

## THE REASONABLENESS OF A SPECIAL DIVINE REVELATION.

THE Christian apologists who lived and wrought in the days of English and American Deism laid special stress on three important propositions: (1) The *probability* of a special divine revelation; (2) The *possibility* of such a revelation; (3) The *need* of such a revelation. We are fully persuaded that the arguments then adduced to uphold these principles are not out-moded to-day, but are as valid and cogent as ever. Those apologists (Butler, Paley, Whateley, Watson, Horne, Mark Hopkins, and others just as valiant) did yoman service in upholding true Christianity, and were especially raised up of God to prevent the Christian system of truth and salvation from perishing in the earth. The defender of Christianity, as well as the preacher of the gospel, has a divine vocation.

### I

#### THE PRIMARY QUESTION

However, in these days of materialistic philosophy and out-and-out atheism, perhaps some one will raise the primary question as to whether there is a God or not. For answer to this question we would refer the atheist and agnostic to the works of the many profound scholars who have written treatises on theism. Among them we may mention the following: Flint, Janet, Stirling, Diman, Lindsay, Balfour, Ward, Orr, Harris, Fisher, Valentine, Pringle-Pattison and Micou. It is hard to realise how any thinking person who honestly canvasses the various theistic arguments—namely, the general, teleological, cosmological, ontological and moral—as they are presented by the authors just named, can still remain an atheist.

It is not our purpose, however, to develop all these arguments here. We shall take space to present only one line of argumentation which seems to us to lead rationally to the conclusion that there must be a personal, all-wise and all-powerful Being who has created and who maintains the universe.

This argument stands as follows: There is something existent now; therefore there must always have been something existent. If there ever was a time when there was nothing, nothing could ever have been—nothing could ever have come into existence. *Ex nihilo nihil fit*. So there must be something

that is eternal and uncreated. But that which has existed from eternity must be self-existent, infinite and absolute. That which has always existed must be sufficient in itself, and can be dependent on nothing else than itself.

But such a predication cannot rightly be made of matter; for matter is made up of finite parts; therefore the whole *ensemble* of material substance, however immense, must be finite; therefore material substance cannot be the eternal something that must be infinite—that is, without limitation. You could never add enough finities together to equal infinity.

Moreover, the various parts of matter are all dependent entities, never independent; every fragment is dependent on something else; therefore the material cosmos as whole must be dependent; hence it cannot be the eternal, independent, self-existent entity that must be the basis of all finite and dependent entities. So the universe and all things finite must have been created, because, since they are finite and dependent, they must have had a beginning. But if the universe was created, there must have been a Creator.

Now, reasoning empirically and inductively, what kind of a being must the eternal Creator have been in order to be adequate to the tremendous task of bringing this vast universe into existence *ex nihilo*? Surely He must have been all-wise. To create such a dimensional universe, to bring it into being and at the same time to provide for every possible contingency in its ongoing, would require omniscience, including prescience—foreknowledge—of the choices of all free beings who exist in the cosmos. The Creator of the universe must also be omnipotent, or He could not have brought it into existence, and could not continue to uphold it without exhaustion.

It is also just as evident that the eternal Being must be a person, because there are persons now in the universe—at least, upon this mundane sphere; and surely only a personal Being could have brought personal beings into existence. Every effect and event must have an adequate cause. The cause must always be equal to the effect, although it may be greater. The only thinkable adequate cause of the existence of persons is a personal Being who gave them their self-conscious life. Think of it for a moment: Could insensate material substance ever have brought forth self-conscious personalities? Can you get something out of nothing? Could the unconscious ever evolve

into the conscious by means of resident forces? Could the non-sentient ever evolve into the sentient? Could the non-moral ever evolve into the moral? Could the non-spiritual ever evolve into the spiritual?

Furthermore, man has a conception of an infinite personal God. If he had not such a conception, he could not use the terms to describe Him. Suppose there is nothing in the universe but matter: how could mere matter ever have created the conception of God in the human mind? There must be an adequate cause wherever there is an effect. Therefore, the very fact that men have the idea of God connotes that He must have an objective existence. Whence could come the idea of God save from God?

Now, is it not much more satisfying to reason to believe that this vast and complex universe, with its precious freight of sentient human personalities, has been created and is being upheld and governed by a supreme personal Intelligence and Power than to think that it came into existence somehow or other, nobody knows how and nobody knows why? The material universe is a vast machine; it is composed of insensate, unconscious, non-personal material substance. Is it possible that such a vast machine could run on blindly without meeting with universal cataclysm? Remember, too, that it has been running for many millenniums, and yet it remains a universe (*unus*, one, and *verto*, to turn); it is a cosmos, not a chaos. The human family has dwelt on one of its planets with comparative safety for many centuries, while that planet has been revolving on its invisible axis at the rate of a thousand miles an hour at the equator and swinging with many times that velocity in its annual circuit around the sun. Could a mere unguided machine accomplish such exploits? How long would an atheist be willing to ride in an automobile with no intelligent driver at the wheel to guide its course? Yet an automobile is a tiny piece of mechanism compared with the vast mechanism of the material universe. Could any of us live with a feeling of security if we realised that the world were hurtling through space with no competent Intelligence and Power to uphold it and direct it in its course?

So we see that it is more rational to believe that there is a God than to believe the reverse. As reasonable persons, we ought to accept the view which is the more rational, and then see whether there is not some clear way by which we may attain positive inner assurance that God exists and is a God of competency, grace, truth and love.

## II

## A SPECIAL REVELATION REASONABLE

The primary question of the divine existence having been settled, or at least shown to be reasonable, it is also reasonable to believe that, if need be, He would give to the world of humanity a special revelation of Himself, of His will and His chief designs. Our argument hinges largely on the qualifying phrase, "if need be." Has not the history of the world proven that men have need of a special divine revelation? Plato thought so. He expressed the hope that some time such a revelation would be given to mankind. He felt that there were too many unsolved problems for the universe to be a rational one, if the human family were left to grope in darkness without a clarifying light from some adequate source.

A few centuries ago, the Deists tried to make the world believe that what they called "The Religion of Nature" was sufficient for the enlightenment and guidance of mankind. What has been the sequel—the legitimate fruitage—of that philosophy? The atheism of to-day. For infidelity to-day is not the Deism of Sir Francis Newport and Thomas Paine and even of Voltaire (who was not an atheist, as is often supposed, but a Deist). No; the successors of the old Deists are mostly atheists, or at least agnostics, to-day. Men cannot long retain the philosophy of Deism; they will soon descend inevitably into believing in no God at all rather than keep faith in a God who created the universe and then forsook it, and went off on a long vacation, leaving His children to grope hither and yonder in the dim, uncertain light of nature and reason.

The adherents of the ethnic religions have had nature and reason through the ages to guide them: what has been the outcome? Have they been able to solve the fundamental problems of the inquiring soul? Note the poor account that Hinduism and Buddhism give of the problems of origin, purpose and destiny. In the former the ultimate sequel of all the laborious and sorrowful transmigrations is re-absorption into the unconscious All, with the soul's personal identity cancelled. In Buddhism the final outcome is a pale, negative nirvana, or entire extinction of being in parinibbana. Confucianism is still more defective regarding the doctrine of human destiny, having practically no eschatology. Yes; the ethnic religions

certainly prove the acute need of a special divine revelation such as we have in the Bible.

The case is no better when we come to examine and weigh the guesses of human science and philosophy. What sure word can they give us regarding the origin of matter, life, sentiency and personality? What can our boasted natural science tell us about the purpose of human life? In his recent book, *Concerning Man's Origin* (1928), Sir Arthur Keith, who is a Rationalist, calls the question, "Why are we here?" "that great riddle," and expresses a doubt whether a solution will ever be possible (see his Foreword, p. x). To anticipate some things which we shall discuss further on, we may say that the question, "Why are we here?" is *A.B.C.* to the boys and girls of our Christian homes and Sunday Schools who are instructed in the teaching of the Bible. Natural science can throw little light on the problem of the destiny of the individual soul and of the race of mankind. Nor are philosophical conjectures any more satisfying to the reason or the emotions.

Thus, when the question is regarded from every viewpoint, the real need of more and clearer light from heaven on the problems of human life is evident. Now, this being so, would not a good, wise and just God vouchsafe to mankind a special disclosure on at least the basic problems of human inquiry? Since there is and must be a God, as we have seen, to account adequately for the universe, it is reasonable to believe that He would not hide Himself behind a dense cloud, but would make known to His rational creatures the purpose of their existence. The fact is, it would be unreasonable to believe that He never would do so. It is not likely that the Creator of the universe would be less kind and considerate than a limited human parent would be. It seems to us that our Lord reasoned fundamentally when He uttered the well-known saying: "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him?" (Matt. vii. 11).

The fact is, when we probe to the heart of our proposition, the wonder is not that God has given a special revelation of Himself such as we find in the Holy Scriptures, but that He has not disclosed His will and purpose still more clearly, fully and universally. Had He never made any self-disclosure, life's whole problem would be plunged into Cimmerian darkness. Our

despairing cry of "Why? Why?" would be mocked by only an echo of the same despairing cry.

However, our troubled question, Why God has not revealed Himself more fully and generally to the human family? is not left entirely in the darkness of night; for, since we know that there is a God, we know that He must be good and wise, or He never could have created this marvellous universe; therefore we can trust Him where we do not clearly understand His ways. The following stanzas from William Cowper find a response in the puzzled yet trusting Christian soul:

God moves in a mysterious way  
His wonders to perform;  
He plants His footsteps in the sea,  
And rides upon the storm.

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,  
But trust Him for His grace;  
Behind a frowning providence  
He hides a smiling face.

While God has revealed Himself to some extent in the natural world and in the human conscience, yet it is evident that He has not seen fit to manifest Himself with sufficient clearness in those ways. That being so, it is reasonable to believe that He would make a further revelation of Himself in a more direct way. For example, nature does not explain the sin-problem for us, nor tell us how we may have our sins forgiven, nor how we may be delivered from their thralldom and cleansed from their defilement. You can find no plan of redemption in nature. Nor has human wisdom, left to itself, ever been able to furnish a solution of these problems. The simple fact is, human speculation stands dumb before the great problem, "What shall I do to be saved?" Is it possible that God has left us in total darkness regarding the most crucial and poignant question that the earnest soul can frame?

Why has God not made a sufficient disclosure of Himself and His purposes in nature and the human conscience? That is a legitimate question to ask. One answer may be that a variety of methods of self-disclosure is better than just one method. Another answer may be that a special, direct and personal manifestation brings men into more intimate fellowship with God than a mere general revelation in the natural world would be. God desires that His people shall have the spiritual mind, because

He Himself is a spiritual Being, and that objective can be achieved better by a direct spiritual experience through the Holy Spirit and the Word of God than in any other way. God does not want us to worship nature nor our own reason, because that surely would not be best for us; therefore He has provided a method of revelation that leads us to worship the highest and holiest Being—a true worship that lifts us into the highest and holiest realm and experience.

### III

#### GOD'S SPECIAL DISCLOSURE IN THE BIBLE

Having seen the reasonableness of the proposition that God would give to mankind a special revelation, we naturally ask where such a revelation may be found, if it has been given. In reply we would say, we are convinced that a right reasoning process will lead us to find it in the Bible. Where else do we find "a lamp for our feet and light for our path"? Let us see whether this Holy Book does not shed a satisfying radiance on the most poignant problems of human interrogation.

There are at least three crucial problems that ought to be solved for us here and now; nor should their solution be postponed. They may be put in alliterative form as follows: Whence? Why? Whither? Let us attend to these problems.

Whence came the universe? Whence came life? Whence came man? Whence came sin? Whence came salvation? Ought not these problems to be cleared up for us in the present life? Can we live happily, strongly, steadfastly and worthily if they are left in obscurity? On the other hand, if they are solved for us in a rational way, how meaningful and ennobled human life becomes!

As to the problem of the origin of the universe, the Bible gives the most reasonable and satisfying solution, and does this in its very first: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Can any one conceive of a better origin for this universe of which we are a part? If a personal, all-wise and all-powerful God (such a God as the Bible portrays) created it, then He can uphold it, exercise sovereignty over it, guide it to its predetermined and most glorious destiny; then, too, He must have created it for a wise and worth-while purpose. Thus the Bible gives us the best answer to the problem of the *Whence* of the universe. It is most reasonable to believe, therefore, that

the Bible imparts God's special revelation on this basic problem of human enquiry.

As far as regards the origin of life, the physical scientists are on the anxious seat. Spontaneous generation has never been proved, and is, indeed, absurd. The law of biogenesis holds the field among the most competent and thoroughgoing biologists of our day. *Omne vivum ex vivo* is quoted approvingly by Vernon Kellogg, and is argued by him at considerable length. Our own beloved American scientist, Professor Austin H. Clark, of the United States National Museum, has been insisting over and over again that life can come only from antecedent life. However, the basic question is, Whence came the first living cells? Let us turn to the Bible and find the only reasonable and adequate response to our enquiry. The God portrayed in the Bible is called "the *living* God"; therefore, if He created the first germ-plasms, the law of biogenesis, that "all life comes from antecedent life," is most wonderfully upheld. The life that is eternal and infinite must be the primal source of all finite and temporal life. Moreover, the all-wise and all-powerful God, who created every electron and atom of the primordial material of the universe, could very easily have created each specific germ-plasm, so that each genus of plants and animals could reproduce "after its kind," just as is said again and again in Genesis i, thereby making the natural realm one of order and stability, and not a welter of things that would not stay in their divinely appointed spheres and perform their specific functions in the orderly scheme of nature.

As to the origin of man, nothing could be more reasonable and uplifting than the statement in Genesis i. 27: "And God created man in His own image; in the image of God created He him: male and female created He them." This verse is endorsed by our Lord Himself (Matt. xix. 4, 8; Mark x. 6). And why is the Biblical doctrine most reasonable? Because if man had so high and holy an origin, he must have been created for a high and holy purpose and destiny. Besides, if God created man in His own similitude, making him a sentient and self-conscious personality, then man must be infinitely precious in the sight of his Creator.

The best explication of the origin and entrance of sin into this world is given in the third chapter of Genesis. Summed up in brief form, sin originated through the wrong choice of a free



moral agent. There is no other thinkable way by which sin could have started and have been sin in the sense of guilt. But, mysterious as this problem is in some respects, the Bible sheds upon it a celestial effulgence; for, according to the Bible, God did not leave our first parents in the lurch when they fell into sin and trouble, but came to them at once; and, while He properly rebuked and punished them, He immediately proclaimed to them the proto-gospel, which says that the "seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head." Then, through the whole Old Testament revelation, we have the preparation for redemption by promise, prophecy and symbol, until at length, "in the fullness of time, God sent His Son into the world, born of a woman, born under the law, that He might redeem them that are under the law and give us the adoption of sons."

We are wondering whether anything could be more beautiful, more reasonable, more satisfying and glorious than that? Who could want anything better? Thus the Bible gives the best solution of the problem of origins. It tells us clearly of the origin of the universe, the origin of life and species, the origin of man, the origin of sin, and the origin and method of redemption through the incarnation and atoning sacrifice of the only begotten Son of God. All these problems are solved in the Bible, and only in the Bible. Therefore it is reasonable to believe that the Bible records God's special revelation to the race of mankind.

Then there is the poignant problem of *Why?* Why are we here? The speculative scientist and philosopher, as we have seen, regard this problem as "that great riddle." But to the believer in the Bible, it is really a primer question. Summing up the whole Biblical teaching in a brief sentence, he would say, "We are here to love, trust and serve God, to do good to our fellow-men, and all the time to prepare for something better in the life to come." We put it up pointedly to thinking and reasoning people whether such a purpose of human existence does not make life worth living by giving it a solid and rational basis. If the Bible is not true, then we want to ask the sceptic what *his* answer is to the question, "Why are we here?"

But the last crucial question we shall ask is *Whither?* Yes, whither are we bound? Life here is short, and even at its best it is not very satisfactory. At all events, for all of us alike it is a mixture of happiness and sorrow, good and evil. Perhaps all of us are willing to say, "We would not live always" in this

world of mingled joy and grief. "It is given unto men once to die." What *then*? Can human science and philosophy give us a sure word regarding the future? We fear not.

But on the problem of destiny the Bible is also "a lamp unto our feet and light unto our pathway." According to its holy teaching, "it is not all of life to live, nor all of death to die." For "Christ hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel." Our Lord throws wide ajar the gateway of a blessed and glorious futurity for every believer in His redeeming love and grace; for He says: "Let not your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's home are many abiding-places; if it were not so, I would have told you." Read all the rest of the radiant promise. Says the apostle: "For we know that, if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."

But there is no need to quote more passages from Holy Writ. To the vision of Christian faith there are no enclosing horizons. The gates of pearl stand wide open on the four sides of the heavenly Jerusalem. And there is still more awaiting us by and by, for there shall be "new heavens and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness." There is also a happy time coming when all the unsolved enigmas of the present life will be solved; for, according to the marvellous old Book, "now we see through a glass darkly; then we shall see face to face. Now we know only in part; then we shall know even also as we are known."

Now, our conclusion is this: All these glorious truths could have been made known only by a special divine revelation; therefore it is reasonable to believe that God made them known in that way; and since we find them in the Bible, and there only, it is reasonable to believe that the Bible is a true record of God's special revelation to the children of men. Let us believe and accept what is most reasonable; then let us go to Christ in humble penitence and docility and receive from Him the assurance by the Holy Spirit that He is "the way, the truth and the life." There is no need to grope and stumble in the dark. Here is the assurance from One who knows the truth from eternity: "If ye abide in my Word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

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