

The Christian Faith Before The Bar of Reason

By

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Faith, whether it be Christian, or Hebrew, or pagan, presupposes not only the existence of a personal God, but the fact of a revelation made by Him in behalf of the creatures whose supreme duty is to serve Him.

It is inconceivable that a God should create an order of rational, and, therefore, immortal beings, whether directly or indirectly, through processes of evolution, and then leave them in the dark concerning their destiny and the means of reaching it. Grant the relationship effected between Creator and creature, between a Heavenly Father and children destined for Heaven, and the position of the Christian believer is easily defended even before the bar of reason.

But before noting the logicality of the theist's attitude it would seem proper to consider whether the position of the atheist, who rejects the fact of a Supreme Being, is even remotely tenable.

The Atheist Position

It is often said by believers that there are no atheists in fact, no matter how large the number be who profess to be such in theory; and it will be conceded, I am sure, that no one of them is an atheist by conviction. Conviction implies evidence, or at least a conclusion reached by un-faulty reasoning, and no avowed atheist has ever defended his attitude by argument. He rather places the believer on the defensive and asks him for arguments. He may ridicule the credulity of those who accept all that the Old Testament Scriptures attribute to the Almighty; he may declare extravagant some of the teachings of the Christian faith, held to be revealed; but these are not arguments.

There may be some excuse for the *un*believer, whose attitude is negative, but not for the *dis*believer, who must have reasons for his stand.

Atheism conflicts with the belief of the generality of people in all na-

tions at all times; it conflicts with the belief of the greatest scholars of the past, of those scholars of our era, who have given more study to religion than to irreligion; it conflicts with the exactions of the soundest philosophy.

Many men, otherwise erudite, prefer to call themselves "agnostics", by which term they mean that they "do not know" whether a God rules from the Heavens or not. I say "otherwise erudite", because these people seldom seriously employ their minds in the direction of faith; for the most part their wish is father to their thought. Their "I do not know" is equivalent to "I do not care"—an attitude as unscholarly as risky.

The Scientist

It is the agnosticism of many such scholars, notably of a few distinguished scientists, which dictates the attitude of a multitude of college and university students. They ask "what does Millikan, or Eddington, or Jeans, or Einstein think about

it?"—not realizing that the scientist concerns himself only with phenomena and the laws which govern them. He does not study causes, assuming rightly that that is the function of the philosopher and of the metaphysician. But it were error to maintain that most of the leading scientists are agnostics.

According to TIME, January 8th, 1934, Robert Andrew Millikan, son of a Presbyterian minister, is famed for his piety. Sir Arthur Stanley Eddington is a devout Quaker.

R. A. Millikan, writing in EVOLUTION IN SCIENCE AND RELIGION, says:

"It is absolutely impossible for us to get along without the aid of certain people who can be trusted to speak with authority on the vitally important question of human ends. The scientist provides us with extensive enough information regarding what is, but unless we have those among us who tell us also what makes for, and what does not make for, our more fundamental well-being, we are lost."

Says Sir Arthur Eddington:

“Materialism and determinism; those household gods of nineteenth century science, which believed that the world could be explained in mechanical or biological conceptions as a well-run machine, each cog of which moved in relation to other cogs, must be discarded by modern science.”

Sir James Jeans, in his work entitled “THE INVISIBLE UNIVERSE”, confesses that science will never be all-knowing. He writes:

“The ultimate realities of the universe are at present quite beyond the reach of science and may be—and probably are—forever beyond the comprehension of a human mind.”

The same British scientist declares:

“These concepts reduce the whole universe to a world of light, potential or existent, so that the whole story of its creation can be told with perfect accuracy and completeness in the six words: ‘God said: Let there be light.’

“This Creator is not so much an engineer as a mathematician, that

is to say, One who lives in the realm of pure thought and, what is equally important, He is outside of space and time.

“Modern scientific theory compels us to think of the Creator as working outside time and space, which are part of His creation, just as the artist is outside his canvas.”

Arthur H. Compton, according to Philip Kinsley, writing in the CHICAGO TRIBUNE, recently said:

“Science can have no quarrel with a religion which postulates a God to whom men are as His children. Not that science in any way shows such a relationship... but the evidence for an intelligent power working in the world which science offers does make such a postulate plausible.”

Abbe Lemaitre, the Belgian Scientist, met with Eddington and Einstein in California in 1933 and discussed the theory, mutually accepted, that the vast universe, of which our earth is only an infinitesimal part, grew out of a single atom. The Abbe, however, told the other two

eminent physical scientists that he saw infinite wisdom and precise laws behind that atom, so potent, so energizing. Behind the phenomena he discovered God as the Director of the great universe orchestra, all of whose billions of parts work in wonderful harmony. The other scientists declared his conclusions "beautiful".

Abbe Lemaitre, speaking on another occasion, claimed that the whole difficulty encountered by people who cannot reconcile science and religion results from an effort to reconcile the findings of science with certain passages of Holy Scripture.

"But," says the Abbe, "once you realize that the Bible does not purpose to be a textbook of science, the old controversy between religion and science vanishes. If scientific knowledge were necessary for salvation, the writers of the Scriptures would have known this and set it down in their verses. . . . If the theory of relativity were necessary for salvation it would have been revealed

to the writers of Holy Scripture, and they would have included it among their writings."

In this connection Gilbert K. Chesterton writes:

"Eddington is more agnostic about the material world than Huxley ever was about the spiritual world. . . if fifty years hence the electron is as entirely exploded as the atom it will not affect us, because we have never founded our philosophy on the electron any more than on the atom. But the materialists did found their philosophy on the atom; and it is likely that at this moment some spiritual fad or other is being founded on the electron."

Sir Ambrose Fleming, an English scientist, declared only last month (February, 1935):

"We have not the very smallest knowledge of how empty space first became occupied by the most rudimentary form of matter. Neither can we have any conception of how life originated. We cannot in any way bring it into existence apart from previous life. Here then are two great gaps,

which no evolutionary theory has been able to bridge.”

Professor Einstien deserves great credit for the success of his researches in his own field, but he deserves little credit for his pronouncements on education and religion. People would have little regard for a scientific pronouncement by the greatest theologian; they should have no greater regard for a religious pronouncement by a great scientist, particularly when it is reasonably certain that such scientist never devoted ten hours of serious study to the subject of religion during his entire lifetime. In fact the attitude of people towards their hero scientists is in direct contradiction of their attitude towards the greatest Christian scholars. They disdain the teachings of Christ or the support of these teachings by Paul or Augustine or Thomas because some of them contain mysteries. Yet they rally round the teaching of Einstein, for instance, despite the fact that for ninety-five

per cent of us it is full of mystery. In fact it is said that only four people in all the world understand it.

Those who concede that we are literally surrounded by mysteries in the natural order are most inconsistent in their refusal to admit mysteries in the supernatural order—an order, which, as the very word implies, must be above the powers of the human mind to penetrate.

The Unbeliever the More Credulous

It may be difficult to believe in creation, but it is more difficult to believe that the first thing, even if only an atom, or an electron, was not created. Some thing and no thing are at opposite poles. It is more difficult to believe that the universe itself is God than that the universe came from God. The universe is material, therefore limited, therefore not infinite, therefore not God. The universe could not be God because scientists admit that there has been succession in the expansion of the universe. But succession im-

plies a beginning, which would mean that the universe is not eternal and, therefore, could not be God.

Life, whether in plant, or animal or man, has always been mysterious, yet is it not the most familiar of facts? It can be explained only by pre-existing life. If it could not have resulted from matter, it could result only from a cause possessed of life. It is easier to believe that an infinitely wise Designer is responsible for the great marvels of life production, whether this be noted in the bird proceeding from the egg, or in the human babe from the womb, than that they are to be accounted for by chance.

My time-piece, or watch, is a mystery to me; that is, I have not the faintest idea how it was put together; but I certainly do know that it did not eventuate by chance. The universe is millions of times more intricate, and its billions of component parts move and function more accurately than the best Bulova or Gruen watch.

We are told that the sun is 93,000,000 miles away from the earth, yet that it is in just the right place. The imagination must stretch itself a great deal to believe that the right position of this heavenly body, so needful to us, is accidental; that air and water, and other things so essential to life, just happened. Necessary as the sun is we seldom advert even to its importance. Such is our attitude towards God. Why do we not take Him for granted in relation to our supernatural and spiritual life as we take the sun for granted in relation to our natural and physical life?

From One Admission the Case Is Proved

We are probably wasting words on a reader, who needs no conversion to a belief in a Creator of infinite power and wisdom, and, therefore, of a Personal God. But it is possible that you are one, who claims that precisely because God is so infinitely great and majestic, He would not condescend to reveal Him-

self to man, so infinitely beneath Him? Such an attitude is quite common, but let us see how logical it is.

A sound philosopher needs nothing more than the admission from the non-Christian that there exists a God infinitely majestic, to infer the plausibility of practically every outstanding truth taught by Christianity. God cannot be infinite at all unless He be infinite in every one of His attributes. If He be infinitely majestic and powerful, He must also be infinitely good, infinitely loving, infinitely merciful, infinitely holy, infinitely just. The moment you deny any one of these attributes to the Almighty, you annul the others, and practically deny His existence altogether.

If God be infinitely good, then why is it not reasonable that He should fashion creatures capable of sharing His immortality and, therefore, called to spend their eternity with Him in ineffable bliss?

If He be infinitely loving, surely He would acquaint those destined

for His heavenly home at least with the terms of salvation, which must depend entirely on His free will. Evidently He would reveal more than this. He would reveal about Himself those things which human reason, unaided, could not know, such as His subsistence in three Divine Persons. If there be no bounds to His love, and there could not be if His love is infinite, even the Incarnation becomes plausible on the theory that perfect love suggests intimacy with the object loved. On this same theory and principle the Catholic teaching, accepted without a dissenting voice for fifteen hundred years, and professed by three-fourths of all Christians in the world today, concerning the Holy Eucharist is highly credible, because perfect love tends to personal union with the beloved. If union with God eternally is not unreasonable, why is union with God temporarily on earth unreasonable? On this same theory and principle the redemption of mankind by the supreme sacrifice

of the Son of God, astounding though it be, appeals to the philosopher, who must credit God with infinite mercy, as well as with infinite power and goodness and love.

A Divinely Guided Teacher Necessary

If God be infinitely holy, He cannot be indifferent towards the conduct of His children in this world. He must detest sin with all the power of His being. While His infinite mercy impels Him to have pity on the sinner and offer him forgiveness upon repentance, His justice, which must be equally infinite, must compel Him to deny admission into His eternal home to those who live as rebels, defy His laws and die as they live. Our conception, even of human justice, must force this conviction on us. If we have any complaint with human justice it is on the score that it is too lenient towards the grievous offender, and not on the score that it does not reward the criminal.

If God would have the human

race, throughout all ages, be conversant with His will in relation to service and the terms of attaining glory eternal, it was necessary for Him to make some sort of arrangement, as Christianity declares that He did make, not only to perpetuate His teachings, but to insure their reliability. Nothing appears more consonant with reason than that He should, while incarnate among men, found a Kingdom to be as world-wide as is the human race, in order that every creature might be served through it.

Divine Helps Also Needed

Moreover, if man's destiny be supernatural, would it not be necessary that to this institution should be committed supernatural helps, divine ordinances, by which the souls of men could be elevated to a supernatural plane, kept on that plane, or restored to it should they, by serious guilt, fall from it? If man's destiny be everlasting association in the life and glory of God it must be supernatural. He must live in an

order far above ours, and because means must always be of the same nature as their end, must be commensurate with that end, the soul of man must in some way be elevated to the supernatural plane and be assisted towards supernatural glory by supernatural means of salvation. The Church claims to have these means in what are known as the Sacraments.

From His Greatness Reason to His Goodness, Love

We repeat, therefore, that the one who admits the existence of God at all, who attributes to Him the attributes of infinite majesty and greatness, must equally attribute to Him the attributes of infinite wisdom, and goodness, and love, and mercy and justice; and the whole Christian system can be plausibly explained by logical deductions from these necessarily admitted attributes. In creating a universe so vast that its parts cannot be numbered nor distances adequately expressed in figures, the Almighty

would furnish us with some idea of that attribute which is apparent to the senses, namely, His infinite greatness; and in so doing may He not have intended to appeal to men's reason for the easier acknowledgement of the boundlessness of His other attributes, on which the most attractive teachings of Christianity are predicated?

The Church's Case in History

Not to speak of the 10,000,000 or more martyrs, who were loyal unto a cruel death, the greatest saints of all times were in the Church; the greatest philosophers of the Christian era belonged to the Church; the builders of the most glorious monuments of Europe, the pride of the various countries; the master artists of all ages, received their inspiration from the Christian religion. The civilization of the barbarians in the early Middle Ages, the abolition of slavery wherever encountered, the formation of societies to minister to every form of human misery; the founding of the only schools

there were during more than a thousand years; the preservation and hand-copying of the ancient classics, as well as of the Holy Scriptures, are a few of the achievements of the Christian religion. The explorations and discoveries which took place from the tenth to the fifteenth centuries, including the two continents of North and South America, were conceived by those who yearned to spread the Christian faith.

The Church frequently brought order out of worse chaos than that which obtains in the world today. She was the acknowledged arbiter in all serious disputes between nations, and the most influential promoter of peace.

Because the World War was not prevented by the Christian Church; because many evils afflict the human race in this generation, many proclaim that Christianity is a failure. They should rather confess that the World War eventuated because civil rulers would not hearken to the Church, and because the spirit

of national selfishness and greed, of international hate and revenge, was long fostered and spread by influences, with which the Church could not successfully cope. Evil is not in Christianity, but in the hearts of men, who insist on going their own way.

If the Church has not brought good out of the evil of the late universal war, let it be remembered that she has been refused representation in the Council of the League of Nations. If the Church has not cured the depression, it might be asked if any other organization has. At least the Church claims to have the remedy for our national and international ills, which she cannot induce our civil rulers to apply or even to recommend. It is the remedy which Christ Himself besought mankind to follow when He declared: "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these other things (He referred to material things) will be added unto you."

What Has Infidelity to Its Credit?

The critics of Christianity now have the grandest opportunity they ever had to demonstrate their superior wisdom, and power, and influence, and ingenuity by restoring that in which alone they are interested, the material prosperity of other days.

Organized atheism has never produced anything better than Communism or the French Revolution, or the destruction of human liberty. Its history in the past, as in Russia and Mexico today, is one of intolerance, of persecution, of ruthless cruelty. Infidelity has erected no monuments, no homes for the poor, or the aged, or the outcast, or even for the sick. Says a noted educator:

“Unbelief never cultured a civilization, never built an empire, never established a republic, never painted a great picture, or erected a cathedral, or summoned out of the uncreated abyss of silence a masterpiece of music. All that is good in the history of man has

been based upon Faith. Christianity itself is but the supreme triumph of Faith."

I believe that human reason, not interested in religious controversy, would pronounce a verdict of divinity in behalf of the Church with no other evidence for such verdict than the survival of the Church throughout nineteen centuries against every form of persecution and hostile legislation. Some of the greatest intellects of the early centuries were converted to Christianity by the one, humanly unexplainable, fact that she was established and succeeded at all against so many obstacles.

I represent a Church which has a long memory. It has existed in this world continuously from the day the charter of Christianity was promulgated. This Church possesses a diary covering these nineteen centuries, and while there are recorded therein many temporary defeats in parts of the Christian world, many things disedifying be-

cause of the human element in its membership, its story on the whole is one of victory and triumph, of blessings incalculable to the human race.

Reading this diary one notes that enemies, bitter and powerful, have, in each succeeding century, fought the Church with great fury, but with little permanent success, and in many instances they repented their opposition before they died. Persecutions, successful in one country, were only instrumental in bringing the faith to another, in which the persecuted sought refuge.

This diary will disclose that what has happened in France or Spain or Mexico during our lifetime, happened in all these countries seventy or eighty years ago, as well as in Germany and in England, and that within a decade thereafter the persecuting powers knocked at the Church's door to renew official peace with her.

What the English moralist, Hannah Wise, wrote a hundred years

ago is equally applicable today. She wrote:

“Christianity bears all the marks of a divine original; it came down from heaven, and its gracious purpose is to carry us up thither. Its author is God; it was foretold from the beginning, by prophecies, which grew clearer and brighter as they approached the period of their accomplishment. It was confirmed by miracles, which continued till the religion they illustrated was established. It was ratified by the blood of its author; its doctrines are pure, sublime, consistent; its precepts just and holy; its worship is spiritual; its service reasonable, and rendered practicable by the offers of divine aid to human weakness. It is sanctioned by the promise of eternal happiness to the faithful, and the threat of everlasting misery to the disobedient. It had no collusion with power, for power sought to crush it; it could not be in any league with the world, for it set out by declaring itself the enemy of the world; it reprobated its maxims, it showed the vanity of its glories, the danger of its

riches, the emptiness of its pleasures. This religion does not consist in external conformity to practices which, though right in themselves, may be adopted from human motives, and to answer secular purposes; it is not a religion of forms, and modes and decencies; it is being transformed into the image of God; it is being like-minded with Christ; it is considering Him as our sanctification, as well as our redemption; it is endeavoring to live to Him here, that we may live with Him hereafter."

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