, what would they do? They don't have a god to worship. The only trait most of them would have in common is the fact that they are nonreligious, and you can only talk about that for so long.

Just because someone doesn't have the same viewpoint as you, does this mean that they are wrong? Should you try to convince them otherwise, and make them feel bad? I don't think so, and many others are in concurrence. Different beliefs are something to learn from, to either harden or question your own ideology.

It's hard to be an atheist. Our founding fathers included God in the Constitution. Cemeteries are adorned with crosses. Half of the cars I see on the street sport a GF (God First) sticker. Religion is everywhere; It's impossible to avoid. Next time you encounter someone who doesn't believe what you do, don't give them a hard time or turn up your nose. You might be able to learn why people think the way they do; that's what college is about.

