

PITY THE POOR ATHEIST

Fifteen centuries ago, as he awaited his execution, the Roman Consul, Boethius, remarked the ubiquity and the majesty of order in the world, the concord governing it in every element—

When Spring brings in her heat to warm the cold
The new year's flowers' sweet breath succeeds the old:
Summer's torrid days will dry and brown
But Autumn brings her fruit with trees bowed down.
Then Winter will produce the falling rain
That brings to birth and nourishes again
All things on earth that breathe the breath of life...¹

His work, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, serves as a reminder of the fundamental rift between the modern world and its patrimony. For more than a thousand years it was not just the works of theology, but this philosophical work of the Christian Socrates that inspired western society. Scholars translated it from the Latin into numerous of the languages of Europe—King Alfred the Great into Anglo-Saxon, Chaucer into Middle English, and Protestant Queen Elizabeth I into the ancestor of our own modern English. In the year 1500 the intellectual atmosphere in which the peoples of the world lived was theistic: all the world believed in God. The few who denied his existence were regarded as mad, were ostracised by society, or were executed as heretics. By the year 2000, in contrast, the atmosphere in which the world's peoples lived had turned atheistic: vast numbers today deny God's existence.

We take the *theism* of the end of mediaeval times as much for granted as the *atheism* of our own. It never occurs to us to try to understand why there should have occurred such a paradigm shift. The belief in God inspired by the Catholic Church in the Middle Ages was not then—as it is not now—something only of faith: it was an intellectual thing. Today's potted experts treat the shift as an inevitable effect of growth in natural knowledge. We know infinitely more than our forbears, the argument goes, so we have progressed beyond the superstitions that characterised their lives and times, such as belief in God. This judgement, grounded on the arrogant assumption of the superiority of one's own age to that of every other, is historical parochialism. It reflects, in the temporal order, the gnostic pride which, in the theological order, is characteristic of every heresy. It can be summed up in the short phrase: "We know better!" But the issue, theism/atheism, turns not on knowledge; it turns on reason, and reason is accessible to every age.

¹ Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius (AD c.480-524), *The Consolation of Philosophy*, Book IV, vi. This transliteration of the author's verse from the Latin text is mine. Boethius was remarkable for the breadth of his education in a civilisation facing, like our own, the collapse of social order at the end of an empire. The emperor Theodoric, an Arian heretic, arrested his *Magister Officiorum*, an orthodox Catholic, on a charge of treason and incarcerated him at Pavia. He had him executed the following year. Boethius' case resembles that of Sir Thomas More under Henry VIII. More followed the example of the great Roman, writing his *Dialogue of Comfort* as he awaited his execution.

In October 1517 the Catholic theologian, Martin Luther, forwarded his celebrated 'Ninety five Theses' on the power and efficacy of indulgences to the Archbishop of Mainz and Magdeburg. A scholarly disputation within the Church, between Catholic and Catholic, turned quickly to revolt when Luther declined to wait upon a ruling but appealed instead, via the newly invented printing press, to the populace. His Theses were translated into the vernacular, reproduced and speedily broadcast throughout Germany and Europe. Their publication brought Luther a following of other Catholics similarly inclined. He appealed to 'Christian freedom' as he preached a doctrine of rebellion against the Church's rule. In 1520 the Pope warned him (in the papal bull, *Exsurge Domine*) that he risked excommunication if he did not retract various of his assertions. His response was to burn the bull publicly. He was excommunicated on 3rd January 1521. One of those who defended the Church and who joined the Pope in condemning Luther was Henry Tudor, King of England.

Luther's lapse into heresy flowed from personal moral problems. He was provided with an intellectual base for his rebellion, however, in the nominalism of the English Franciscan friar, William of Ockham (c.1288-1347).²

Because of the debility of thought which passes for philosophy today, we hardly understand the issue which preoccupied the philosophers of the middle ages, the problem of universals. The issue is as old as Plato. How can a thing be at the same time both one and many? How can this dog, *Rover*, be this unique individual yet exemplify a nature which is found universally? Plato thought each individual dog was a shadow as it were of a universal reality which existed (somewhere) *in the concrete*; the prototype dog. St Thomas Aquinas, building on the philosophy of Aristotle, admitted the reality of the universal, the concept and the name but allowed that the universal existed *in the concrete* only in the singular individual, while as universal, it existed only in thought, the concept signified by the name. The universal essence, or nature, emanated from and abode in the mind of God.

In contrast to this realistic solution to the problem (by which I mean a solution corresponding to reality), Ockham asserted that the universal was nothing but a convention, a common name (hence *nominalism*), whereby men gathered together the many singular instances of apparently similar creatures. He admitted the existence of a common concept (of which the common name was a sign) but reduced the universal to a mere figment of the mind, denying there was any reality to which it corresponded. In doing so he effectively denied the natures of things, denied the natural order and, incipiently, advocated atheism. Here was his attraction for

² Ockham is much lauded today for the principle of economy known as *Ockham's Razor* which runs: *entia non sunt multiplicanda praeter necessitatem*: 'entities are not to be admitted except where necessary'.

Interestingly, the statement of the principle in this form is not to be found in his works. The nearest seem to be *numquam ponenda est pluralitas sine necessitate* ('plurality is not to be posited without need') found in his commentary on the *Sentences* of Peter the Lombard, and *frustra fit per plura quod potest fieri per pauciora* ('many are not required where few will suffice') found in his *Summa Totius Logicae*. Cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ockham%27s_Razor

Luther. Here, too, is the key to understanding the movement Luther precipitated, Protestantism.³ Ockham is the real father of the modern age.

Henry VIII ruled from 1509 to 1547. After about 1529 he began to complement in England the devastation of religious and social order begun in Germany by Luther. Like Luther he was driven by personal moral problems. He initiated through tyranny what Luther had essayed through doctrinal error, the destruction of the influence in men's lives of that institution founded by Almighty God for their salvation, the Catholic Church. He and Luther were never to agree on doctrine, yet the two combined in the attack on reason and reality—*les extrêmes se touchent*.

The revolution accomplished by the Protestant rebellion against God's Church is not understood. Protestantism is not, as people think, a religion but rather *irreligion* masquerading as religion. The truth is to be seen not so much in its obvious watering down of Christ's teachings, as in its effects. From its inception, Protestantism left its followers in a state of anxiety over their salvation. In this it followed its founder. "Why," Maritain asks, "does the doctrine of salvation absorb all Lutheran theology, if it be not because the human self has become... the chief preoccupation of that theology?"⁴ Protestantism replaces something of God with something of man: it replaces Divine faith, a gift of God to man no less than the gift of his very life and existence, with merely human belief. The effect in the life of the individual Protestant, unless something intervenes to prevent it, is collapse into complete unbelief. Read the life of any prominent Protestant: in eight cases out of ten, you will see a complete collapse of his faith. Protestantism is inchoate atheism.

It is the flourishing of Protestantism in western civilisation since the first half of the sixteenth century that has brought about the shift from theism to atheism. If that shift has occurred more rapidly in the last forty years it is because those in positions of power within the chief bulwark in the world against the influence of Protestantism, the Catholic Church, have abrogated their responsibilities.⁵

Reality is the only measure of true philosophy. It operates as a standard: it is uncompromising, as uncompromising as its creator. Reality is a surrogate, standing in this world in the place of its creator—

Hard reality to measure us, to test us and to prove...

Truth is the identity between what is asserted and reality—between what is asserted, and what is. True philosophy reflects what our common sense tells us—that we did

³ Here, too, is the reason his thinking is so attractive to modern thinkers. Strictly, Ockham was not a nominalist but a conceptualist. A nominalist denies any reality but the collective name: he denies that there is any universal thing, or any universal concept. A conceptualist admits not only the name but the universal concept of which it is the sign, but only as a figment of the mind, while denying that this concept corresponds to any universal thing.

⁴ Jacques Maritain, *Three Reformers*, Charles Scribner's Sons, London, 1950: my copy Greenwood Press, Westport, Connecticut, 1970, p. 17.

⁵ Exemplified by the Opening Speech of Pope John XXIII to the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council. The cause of this is the reflorescence within the members of the Church of a heresy derived from the influence of Protestant error on philosophy, Modernism.

not make ourselves; that we did not choose the nature with which we are endowed; that we do not keep ourselves in existence; that our end, or reason for existence, is determined for us not by ourselves but by another. This philosophy demands, as a matter of reason, the concession that we are but an effect—if the highest—of intrinsic and extrinsic causes; that we are not our own possession; that we have this body and this soul for a time only; that we have duties, just as we have rights and that we forsake those duties at our peril; and that the time will come when we will have to give an accounting of the use of these gifts. This philosophy demonstrates that belief in God is a *rational* thing and that its denial is utter folly.

It took about 100 years before Luther's rejection of the authority of God in favour of the authority of the individual manifested itself formally in the philosophical sphere. René Descartes' celebrated dream marked the crossing of the threshold. With his *cogito ergo sum* the die for all modern philosophy was cast. What man first knows is not reality, said Descartes, but himself. No longer would men look to objective authority to find the answers to the ultimate questions, but cast about in their own psyches.

Two consequences flow from the denial that man can know objective reality. First, the observer is thrown in upon himself and becomes preoccupied with his own perceptions. It is a corollary that however much he may appeal to objectivity, he can never know it as a certain standard, never be certain of the truth. Here is the source of the ubiquitous agnosticism (and cynicism) that characterises our world in almost every field of intellectual endeavour. The second effect is that he comes, sooner or later, to deny the existence of anything but what his senses can show. He becomes nominalist, empiricist, positivist and, ultimately, materialist.⁶ In denying the very ground on which reason is based, he attacks reason itself. He sets himself adrift on a sea of opinion and wastes his life in conjecture.

It is Protestantism that has brought modern thinkers to reject their heritage, the hard common sense of Aristotle refined by the mediaeval schoolmen, as Esau rejected his heritage—for a mess of pottage.

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In his July 2007 *Quadrant* editorial, the late Padraic McGuinness mocked Blaise Pascal for his celebrated wager, his suggestion that the unbeliever should bet in favour of faith in God rather than against it since in doing so he had all to gain and nothing to lose; rather than bet against it, where he had all to lose and nothing to gain.⁷ Given Pascal's involvement in probability theory, it was perhaps inevitable that he would apply the theory to matters of belief.

⁶ *Nominalist*, ie, he denies the existence of natures; *empiricist*, he denies what his senses cannot detect; *positivist*, he asserts that law is nothing but what is asserted; ie, law flows from the popular will, not from the demands of nature; *materialist*, he asserts that it is impossible that anything exists which is not material.

⁷ Cf. Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*. My English edition, Everyman, J M Dent & Sons, London, at pp. 92 et seq.

In mocking Pascal, however, atheist McGuinness mocked himself. For, like all atheists, he had already made a wager along the lines Pascal proposed—but on the *opposite* result. For every atheist wagers an idea against a principle.⁸ The principle is this: *Nothing is without a reason of be.*⁹ A child of two understands it and its universality: he makes his parents' lives a misery with his constantly repeated 'Why?' The idea the atheist wagers against this principle is this: *To explain the universe and one's own being, there no need to have recourse to a creator.*¹⁰ The form guide upon which the atheist relies in laying his bet (to continue the metaphor) is a philosophy which denies the existence of anything other than the material. This philosophy, materialism, is the source of all his errors.¹¹ It is the reason he confuses the brain with the intellect; sensed knowledge with intellectual knowledge; the collective with the universal; the image with the concept; and—critically—death with annihilation. Materialism is the philosophy of the gutter; of the ditch. Its proponents are blind men, and they fall into the ditch. Worse still, they lead others to fall into the ditch with them.

The atheist did not bring himself into existence. How, then, can he take himself out of it? If he considered the issue logically, dispassionately, he would realise that he cannot—annihilating himself is beyond his power. His answer to (what is for him) the dilemma of his existence is either to deny he was caused, or (which amounts to the same thing) to equate his being with his body. Materialism provides (or pretends to provide) both answers. There is no influence in the world but the material, it asserts. Hence a man is nothing but the end result of matter 'evolving', a series of accidents occurring over aeons of time in which matter has worked itself out to the sophistication of the living human body. Once his body fails, a man ceases to exist.

The principle of indeterminacy stands in the way: *that which can be many, from itself is not one of the many.* If water can be hot or cold, from itself it is neither. If matter can be a living body or a dead body, from itself it is neither. So it is not the *matter* of a man which makes him be what he is but something else. When his matter fails—in death—this 'something else' abides. And it is the fate of this *something else*, this influence which has made him a living human being, which is the issue.

To this influence metaphysicians give the generic name *substantial form* or *substance*. The form of a thing is *that which determines* matter to be that thing—to be man, or horse, or mosquito, or tree, or water, or carbohydrate molecule, or oxygen atom, or any other of the almost infinite variety of material things found in nature. *Matter* is like plasticine: it can take any form. It is eternally slippery; always inclined to be

⁸ Atheists who deny they have ever committed themselves to such a course should understand the force of the aphorism *not to will is to will not*. If I refrain from acknowledging God's existence I have in that very refusal exercised my will.

⁹ Expressed more felicitously, perhaps, by Oscar Hammerstein II's popularisation of the pre-Socratic notion *ex nihilo nihil fit*—"nothing comes from nothing".

¹⁰ This idea is a prejudice, that is, a pre-judgement, a judgement made without consultation of the facts.

¹¹ I am using 'materialism' here to include its corollaries, *positivism*, the theory that to attain truth, the mind must not go beyond the experience of the senses; and *empiricism*, the doctrine which gives value only to experience.

something else; the reason of corruptibility; no more than the substrate of the effect. Matter is *what is determined*.

Form, on the other hand, is immutable.¹² It is the reason why, in living things, offspring follow the nature of their parents; the reason why kookaburras always produce kookaburras and not some other kind of kingfisher, not something half kookaburra, half something else. It is the reason the alleged 'transitional forms' of Darwinian evolutionary theory have never been found, and the reason why they never will be found.

Finally, among living things, a distinction is to be made between man and all the rest. Alone among them man is possessed of subjective immateriality. He is a material creature who is also immaterial: proved by the fact that he does immaterial acts, knowing not just that things are but *what* they are; free of material compulsion, not determined blindly by his nature, but choosing freely his own ends. When his body dies his soul does not, for it is not something material.

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Atheism's chief complaint—it is hardly an argument—is this: *How could a good God exist who allows the evil that is to be found in the world?* It is the sort of question an unruly child will bawl as he rages over misfortune. The presence of evil in the world is a difficulty: it is to be addressed, and solved. But it can never provide a ground for doubting the necessity of a creator of the one who asks the question, or of the world in which he finds himself. There is another question, infinitely more important, that the atheist, adopting the wisdom of the child, should ask himself: *How could the good that is to be found throughout the world exist without an adequate cause?*

Evil is not something, but a lack of something: it is not a positive, but a negative. Every evil is a lack of something due. Blindness is not evil in a tree: but it is in a dog or in a man, for sight is not due to a tree, but it is to a dog, and to a man. Moral rectitude in action is not an evil in a dog, but it is in a man. For moral rectitude in action is not something due to a dog, but it is to a man. Moreover, careful consideration will show that no matter how great an evil may be, it is impossible that it ever outweigh the good. For there must first be a good of which evil is the detraction, the defect, the lack.

This world is almost ineffably good, intricate in its goodness and good in its intricacy. And embedded in the intricacy is the chief part of its good—order: superior and inferior working in harmony, a subordination which may reach in some instances to the 100th power. Each creature blending with the other; inanimate cooperating with animate; animal and plant interdependent, each contributing to the welfare of the other; each dependent on the working in due and precise order of the elements of which it is constituted. And there is something more—peace, for peace

¹² I am speaking here of *natural* forms. Artificial forms, those invented by man, change as man changes their design. Insofar as they are comprised of natural materials, the *artificial* follow the natural.

is the tranquillity of order.¹³ And again something beyond this—*splendor formae*—beauty, the due proportion in things shining through their being.¹⁴

Whence comes the good? whence the order? whence the peace? whence the beauty? It is utterly inadequate—*it is mindless!*—to say these things happened by chance as the atheist, as the evolutionist, does.

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The last great mass conversion of atheists occurred at about midday on 13th October 1917 in the fields near a village in Portugal north of Lisbon called Fatima. Some 40,000 or more people had gathered there because three shepherd children, the eldest only 10, said they had seen the Mother of Christ, the Virgin Mary, in a series of visions once each month since the 13th May previous. None but the three children were able to see their heavenly visitor and there was debate among those who attended them after the first vision on 13th May as to whether in fact the Blessed Virgin was appearing or whether they were hallucinating.

Who knows how many atheists attended that day. We know from their later testimony there were a great number. If there were a thousand who had come to scoff, not one of the thousand returned to his bed that night an atheist. And when he did lie down, it must be doubted whether he slept. For he had witnessed something utterly impossible: he had seen the sun dancing around the sky!

It was said later, of course, that the phenomenon was the result of mass hysteria. The defect in that thesis was that people up to 40 miles away, people having no contact with those who had gathered around the three children, experienced it too. It was also said, and rightly, that beyond this 40 mile compass there was no evidence of unusual solar or astronomic activity to confirm this impossible movement of the sun. No scientific instruments placed elsewhere else in the world recorded anything to confirm these observations. Yet the evidence of so many witnesses requires it to be accepted that within this geographical compass the sun appeared to defy all the laws of nature. Whatever the scientific evidence, none of those who attended were in any doubt that what they had seen had demonstrated the existence of God.

But there is more: the event happened as the three children had predicted. Indeed, it had happened at the request of one of them, Lucia de Jesus Santos, who in conversation with their heavenly visitor complained at the suffering she and her companions had endured over the visions at the hands of the authorities, and asked that she “work a miracle so that everybody will believe that you are appearing to us”.

It is reasonable to believe in God. It is unreasonable, that is, *it is irrational*, to deny God’s existence. More cannot come from less.¹⁵ If I, possessed as I am of intellect

¹³ St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 29

¹⁴ Ibid, I, q. 5, a. 4, ad 1

and will and the ability to control my own destiny, exist then something greater than I, something at least as greatly endowed as I, must have brought me to this. Call this IT what you like; it cannot simply be an IT—an impersonal force, as the Muslim teachers seem to assert—IT must be SOMEONE, a person. And if this SOMEONE is a person, it is reasonable to expect that he has communicated with mankind. This, that Almighty God has communicated with mankind, is what the Church which claims to have been founded by God, the Catholic Church, maintains. So it is that in all the history of the world there is only one question that matters: *Did God become man in Jesus Christ?*

That Christ was God is demonstrable: that is, the arguments in favour of the proposition that he was, that *he is* God, are capable of a certain conclusion in the affirmative. Whatever Christ was he was not simply, as many like to assert, a great and good man. There are only two possibilities: either he was God, or he was a liar—*because he claimed to be God!*¹⁶ This, that he claimed to be God, was the very reason the Jews bullied Pilate into executing him. If God became man in Jesus Christ, then he who created us has communicated with us and, since we are utterly dependent upon him, it is a monumental exercise in folly to ignore that communication.

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Pascal mocked the reasoning of the atheists of his day in the following fashion.¹⁷

“I know not who sent me into the world, nor what the world is, nor what I myself am. I am terribly ignorant of everything. I know not what my body is, nor my senses, nor my soul and that part of me which thinks what I say, which reflects upon itself as well as upon all external things, and has no more knowledge of itself than of them.

“I see the terrifying immensity of the universe which surrounds me, and find myself limited to one corner of this vast expanse, without knowing why I am set down here rather than elsewhere, nor why the brief period appointed for my life is assigned to me at this moment rather than another in all the eternity that has gone before and will come after me. On all sides I behold nothing but infinity, in which I am a mere atom, a mere passing shadow that returns no more. All I know is that I must soon die. But what I understand least of all is this very death which I cannot escape.

“As I know not whence I come, so I know not whither I go. I only know that on leaving this world I fall forever into nothingness, or into the hands of a wrathful God, without knowing to which of these two states I shall be everlastingly consigned. Such is my condition, full of weakness and uncertainty. From all this I conclude that

¹⁵ The more rational of scientists see this clearly. It is the principle at the heart of the Second Law of Thermodynamics, the law of increasing entropy in the universe. The universe is running down: how then could it have had such an energy filled beginning unless some influence outside it brought this about?

¹⁶ There is a further possibility which can be excluded almost as soon as it is advanced, namely, that he was mad. Madmen do not perform miracles; they do not rise from the dead. They do provide sound teaching. No madman was responsible for the greatest civilisation the world has ever known.

¹⁷ *Pensées*, Louis Lafuma Edition, translated by John Warrington, J M Dent & Sons (Everyman), London, 1960, § 11; my edition, 1973 Reprint; quoted material at page 6.

I ought to spend every day of my life without seeking to know my fate. I might perhaps be able to find a solution to my doubts; but I cannot be bothered to do so; I will not take one step towards its discovery. And then, despising those who concern themselves with this task (whatever certitude they may attain, it is a subject of despair rather than of pride), I will go without fear or foresight to try the great event, and allow myself unprotesting, to be led to my death, uncertain of my future state.”

He might have been speaking to the atheists of this century. One need not change a word!

Consider the prospect that faces the atheist: consider his dilemma. For him no ultimate catharsis; no repose for that desire for the infinite that gnaws at the heart of every human being. No wonder so many atheists commit suicide! And there, in suicide, in his unilateral assertion of the subjectivist absurdity—*reality is what I say it is*—the atheist confronts the ultimate irony. It is matter that impedes knowledge. In the instant of death, when the impediment of the body is removed from the soul, a man knows the truth about himself and his dependence on God inescapably. No scope for evasion, or doublespeak, then. He knows the gifts he has been given—as he has always known, but has never been prepared to acknowledge—that he is a creature of God; that he is made in God’s image and likeness; and that (no matter how he may have tried to close his mind to it) he is responsible for his own actions. He knows himself at last and the achievement, or failure, of the life he has lived.

The reports of the reactions of those who experienced the miracle of the sun at Fatima on 13th October 1917 are replete with this spirit of realisation, of compunction and acknowledgement of utter dependence on their maker. This, the conversion of heart of so many, was the real miracle of Fatima.

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I did not make myself: something—someone—else made me, and keeps me in existence. Why was I made?—*why?* The question of the child in its innocence assumes profound significance.¹⁸ St Augustine provides answer:

“Thou hast made us for Thyself O God, and our hearts are not at rest until they rest in Thee.”¹⁹

The man who understands, and accepts, that he was made by God for Himself, that he was made for eternal beatitude, has within his grasp something which exceeds every other probable or possible good. He understands the force of Christ’s parable about the pearl of great price: he sees the vacuousness of all human endeavour which has not God as its ultimate end. He realises what Christ meant when he spoke of the poor in spirit—why he called them “blessed” and why he promised them the reward that he did. And with that realisation, and conversion of heart, comes peace.

Where does the love come from that a mother has for her child, that moves man and woman to marry and, despite the cynicism of the world, remains a formidable

¹⁸ *Out of the mouths of infants and sucklings you have found praise to foil your enemy, (Psalm 8: 3)*

¹⁹ St Augustine, *Confessions*, I, i

influence in the life of every man? We do not give ourselves this order and inclination of our souls. We can no more deny it than we can deny the desire to be happy. So where does it come from, if not from him who created us? Where, if not from him who reveals himself as having made us, and redeemed us—*in love*.

Why, then, do we behave like petulant children? Why do we persist in turning away from him? why strive so vehemently to deny his existence?

Here is the prophet Malachi, speaking in the fifth century BC:

“The Lord God says this: ‘Behold, I am going to send my messenger to prepare a way before me. And the Lord you are seeking will suddenly enter his temple; and the angel of the covenant for whom you are longing, yes, he is coming,’ says the Lord of hosts. Who will be able to resist the day of his coming? Who will stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner’s fire and the fuller’s alkali. He will take his seat as refiner and purifier; he will purify the sons of Levi, refining them like gold and like silver...”²⁰

And here is St Paul in the first century AD:

“It was not the angels that [Christ] took to himself; he took to himself descent from Abraham. It was essential that he should in this way become completely like his brothers so that he could be a compassionate and trustworthy high priest of God’s religion, able to atone for people’s sins. That is, because he has himself been through temptation, he is able to help others who are similarly tempted.”²¹

You would think the immensity, the internal consistency and the concordance with human reason of what Christianity asserts to be the revelation of God would give the atheist pause; but it does not. The atheist knows better! Better to be obdurate, and blind, than to accept that documents whose historical provenance and accuracy are eminently verifiable might contain material vital to his eternal welfare.

Jesus Christ is at once the Judge and the loving Redeemer of every man. As Judge he will be ruthless. As Redeemer he is merciful, but only if we will first accept him. He suffered as much as, and more than, any man who will appear before him. He has made himself the means of our salvation—*if only we will accept him*.

“Come to me all you who labour and are heavy burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me. For I am meek and humble of heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden light.”²²

Michael Baker

10th February 2008—*First Sunday of Lent*

²⁰ *Malachi* 3: 1-3

²¹ *Hebrews* 2: 16-18

²² *Matthew* 11: 28-30