

Are we all agnostics, or is anyone truly agnostic?



Highland Views

Chris Highland
Guest columnist

I had coffee with a retired minister who divulged he's now agnostic. He "leans" toward not believing but isn't ready to claim atheism. I know the struggle.

There are many things we "just can't believe." We see an amazing sight, someone does something marvelous, we learn something about our world that stirs a feeling of awe and wonder. "I can't believe what I just saw, or heard, or felt." That's a natural and normal re-

sponse.

I think one of the best "cures" for agnosticism (other than discovering something is indeed true or false) is to test it on other things. For example, are we agnostic about Santa Claus, the tooth fairy, Bigfoot, Nessie or space aliens? "I just don't know" would sound silly, wouldn't it? Skepticism makes a good companion for agnosticism. "I'm pretty sure that's nonsense; where's the evidence?" "I saw it on Facebook" wouldn't make the critical thinking cut.

Does that mean we never believe anything, anytime? Not necessarily. It just means we choose to "fix reason on her seat" (as Thomas Jefferson advised) and let her be the judge. We choose not to be credulous, easily accepting what-

ever people tell us is true. John Muir once met a "kindly skeptic" onboard a ship in Alaska and found their conversation lively and stimulating. Muir himself was a skeptic when it came to those who said they knew things about nature that he did not see verified by experience.

Where does this leave the agnostic? I don't know!

In a sense, I suppose, we're all agnostic, at least about some things. Any good scientist is carried along by skepticism, investigating theories, experimenting, exploring. "I don't know, but let's find out."

In another sense, I think no one is truly agnostic, at least in most day to day matters. Some might say they're ag-

nostic just to cover their ignorance or mental laziness. I don't find that convincing.

But what about religion? What of God? A convinced atheist sees no evidence and no need for God. Some atheists take this to another level and think a belief in God is harmful to individuals and human society. They would like nothing better than to see religious faith eradicated from the earth. In my experience, most atheists find no convincing evidence or need for belief but get along fine with most believers. Believing in a God is not the be-all and end-all of relationships in work, family, community or world.

See AGNOSTICS, Page 2D