

Fundamentals of Christianity

CHRISTIANITY IS A SUPERNATURAL RELIGION

i. e. involves truths that are beyond and sometimes contrary to the physical laws of the universe; v.g. (a) the deity and the virginal birth of Christ; (b) certain wonders which He worked like the multiplication of the loaves; (c) his physical resurrection from the dead; (d) the future union of man's soul with his Creator in eternity—these we believe no scientific discovery or material progress can ever strip of the supernatural—without denying the facts themselves or at least essentially changing their intrinsic nature.

INVOLVED IN THIS IDEA OF THE SUPERNATURAL ARE MIRACLES

which are extraordinary facts in physical nature, such as can only be performed by God's power. Catholics are not willing to admit that God, the Author of nature, is no longer its Master; that his power is harnessed, held in bonds. Hence if God wished to accomplish the miraculous birth of Christ; if God wished to combine planting, growth and harvest in the multiplication of the loaves; if God wished to raise the physical body of Christ from the dead, we believe He could do so with infinite ease and facility. As we see it, the main reason why men deny the supernatural is because of their repugnance to go beyond the realm of their own physical experiences. From the standpoint of the materialist, God Himself, an infinitely pure and perfect spiritual Being, is in Himself the greatest of all Miracles. But granting their possibility

WHAT OF THE UTILITY OF MIRACLES?

That God everywhere reveals Himself through nature is self-evident; Catholics, not only CAN but MUST believe this. But our interpretation of history convinces us that the book of nature alone has never been and never will be sufficient. All history proves that man left to himself and relying only upon the natural religion he derives from material things, has fallen into the grossest errors, immorality, degradation; hence as the apostle said: "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, etc." (Hebrew I 1-2). But without miracles no supernatural revelation could be recognized as being genuine.

WHICH STULIFIES THE INTELLIGENCE?

To say I will only believe what I can see or come in contact with through my physical senses; or to reason thus: If God has seen fit to reveal a special or super-sensible religion, I as his creature am bound to accept it. But if God really wished to thus reveal Himself to me more intimately than through mere nature — then humanly speaking, He had to use miracles, otherwise I would not be sure that He had really spoken. The practical question for me therefore is: Have I historical evidence to prove that God has thus revealed Himself? The affirmative according to the Catholic belief can be proven by an appeal to the Four Gospels **TAKEN MERELY AS RELIABLE HISTORY**; and upon these we can construct a faith that is absolutely logical and entirely reasonable.

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Christ's Virgin Birth

DENIAL OF CHRIST'S VIRGIN BIRTH seems but incidental to the complete rejection of his divinity or deity. For when one believes Christ to be the incarnation of God, then "He was conceived by the Holy Ghost," can offer no special difficulty; not from the standpoint of scripture which states this expressly; nor from reason which tells us that if God wishes to act above or even contrary to the natural laws whereof He is absolute Master, He can do so with infinite ease and facility.

The Catholic doctrine on the deity of Christ is found in the obvious and literal sense of these words of the Nicene Creed (formulated about 381 A. D.) "And (I believe) in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only Begotten Son of God, * * * True God of True God, Begotten not made, of the same substance as the Father," etc. Whoever denies this concept of Christ cannot be a Catholic.

FIRST PRINCIPLES

1. The true religion must deal intimately with the true God; but the true God is necessarily involved in mystery; hence the true religion must also contain mystery. Hence the element of mystery in the union of God and man in Christ does not in the least disturb us.

2. For God to take human nature, two things are required: infinite power and infinite love. Both these, we ascribe to the Supreme Being.

3. To Catholics therefore, it is solely a question of fact. If we examine the claims of various religious founders, like Moses, Confucius, Buddha, Mohomet, Brahman, Jesus Christ, we find that, varied as were their claims, none pretended to be God, EXCEPT JESUS CHRIST. He, while acknowledging inferiority under one aspect (i.e., in his human nature) claimed absolute identity and equality with God; demanded and received divine adoration, arrogated to himself divine powers and prerogatives; even swore solemnly before the Jewish Court that He was actually God; accepted the death sentence from his own nation, rather than qualify this claim. Our conclusion therefore is that if Jesus Christ were not God, He would have been the greatest imposter, falsifier, perjurer that the world has ever known.

EVIDENCE ACCEPTED BY ALL CATHOLICS AND MILLIONS OF PROTESTANTS

But the fact that (a) He fulfilled the ancient prophecies which described minutely events before his birth, during his life, after his death; the fact that (b) He invented the most sublime religious and moral doctrines that the world has ever known; the fact that (c) He performed miracles which nineteen centuries have been unable to explain much less reproduce; the fact that (d) the most stupendous historical proofs are available to show that after death, He raised Himself to life; the fact that (e) He conquered the pagan world with doctrines of purity, humility, charity that were sheer madness to them; the fact that (f) millions in every age have worshipped Him as their God; the fact that (g) his religion made the most drastic change in mankind of which the world's history has a record; the fact that (h) his religion was propagated without human means or resources and chiefly by twelve ignorant Jewish fishermen; the fact that (i) his religion has survived the attacks of nineteen hundred years and still holds in loving bondage more than half a billion hearts today—these facts must be given due weight before any one can properly answer the question "Was Jesus Christ God, or was He an imposter?"

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The Physical Resurrection of Christ

Catholics believe that "Christ suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified (actually), died and was buried; and since we accept Him as God, we unequivocally assume that "on the third day He arose again from the dead." Hence no mystical or figurative resurrection will satisfy our concept of it. Although the risen Christ was endowed with immortality, impassibility, etc., it was his real, actual physical body that rose. From many reasons for thus believing, these three may be singled out: (1) Direct, unmistakable evidence contained in the four gospels, which at the lowest appraisal, are at least reliable history; (2) Nineteen centuries of innumerable and unimpeachable witnesses who have testified to this truth; (3) Christianity itself, viewed as a tangible fact, and therefore the result of some definite tangible cause.

WHAT THE GOSPELS PROVE

Gospel history testifies that after Christ had hung three hours upon the cross; after all his blood had flowed from his open wounds, He expired. Officially pronounced dead by the Roman Centurian, He was placed in a rock-sepulchre, securely sealed by his bitterest enemies, carefully guarded by Roman soldiers. No one saw Christ rise, but hundreds saw Him alive after He had been dead. These conversed with Him, ate with Him, examined His wounds, associated with him for forty days; according to St. Paul, five hundred saw Him at one time.

UNIMPEACHABLE WITNESSES

(1) Nineteen centuries of believers in Christ's resurrection constitute an army of witnesses; so also do nineteen centuries of unbelievers, whose crushing failure to disprove this historical truth, makes them irrefutable though unwilling witnesses in its favor.

(2) Thousands of stubborn Jews who were converted when the apostles preached the resurrection; but, without drastic proofs of it, to persuade this multitude to adore One whom they had just crucified—this would be absolutely impossible.

(3) Multitudes from many nations of pagans and gentiles converted when ignorant fishermen preached the resurrection, which would have been impossible had it not been supported by rock-ribbed proof.

(4) Vast numbers among the proud, rich, sensual Romans, who in believing the resurrection had to sacrifice pride, luxury, sensuality, often life itself. Other religions and cults have attracted members by appealing to such passions, but Christianity promised men naught on earth but self-denial, hardship and death.

(5) The very enemies who had crucified Christ but who could do nothing except forbid his Apostles to teach men that He had risen. If there had been any way of disproving this historical fact, they would have exhausted their resources to accomplish it.

(6) The twelve Apostles who from being incredulous, cowardly, ignorant fishermen became moral giants and martyrs, who attributed their own miraculous change to—and based all their preaching upon—Christ's physical resurrection.

A BUILDING WITHOUT A FOUNDATION?

Christianity itself, like some great stone building, must have had a real foundation. As a twenty-story building could not be suspended in air, so Christianity—without its foundation, could not exist. But the foundation of Christianity is Christ risen, not symbolically but verily. **IN FACT CHRISTIANITY, WITHOUT THE PHYSICAL RESURRECTION WOULD BE A FAR GREATER MIRACLE THAN THAT STUPENDOUS HISTORICAL FACT ITSELF.**

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Evolution and the Bible

A few Catholic principles on this subject are given herewith:

1st. Material or matter itself is not eternal; for Holy Scripture expressly teaches that God not merely formed but created all things. However, even if matter did have eternal existence, then without God it would be chaos, like dust caught in a whirlwind and scattered wherever blind chance might fling it. Order, harmony, providing for future contingencies—is the work of an intelligent mind.

2nd. The Bible was never intended to teach science but to inculcate religious truth; hence apparent contradictions must be studied with this fact in mind.

3rd. The Six Days mentioned in Genesis need not be restricted to 24 hours each. In the original language, this word means also "a period of time." In our "day" we still use "day" in that sense.

4th. Man's soul was not developed from matter but is a superior substance which God has specially created. The soul proves its own spirituality and independence of matter by its intellectual activities. Evolution of the soul from material is therefore flagrantly false and intrinsically impossible.

5th. The theory that man's body is a development of the Ape is (a) unproven, (b) unprovable. It is unproved because absolutely no solid proof has thus far been advanced to show that the progenitors of men were monkeys. This theory is also unprovable, because even if it could be shown that the body of the first man was exactly similar to the body of the ape—if the so-called missing link could be found—it would not follow that man had actually descended from the ape. Similarity does not prove identity. When God made the first man, he could have made his body slightly superior to the ape, or he could have made him exactly like the ape. In the latter case there would be similarity but not identity. Two lines may be exactly alike and still not be joined—only parallel.

6th. The sequence of events as given in the biblical account of creation need not be taken as a scientific treatise but rather as a simple, familiar manner of inculcating religious truth. The author wrote for a people just come out of slavery, in whom a scientific explanation would have produced incredulity. Imagine their impression if the compiler of Genesis had discoursed learnedly about revolving worlds, incandescent matter, cooling-off processes, etc. Instead he taught them in simple, child-like language that God created all things, sun, moon, stars, light, earth, planets, animals, man.

7th. Aside from the origin of man, the more evolution that can be shown to have taken place, the greater the wisdom of God is proven to be. For the more complicated is any machine, the greater must be the intelligence of the one who invented it.

ENEMIES TO PUBLIC MORALITY?

Finally (as a matter of opinion rather than of Catholic faith) would it not seem that those so-called historians, pseudo-scientists and others who insistently proclaim as facts, the unproved hypotheses of their own descent from a monkey—are doing incalculable damage to the morals of the present generation? When the young are taught to think that they are not spiritual beings but only over developed apes, what wonder if the restraints of Christian morality are so often relegated to the scrap pile, together with purity, integrity, decency—as things that were but are no more.

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