

CATHOLICISM AND HEAVEN'S GATE

The tragedy of the Heaven's Gate cult, which resulted in the loss of 39 lives, was unfairly compared by some in the media to Catholicism. Here are a few examples.

On Nightline, pictures of the Vatican were shown while introducing the subject of religious cults. On talk radio, Ron Kuby, who assisted the late William Kunstler, said there was no difference between believing that a space ship was coming to save the cult members and a belief in the Immaculate Conception. And Harvard lawyer Alan Dershowitz contrasted the cult's beliefs with a belief in angels.

It is tempting to see anti-Catholicism at work here, but in fairness, what it shows is the consequence of believing in nothing. Agnostics and atheists have a hard time understanding anything that is not scientifically verifiable and thus tend to relegate to the bin of superstition any belief in a transcendent universe. That their own beliefs are substantively hollow is not something they are willing to entertain.

At bottom, those who like to make these comparisons show their inability to distinguish between New Ageism and Christianity. But since making critical distinctions is one mark of a true intellectual, it also tells us something about their status.