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AN ATHEIST IN THE SACRISTY: WHY DOES FAITH SEEK INTELLIGENCE?

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FAITH SEEKS INTELLIGENCE IN ORDER THAT LIGHT MIGHT MEET LIGHT. THE SCOTTISH divine and writer, George MacDonald, whom C. S. Lewis so much admired, gave a sermon in the latter part of the last century entitled simply “Light.” He suggested that we must first become “fit” for what we are to receive and have, but that our nature will indeed be completed. MacDonald, in a most beautiful passage, reminded us:

There are good things God must delay giving until His child has a pocket to hold them - till he gets His child to make that pocket. He must first make him fit to receive and to have. There is no part of our nature that shall not be satisfied and that not by lessening it, but by enlarging it to embrace an ever-enlarging enough.¹

Faith seeks intelligence in order to understand and be able to accept that we are given more than we can expect. We must also make ourselves ready for what we are and will receive. One of the good things God delays giving us is precisely Himself. Our individual lives, their narrative history, is the account of what we do with this delay, of what we do to prepare ourselves for the “ever-enlarging enough.”

In Evelyn Waugh’s autobiography, appropriately named for our purposes, *A Little Learning*, he included a chapter entitled, “A Brief History of My Religious Opinions,” a chapter that hints at just why “a little learning” in its classical statement is precisely “a dangerous thing.” Waugh began by citing a passage of 18 June 1921, from his own diary. He gravely wrote - he was all of eighteen at the time - that “in the last few weeks I have ceased to be a Christian. I have realized that for the last two terms at least I have been an atheist in all except the courage to admit it myself.”² When he wrote this self-confession, Waugh was in his last year at Lancing, an Anglican prep boarding school in the South of England. He went up Oxford the following year.

In spite of his newly-found school atheism, however - he had gone to Lancing as a rather pious young man - Waugh still enjoyed being a sacristan at the school chapel. He even had a sort of atheist scruple about the impropriety of it all, a scruple prompted by his friend Drieburg who told him frankly that an atheist had no business “handling the altar cloths.” So Waugh, with some atheist illogic, decided to consult the school chaplain about the matter. When Waugh arrived at his quarters, the chaplain and another master were just sitting down to have a smoke. With some embarrassment, he had to explain his strange perplexity to both chaplain and master. After soberly listening to his curious anguish - “adolescent doubts are very tedious to the mature,” Waugh admitted - the two masters “genially assured” him that “it was quite in order for an atheist to act as a sacristan.”

At the same time, Waugh had belonged to a school debating society called the “Dilettanti.” During his last two years at Lancing, he found himself “eager to dispute the intellectual foundations of Christianity.” The subjects of

these school debates, he recalled with some amusement, were such propositions as these: “Resolved: This House does not believe in the immortality of the soul”; This House believes the age of institutional religion is over; “This House cannot reconcile divine omniscience with human freewill”, and so forth.”²³ One wonders, on looking at this list, whether a school system that encourages such debates or one which ignores them is the more unhealthy one.

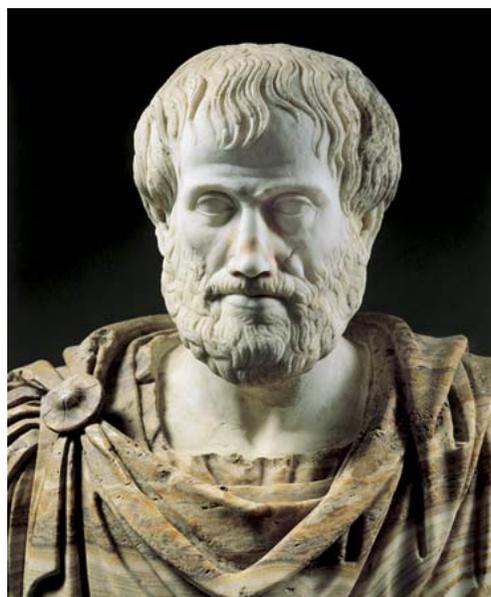
What is of interest to note about Waugh’s account of his youthful atheism and doubts, however, was the state of soul that resulted from them. He tells us: “I suffered no sense of loss in discarding the creed of my upbringing; still less of exhilaration. My diary is full of pagan gloom and the consideration of suicide.”²⁴ Gloom, boredom, and suicide ironically seem, more often than not in intellectual history, to be the results of losing the joy that Christianity maintains itself ultimately to be. Indeed, it was into a world of gloom, boredom, and suicide that Christianity was first born in the Roman Empire; hence we have the abiding of the importance of Roman stoicism, cynicism, and epicureanism as well as of the insufficiency of their sober virtues.

These classic questions, which it is the function of faith and intelligence to ponder even from the beginning of our intellectual and spiritual lives (even in school debating societies) are, to be sure, ones that can make an atheist out of a Christian, or, equally often, a Christian out of an atheist. This possibility leads us to suspect that our relation to God and to truth is not merely intellectual, however much it is indeed intellectual. The immortality of the soul, after all, was advocated by no one less than Plato, hardly a Christian, except perhaps “naturaliter,” as many of his admirers ancient and modern have held. Meantime, at least some institutional religion persists in all ages, in spite of all academic predictions or Gates of Hell prevailing to the contrary. Divine omniscience and freewill are questions an Aquinas, for instance, with perhaps a little more perception than the Dilettanti Debating Society in 1921, found non-contradictory and therefore theoretically quite compatible with each other. We could not even think of divine

omniscience without its including a freewill that was really free.

The famous “dicta” that “faith seeks understanding” and that “understanding seeks faith” are ideas that go back at least to St. Augustine and St. Anselm, if not to Plato himself. Aristotle, in a remarkably fertile phrase, had said that the human mind has a capacity to know or to “be” all things. *All that is*. Aristotle had noted that if man were the highest being, politics would be the highest science; but, he added, that man is not the highest being so that he stands to the highest being as a “contemplative,” that is, as someone who must receive or behold what is not his to make or create. This conclusion is ultimately the real source of human freedom.

Aquinas also had argued that since we can in some essential fashion prove that God exists but not what He is like, not what His inner life consists in, we nevertheless continue to seek to know about God in His fullness. However little we can know about this First Being, Aristotle told us at the end of *The Ethics*, it remains worth all our efforts even in comparison to the admittedly important things of this world. We are curious about what this conclusion about God’s existence means. We cannot really let it go and remain consistent with ourselves, with our desire to know what is. For it leads our minds to establish the fact that finite being, including our own, whose limits we self-reflectively are aware of, is not and cannot be the cause of itself, even though, as we read in the *Book of Genesis*, we might be tempted to make ourselves, not God, the cause of the distinction of good and evil in the world.



Aristotle

Eric Voegelin, in a most provocative lecture he gave in Montreal in 1980, to young university students, told them that they must be open to something beyond themselves because “we all experience our own existence as not existing out of itself but as coming from somewhere even if we don’t know where.”²⁵ We should, furthermore, be aware that such a vital question concerning our own being will in all probability not be formally asked in any university of our immediate acquaintance. This fact is no doubt at the origin of the intellectual mal-

aise and spiritual emptiness many of our friends and acquaintances find in themselves. Even though the pursuit of truth must in some sense depend on those who have been wise before us, and these not always the recognized “great” thinkers, it has almost become a private, not corporate, academic, or even religious enterprise for most of us.

Allan Bloom caused quite a scandal in recent years by suggesting that the unhappiest souls in our society are not those of the ghetto dwellers, or the dope addicts or peddlers, or even of the craftsmen, the businessman, the poet, or politician, if I might hint at the characters in *The Apology of Socrates*. Rather the unhappiest souls belong to those students in the twenty or thirty “best” universities, where they pay twenty-five thousand a year to attend and consequently assume they have entered onto the paths of worldly accomplishments and intellectual glory, only to be taught and too often themselves to believe that everything is quite relative and that there is no truth. The reason these particular souls are the “unhappiest” is the same reason Plato gave, namely, that the potential philosophers both encountered and chose a good that was less than what it is that could satisfy the being they were given. The real drama in each of our lives remains what Plato said it was: which good will we choose in a world where there really are differing goods and definite vices?

In a recent interview, Bloom was asked whether he could really fault the universities for this situation? He replied:

I do partly blame the universities. One of the reasons for students’ not reading seriously is their belief that they can’t learn important things from books. They believe books are just ideologies, mythologies or political tools of different parties. If the peaks of learning offered some shining goal in the distance, it would be very attractive to an awful lot of people - people with very diverse backgrounds. The golden thread of all education is in the first questions: How should I live? What’s the good life? What can I hope for? What must I do? What would be the terrible consequence if we knew the truth?⁶

Bloom did not specifically mention, though there is no reason to think he was hostile to it, the question of “whether God has communicated to men anything either to know or to do?” The very fact that we experience ourselves reflectively as receivers of our own limited exist-

ences requires that we at least ask the question of the source of our particular being; for we cannot, and still remain authentic to ourselves, close it off as if the answer were not the most significant truth we must know about ourselves.

E. F. Schumacher, in his wonderful book, *A Guide for the Perplexed*, wrote in a similar vein. In recounting his own university days at Oxford, he discovered there that he was in a similar situation to Moses Maimonides, who wrote the original book entitled “A Guide for the Perplexed.” For the pious Jew or Muslim or Christian of the Middle Ages, intellectual perplexity was caused by the sudden eruption of Plato, Aristotle, and the post-Aristotelians into his seemingly complete religious life and culture. How was it that Plato and Aristotle knew so much compared to Scripture? What was it that Scripture knew that Plato and Aristotle did not? Were at least some of the things found both in the philosophers and the prophets the same? How could this be possible? As Maimonides and Aquinas and Avicenna sorted it all out, they wanted to know what was the relation of the teachings and practices of revelation to the analyses of Plato and Aristotle who stood for them, as they still stand for us, as the best in human wisdom itself?

For Schumacher, however, the perplexity of the modern student arose from another source.

All through school and university I had been given maps of life and knowledge on which there was hardly a trace of many of the things that I most cared about and that seemed to me to be of the greatest possible importance to the conduct of my life. I remembered that for many years my perplexity had been complete; and no interpreter had come along to help me.⁷



He finally began to understand that the very nature of modern science, itself the heart of society and of the university, itself a product of western intellectual history, methodologically excluded the most important questions that concern any human being.

The heart and mind, consequently, will remain empty especially at the highest and best of academic institutions because such education simply will not deal, as it could and should, with what is most important to know and to do. Anyone who completes a modern academic degree thinking he has a full heart will not have any idea about what his own heart is about. As Schumacher realized, to find the truth we must look elsewhere. We must again look at the classics. We must again look at the mystics and the metaphysicians. John Senior wrote in this regard something that is very true which will yet seem so mysterious to most of us:

The greatest contribution to the restoration of order in all human society would be the founding in every city, town, and rural region, of communities of contemplative religious committed to the life of consecrated silence, so that silence would be present to our works and days ... to judge and measure all our noisy accomplishments.⁸

The contemplation of our own accomplishments reveals their grandeur but also their limits. We are a generation desperately in need of the freedom of limits.

Not too long ago, I received a letter from a friend who had just arrived at a teaching position on a university campus, in Virginia, in fact. Since a new professor is not easily recognized in such exalted status at least until classes begin, my friend could go about, as she put it, “incognito.” Shades of Waugh at Lancing in 1921, she heard even today, that “religion is the same as superstition.” But what seemed to be the most “amazing” theme was this, that “it is dangerous to have high moral standards because, if you do, then you will impose them on others (and this is dangerous and bad), so, therefore, you ought to have low standards.” However much we are all sinners according to our religious traditions, vice and mediocrity are in the academic air as democratic and intellectually respectable.

Needless to say, for anyone familiar with a C. S. Lewis, such a viewpoint is nothing but a central strand of popular modern social and philosophic theory carried to its logical conclusion on a famous campus in Virginia or anywhere else. The “cause” of corruption, in such a view, is the good. The only truth is that there can be no claim to truth, no claim, that is, that might be spoken to others with authority and with earnestness. Therefore, any good must be subjective. It is impossible to distinguish one good and another. All activities and all thoughts in

themselves are of equal weight even if they are contradictory to one another, even if they are dangerous. The low and the high are the same things. It makes no difference what we do just so long as what we do has no influence on any one else. We have all, in a famous phrase from Machiavelli, “lowered our sights” because the good is too good for any of us. The “modern project” in Leo Strauss’s phrase is complete. We allow nothing that has an origin outside of ourselves.

I mentioned C. S. Lewis in this context because however much we might be subject to such views, however much we run across them in books, in classes, in the media, or in our lives, we suspect that they cannot bear final examination. Lewis wrote that there are two points to keep in mind:

First, that human beings, all over the earth, have this curious idea that they ought to behave in a certain way, and cannot really get rid of it. Secondly, that they do not in fact behave in that way. They know the Law of Nature; they break it. These two facts are the foundation of all clear thinking about ourselves and the universe we live in.⁹

Why does understanding seek faith? Precisely to explain why we try to justify these lowered sights, to think clearly about these things we cannot really get rid of if we reflect on ourselves. Why does faith seek understanding? Because it must know these facts, that there is a law, that we break it.

In her penetrating essay, “Creed or Chaos,” which she wrote in 1949, Dorothy Sayers spoke of running into a young and intelligent priest. The priest told her that one of the most hopeful signs in the world was the growing pessimism with which many of us viewed human nature. In these days in which even the President has decided that we must actually war against drug czars, not Communist ones, that we may be destroyed by drugs before we are overcome by ideology, these words seem even more pertinent. “There is a great deal of truth in what (the priest) says,” Dorothy Sayers reflected.

The people who are most discouraged and made despondent by the barbarity and stupidity of human behavior at this time are those who think highly of homo sapiens as a product of evolution, and who still cling to an optimistic belief in the civilizing influence of progress and enlightenment. To them, the appalling outbursts of bes-

tial ferocity in the totalitarian states, and the obstinate selfishness and stupid greed of capitalist society, are not merely shocking and alarming. For them, these things are the utter negation of everything in which they have believed. It is as though the bottom had dropped out of their universe. The whole thing looks like a denial of all reason, and they feel as if the whole world had gone mad together.¹⁰

If it is best that we lower our sights lest we imply that there really is something objectively good for ourselves and for others; if finally the world we thought we wanted turns out to be a world that somehow seems to have gone “mad,” then we must begin to suspect the theories on which this world is built.

Why does understanding seek faith? It is because understanding does not succeed in explaining what it sets out to understand. Things actually happen and take place that do not explain themselves. There seems to be a constant diversity between the theories of modernity, which are based upon the autonomy of the human intellect that admits no knowledge but what proceeds from human will, and the kinds of things that actually happen to which our minds as original sources ought to be open. In other words, the troubled searching but never finding, which is characteristic of modern thought, the fear of finding out that something indeed arises outside of ourselves that we ought to do and hold, something that would require our change of hearts, leave their own empirical records in the lives and thoughts of our kind.

As this record becomes more and more negative, we begin to realize that the conditions of society and of soul are more accurately described by, say, Paul’s *Epistle to the Romans*, or Augustine’s *City of God*, or Plato’s *Laws*, than by what we are taught in the best universities, where we do little study of Paul or Augustine or even Plato because they find in things a right order. We are not academically allowed to suspect that these sources might indeed contain answers to our real problems. And if they do, we must wonder how is it that such a source can know more about ourselves than we, apparently the best of our kind, know about ourselves?

Why does faith seek intelligence? Lucy and Charlie Brown are talking over the stone fence. Charlie is clearly pretty bothered and down-in-the-mouth. Lucy with some uncharacteristic sympathy asks him, “Discouraged again, eh, Charlie Brown?” Charlie brightens up a bit at this show of interest as both he and Lucy gaze distantly over the fence. She continues, “You know what your trouble is? The whole trouble with you is that you’re you!” Immediately, Charlie turns about, somewhat annoyed, to face Lucy, “Well, what in the world can I do about that?” Finally, he simply stares at her when Lucy responds coolly, “I don’t pretend to be able to give advice.... I merely point out the trouble.”¹¹

The trouble, in other words, lies somehow not in our institutions, even though they can be better or worse as Aristotle understood, nor in the structure of the world, nor in the skies. The trouble lies in ourselves, in our freedom. No one tells us this except orthodox religion and the philosophy developed in an effort to explain it. In Sigrid Undset’s biography of St. Catherine of Siena, we read: “Catherine’s opinion was that politics are never anything but the product of a person’s religious life.”¹² The condition of our souls is anterior to the condition of our polities.

G. K. Chesterton once noticed an invitation in one of the London papers inviting general response to the set question: “What’s wrong with the world?” Chesterton immediately sat down and wrote a letter to the Editor in which he replied quite briefly: “Dear Sir: What’s wrong with the world? I am. Signed, G. K. Chesterton.” One

of the main reasons faith seeks understanding is because from faith we learn that we are somehow fallen, that there is some disorder in our lives which we experience and need to account for but for which we have no apparent explanation. That there is something wrong is not merely a proposition of revelation. Aristotle himself often noted that

man left to himself was the worst of the animals. No one gives a more graphic description of human corruption than a Plato. These classic philosophers knew that we were fallen, but they did not know of The Fall.

So faith seeks understanding. We have all encountered the young man or young woman, even the old



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professor, who informs us that he does not believe in God because of well, how could there be a God with all the poverty and pain and evil in the world? If we know of the Book of Job, of course, we are already prepared somewhat for the fact that what God ultimately requires of us is not the elimination of poverty or pain but obedience to his Will. Even those who are poor, even those who suffer, even those who are humiliated can reach that purpose for which each was primarily created. Some indeed think they can do so easier than those who are rich, intelligent, and well-made. The harlots and publicans evidently go first into the kingdom of God, a hard saying for us all. But what about it? Could we not have had a better universe, one in which pain and evil were eliminated? Isn't God responsible for the mess we are in? Of course, we know that other worlds are quite possible. We know about *Perelandra* and the "Silent Planet." The question that more directly concerns us, however, is whether we ourselves are possible in other worlds? And if not, do we have any reason for rejoicing in this one?

After all, some strange congruities are before us. In spite of the fact that there is so much disorder in ourselves and in the world against which the enlightened mind rebels as if it were not its own fault or concern, some things do seem to belong together. If it is a mystery about why there is pain or evil, a much more subtle mystery persists over the question of why there is joy than over why there is pain and evil.

Hilaire Belloc once wrote a perfectly wonderful novel, or perhaps an allegory of himself, called *The Four Men*, about Sussex, the heart of England, of what happened on a walk on Halloween, and All Hallows' Day, and All Souls' Day in 1902. On All Saints' Day, All Hallows' Day, the Four Men found an old inn "brilliantly lighted," with small square panes and red curtains. They entered the inn, into a "pleasant bar" which opened out into a large room where about fifteen or twenty men were assembled to drink and sing.

Belloc continued:

Their meal was long done, but we ordered ours, which was of such excellence in the way of eggs and bacon as we had none of us until that moment thought possible upon this side of the grave. The cheese also, of which I have spoken, was put before us, and the new cottage loaves, so that this feast, unlike any other feast that yet was since the beginning of the world, exactly answered to all

that the heart had expected of it, and we were contented and were filled.¹³

How is it, we wonder, that we are so made that the things that content us are actually found in this world? How are we to understand this? Can it be an accident? Did the eggs and the bacon and the cheese and the inn and the appetite all just happen? Or are we indeed made for these things and are they made for us, even when, like the cheeses, we make them ourselves?

Faith seeks understanding because we are "fit to receive and to have" such things, as George MacDonald implied. Yet, we must make ourselves ready to receive them. How is it that we are content and filled in anything? Must this completion be seen in the light of our experience that we did not cause ourselves either to be or to be human beings? We could never have guessed that things actually fit together. C. S. Lewis, in his usual way, put it well:

Reality, in fact, is always something you couldn't have guessed. That's one of the reasons I believe Christianity. It's a religion you couldn't have guessed.... What is the problem? A universe that contains much that is obviously bad and apparently meaningless, but containing creatures like ourselves who know that it is bad and meaningless. There are only two views that face all the facts. One is the Christian view that this is a good world that has gone wrong, but still retains the memory of what it ought to have been. The other is the view called Dualism. Dualism means the belief that there are two equal and independent powers at the back of everything, one of them good and the other bad, and that this universe is a battlefield in which they fight out an endless war.¹⁴

This universe we could not have guessed, yet it exists. Faith teaches which of these understandings is the correct one, either the good world in which something, something we find in ourselves, has gone wrong, or the endless war of the worlds.

But if something has gone wrong, some way to make it right is to be sought. Yet if there is a way to correct what is wrong, will we recognize it? And will it be the way we expected? Will we be among those who did not believe that any good could come out of Nazareth, because well, where is this Nazareth anyhow? This Incarnation is not the way to repair a world, this baptism, this

greater love than this, this body and blood. These ways are, as Paul said of the philosophic Greeks, intellectual scandals. We need something practical, some plan. Yet we still find a Karol Wojtyla calmly telling a group of evidently hesitant bishops, in this case American ones:

We are the guardians of something given, and given to the Church universal, something which is not the result of reflection, however competent, on cultural and social questions of the day, and is not merely the best path among many, but the one and only path to salvation.¹⁵

At the same time, present in the world is a promise of personal salvation and a way to it that does not depend on anything arising from society, politics, or philosophy.

Samuel Johnson, in his famous trip to the Hebrides in 1774, told of stopping in October at the Island of Ulva, near which was a small adjacent island called Staffa, about which a famous book had been recently written, but concerning which to me no one on the island seemed to know anything. Johnson continued:

When the islanders were reproached for their ignorance, or insensitivity of the wonders of Staffa, they had not much to reply. They had indeed considered it little, because they had always seen it; and none but philosophers, nor they always, are struck with wonder, otherwise than by novelty.¹⁶

That we initially are struck by wonder, not need or want, was for Aristotle the foundation of all thought pursued for its own sake. But that we be struck even beyond the ordinary wonder, this was the classic purpose of miracles, of our being called specially to attend to certain events that we might otherwise not notice because, like the islanders on Ulva, we had always seen them.

Why does faith seek understanding? In modern cosmological speculation a fear has been prevalent that we would not find other intelligent life in the universe. We have now explored the last of the Planets of our own solar system. We can see pretty clearly that in this system we are quite alone. Neither radio astronomy nor space exploration has given us any indication that there is anything but us. To be sure, we read statistics showing that there are so many billions of stars in the universe that surely there must be, by the law of averages, other beings like unto ourselves. Other studies, however, hint that the

specificity required that human life exist in the universe is so unlikely and rare that it begins to look like the formation of man was the very purpose of the universe.¹⁷ The discovery of only ourselves is anything but exhilarating for many, for if we are meant to be in some sense, then we have a purpose that is not entirely a product of our own will or intellect.

No doubt mankind has some mission toward the physical universe. Even on earth, however, there begin to be Hegelian type philosophers who now despair because evidently western liberalism has won the great battles and proved the ideologies designed to reorganize the world to be merely the tyrannies they are. Some find solace in the wars of religion that still rage on the planet, the Middle East, perhaps, because there at least something ultimate still seems at stake. But in essence intellectuals with a this-worldly perspective begin to speak a new kind of despair. *The Wall Street Journal* took pains to note the theories of Francis Fukuyama who has been attracting attention with this “end of history,” thesis, so reminiscent of Nietzsche. Fukuyama “thinks that democratic liberalism has triumphed (a good thing), that ideologies are disappearing (also good, he feels), but that the new order may bring on ‘centuries of boredom.’”¹⁸

This thesis of boredom is, after all, not unlike the “gloom” that Waugh on losing his faith experienced as a young man in England after World War I. And indeed it probably stems from the same source. Faith seeks understanding. Let us suppose it is true, for the sake of argument, that the ideologies are dead. Voegelin had already stressed this fact:

We have, since the mid- and late nineteenth century, since Comte, Marx, John Stuart Mill, Bakunin (and so on), no new ideologist. All ideologies belong, in their origin, before that period; there are no new ideologies in the twentieth century.¹⁹

If the twentieth century has exhausted the ideologies allowing them to work themselves out in practice so that we can see their results, it does not follow that liberalism itself is not one of these ideologies, one of the successful ones. The fact, if it is a fact, that it has won, does not mean that it is not itself a man-made theoretical construct that is itself reductionist, itself cutting man off from the true ends and issues for which he is made.

In the revelational tradition, the purpose of the world is not some sort of perfect world order, nor is it

a kind of unlimited freedom to do whatever we wish, though we may seek both. Rather the world is a place of trial, a vale of tears, if you will. This does not deny that there may indeed be some kind of inner-worldly mission for mankind. But the drama of history and individual being relates directly to the ground of being, to God.

The world exists for something other than itself. It exists in order that we might have time and space in which to choose what it is we are about. The drama of existence remains in the human heart; and the configurations of the world, its political and social orders, are merely, as Plato and Aristotle saw, reflections of these choices.

If faith seeks intelligence, as it does, it is to understand how the world might be seen as an arena for the action of God and the actions of men such that the very purpose of the world is achieved in the final actions of men with regard to that insufficiency that defines their very being. St. Thomas asked the question of whether the world was created in justice or mercy. He answered that it was created in mercy because it did not presuppose anything that God “had” to do. The order of the world, its diversities, inequalities, its vastness of time and space, are themselves good. We do not suffer any injustice in our being what we are. If our existence as such is not “unjust,” then it follows that it must come about from a source beyond justice. What is beyond justice is gift and generosity and love. If this is the source of our being, if this is what faith teaches intelligence, then we can begin to understand ourselves in a more lightsome way.

Josef Pieper, in conclusion, remarked that “Christian doctrine is primarily concerned with the doctrine of salvation, not with interpreting reality or human existence. But it implies as well certain fundamental teachings on specific philosophic matters - the world and existence as such.”²⁰ Faith seeks intelligence because it knows that all things do fit together, that nothing will be “true” and contradict the particular path of our salvation that is founded in faith. It is not just any way, but “the Way,” as the early Christians said of themselves.

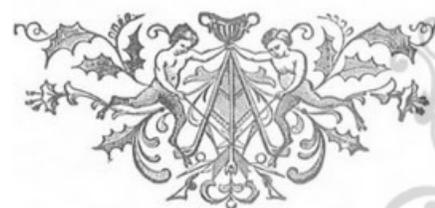
When George MacDonald remarked “that there is no part of our nature that shall not be satisfied,” he intended to include our intelligence. St. Thomas insisted, therefore, that the primary locus and act of precisely the beatific vision, of our final receiving of God as our end, was not found in our will by which we loved God but in

our intellect in which we knew Him as He is, face to face, to use Paul’s striking phrase.

We should, like the young Waugh, I think, be “eager to dispute the intellectual foundations of Christianity.” If we dispute with that openness to all truth and to all sources which Christianity insists to be required for its intellectual integrity, not reducing our attention by method or prejudice or bad will or corrupt lives, we will discover, much to our astonishment, that there are indeed intellectual foundations to this faith. We will not, for the most part, find these in the universities or in the culture except incidentally, in obscure books and in holy lives, in “consecrated silence,” in our concern about the gloom and boredom into which the culture by its own confession seems to be experiencing.

We will continue to be, like E. F. Schumacher, perplexed that the ultimate questions are never even mentioned or if mentioned, never given a fair hearing. Yet, there is Belloc, the suspicion that there are feasts unlike any other feasts since the beginning of the world that are exactly answers to what our heart might expect. There are strange incongruities that we will encounter that no system will explain to us. Is it, to recall Lewis’ alternative, a good world that has gone wrong or an eternal battlefield in which endless wars are fought in our fields or in our hearts?

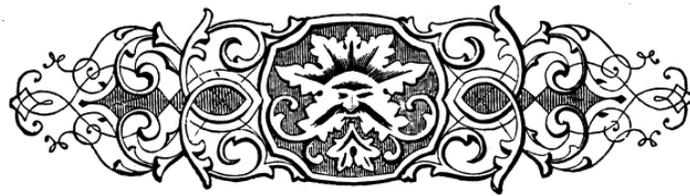
When we think of these things are we, unlike the islanders of Staffa whom Johnson encountered, struck with the novelty of it all, struck enough to wonder as philosophers should about that “something that is not the product of human reflection,” something not just the best path but the only path? Let us indeed like Waugh give a “brief history of our own religious opinions” to see what it is we are incited to think because of our faith. We can indeed remain atheists even in the sacristy. Belief is both a gift and a choice. But we all have the experience that our own existence “does not exist out of itself.” We should not be either overly surprised or overly sad about the sad hearts in the best schools. Both the Greeks like Aeschylus and just men of the Old Testament like Job knew that man learns by suffering.



As Lucy told Charlie Brown, “the whole trouble is that you’re you.” Or to recall Chesterton’s answer to the question, “What’s wrong with the world?” - “I am.” This is the location of what is wrong and of what is the whole trouble. This is why Christianity is first a doctrine of salvation, because this is what we know about ourselves, about our finiteness and about our actions. Yet, this is a good world in which something has gone wrong, often something to which we ourselves have contributed. The world was created in mercy, not justice.

There are indeed good things God must delay in giving us because of what we are, beings who know that they did not cause themselves to be. Yet, “there is no part

of our nature that shall not be satisfied - and that not by lessening it, but by enlarging it. ...” If this is what faith teaches us, as it does, even if we be in the best universities in our time, or at Lancing in Waugh’s time, or in Sussex on All Hallows’ Day with Belloc, or in Siena with St. Catherine, or at Paris with St. Thomas, or at Corinth with Paul, we need to know what the world is like in which both faith and intelligence can and do exist. This is why understanding ultimately arrives at something more it wants to hear because of what it has discovered about itself and the world. This is why faith seeks understanding, not merely itself.



NOTES

- 1 George MacDonald, “Light” in *Christ in Creation*, edited by Rolland Heim (Wheaton, IL: Harold Shaw Publisher, 1986), p. 41. See *George MacDonald: An Anthology*, edited by C. S. Lewis (New York; Macmillan, 1978).
- 2 Evelyn Waugh, *A Little Learning* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1964), p. 141.
- 3 Ibid., p. 143.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 *Conversations with Eric Voegelin*, edited by R. Eric O’Connor (Montreal: Thomas More Institute Papers, 1980), p. 9.
- 6 “A Most Uncommon Scold,” *Interview with Allan Bloom*, *Time*, October 17, 1988, p. 74.
- 7 E. F. Schumacher, *A Guide for the Perplexed* (New York: Harper Colophon, 1977), p. 1.
- 8 John Senior, *The Restoration of Christian Culture* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1983), p. 198.
- 9 C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (London: Collins, 1961), p. 19.
- 10 Dorothy L. Sayers, “Creed or Chaos?” in *The Whimsical Christian* (New York: Macmillan, 1978), pp. 44-45.
- 11 Robert L. Short, *The Gospel According to Peanuts* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1965), p. 38.
- 12 Sigrid Undset, *Catherine of Siena*, translated by Kate Austin-Lund (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1954), p. 262.
- 13 Hilaire Belloc, *The Four Men* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 147.
- 14 C.S. Lewis, *The Case for Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1943), pp. 36-37.
- 15 John Paul II, “I Confirm You to Truth,” *Address to Joint Assembly of the U. S. Archbishops and the Department Heads of the Roman Curia*, March 11, 1989, *The Pope Speaks*, 34 (September/October, 1989), pp. 254-55.
- 16 *Johnson’s Journey to the Western Islands*, edited by Allan Wendt (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), p. 106.
- 17 Stanley L. Jaki, “The Universe and the University,” *Chance or Reality* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1986), pp. 191-93.
- 18 Editorial, “About Neptune,” *The Wall Street Journal*, August 29, 1989.
- 19 Voegelin, *ibid.*, p. 16.
- 20 Josef Pieper, “Philosophy out of a Christian Existence,” *Josef Pieper-An Anthology* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), p. 165.