

Note

1. For a recent application of contemporary philosophy to the understanding of these issues, see *Philosophy and the Christian Faith*, ed. T. V. Morris (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988.).

3

QUAM DILECTA

Peter van Inwagen

Yea, the sparrow hath found her an house, and the swallow a nest, where she may lay her young; even thy altars, O Lord of Hosts, my King and my God.

Ps.84:3

Three of my grandparents were unchurched Protestants, and one (my father's mother) was a devout Roman Catholic. As a consequence, my mother was, and is, not much of a churchgoer, and my father was a lapsed Catholic with pretty strong feelings on the subject—an enthusiastic reader of Paul Blanshard and similar authors. When I was seven, my parents briefly sent me to a Presbyterian Sunday school. Our lessons were from a little textbook with the excellent title *The King Nobody Wanted*, which I still occasionally come across in secondhand bookshops. I recall learning that we Christians believed that Jesus was the Messiah and that the Jews did not. (I remember wishing that I could have a chance to tell the Jews about Jesus;

I was sure that they would be reasonable about his messianic status if someone were to inform them of it.)

I must also have absorbed the idea that Jesus was the Son of God, for after my family had joined a Unitarian congregation, my father sternly informed me (presumably in response to some casual theological remark of mine) that we Unitarians did not believe that Jesus was the Son of God. Well, I was shocked. I had thought that everyone believed *that* (except, of course, the Jews, but it was pretty clear that Unitarians weren't Jews). I have a memory of walking through a hallway at my school—I think we've got to about age thirteen—and saying defiantly to myself, "I can believe that Jesus is the Son of God if I want to." I must have been wanting in what Roman Catholic theologians used to call heroic faith, however, for I was soon enough a good little Unitarian boy. I learned in Sunday school that the feeding of the multitudes was really a miracle of sharing, and how much more miraculous that was than a magical multiplication of loaves and fishes would have been if it had occurred, which of course it hadn't. (Twenty years later, in the early 1970s, Peter Geach told me how shocked he had recently been to hear the same story from a Roman Catholic priest. I was able to tell him that the Unitarians were at least twenty years ahead of Rome.)

My attachment to Unitarianism (and its three pillars: the Fatherhood of God, the Brotherhood of Man, and the Neighborhood of Boston) did not survive my going away to college. That sort of thing is, of course, a familiar story in every denomination, but it's an easier passage for Unitarians, since it does not involve giving up any beliefs. My wife, who is one of my most useful critics, tells me that this is an unkind remark and ought to be omitted. It seems to me to be an important thing to say, however. I did not experience the crisis of conscience so common among Evangelical or Roman Catholic university students who leave the church. And the reason is that if Evangelicals or Roman Catholics stop going to church, it is hard for them to avoid the question how they can justify not going to church when they believe what they do—if, indeed, loss of belief was not their reason for leaving the church. It is, however, simply a fact that a Unitarian can sever his connection with Unitarianism without changing any of his beliefs.

If you had asked me about my religious beliefs when I was an undergraduate or a graduate student (a period that covered roughly the 1960s), I suppose I should have said I was an agnostic, although there was a brief period when I was in graduate school during which—under the influence of some version or other of the Argument from Evil—I should probably have said I was an atheist. This was a position of the head, not the heart, however; it had no more connection with my emotional life than, say, my belief (also briefly held in graduate school) that Quine had shown that quantified modal logic was impossible. My emotional life in the late 1960s, insofar as I had one, had entirely to do with the concerns of everyday life—although, to be sure, everyday life for a graduate student in philosophy is a little different from the everyday life of most people. A very important feature of my life as a graduate student was a growing conviction that I was a better philosopher than any of

my fellow graduate students and most of my teachers. Vanity in this area—wounded vanity, because little attention was paid to me or to my work during the early years of my career—was a dominant feature of my inner life in the 1970s. (Professional vanity may well continue to dominate my inner life, but it would be harder for me to tell these days, since I now feel, rightly or wrongly, that my philosophical talents are adequately recognized by the profession. Wounded vanity is a rather more salient feature of one's inner life than self-satisfied vanity.)

When I was a graduate student, I began to read the apologetic works of C. S. Lewis. There were (under God) two reasons for this. First, I had loved his "space trilogy," and I was looking for "more Lewis." Secondly, I recognized him as a master of expository prose and thought—rightly—that I could learn a great deal from him about the art of expressing a line of argument in English. Like many other people, I first discovered what Christianity *was* from reading Lewis. The discovery was purely external, a matter of being able to use the right words when talking about "Christianity," but it was no small gain to have a *correct* external understanding of Christianity. I saw that the picture I had been given of Christianity by my Unitarian Sunday-school teachers and various teachers of philosophy (no great difference there) was self-serving, frivolous, and wildly inaccurate. I saw that Christianity was a serious thing and intellectually at a very high level. (I was thinking, of course, in terms of propositions and distinctions and arguments.) I lost at that time, and for good, any capacity for taking any liberalized or secularized version of Christianity seriously. I could read Lewis. I could try to read Harvey Cox or William Hamilton. I could see the difference. To this day, I cannot see why anyone disagrees with my judgment that academic theologians of their stripe have nothing of interest to say. I have to admit, however, that some very learned people do disagree with this judgment.

The only thing was, I didn't believe it. I could see that there was an "it" to believe, and if I did not really see how much there was to being a Christian beyond having certain beliefs, I did see that the beliefs must come first, and that a Christian life without those beliefs is an impossibility. One day in the late 1960s, I fell to my knees and prayed for faith, but faith did not come. I do not know what led me to make this gesture, but presumably there must have been some sort of felt pressure, and presumably this pressure did not long continue. I expect that I had been setting God some sort of test: If You don't give me faith on the spot, I'll conclude that You do not exist or are not interested in me, and that these pressures I've been feeling have some sort of purely natural explanation and can be ignored till they go away. We all know how well that sort of thing works.

I married, spent two years in the army (at the height of the American military involvement in Vietnam; but I was safe in Germany), became the father of a daughter, and began to teach philosophy. I was entirely immersed in the secular world. Sunday was my day of rest and my day of nothing else. Although I continued to be interested in Christianity in an intellectual sort of way, it would no more have occurred to me to take up churchgoing—even as

an experiment—than to take up hang-gliding or bookbinding. In 1973, I spent six delightful weeks on the campus of Calvin College at an NEH Summer Institute in the Philosophy of Religion, which was directed by Alvin Plantinga. As far as I am able to tell by introspection and memory, this had nothing to do with my religious development, although it had a great deal to do with my philosophical development. (Plantinga's lectures—roughly, *The Nature of Necessity*—became for me a model for doing philosophy.) Besides my family, my only interests were philosophy and my career in philosophy. Perhaps my former wife and my daughter would say that the qualification “besides my family” is unnecessary. I certainly was taken up both with my researches and with my desire to be recognized and admired. My researches, I think, went very well indeed, but I haunted my departmental mailbox mostly in vain, and was subject to frequent periods of depression and spasms of anger because of my lack of professional recognition. The anger was directed at certain of my former teachers (the more famous ones), who, I believed, were in a position to advance my career and yet were doing nothing for me. I believed that they just didn't see how *good* I was and wasted their influence in advancing the careers of people who were less good than I. (I was never jealous of these other people, only envious: I didn't want them *not* to get what they got, but I wanted some too.) When Al Plantinga wrote to Hector Castañeda, suggesting that a paper of mine be published in *Noûs*, and when Tony Kenny wrote to the Oxford University Press, telling them that I had a manuscript that they ought to try to get hold of, this made me even angrier with my teachers: “There,” I said to myself, “that proves it. It *can* be done. Comparative strangers do it, but *they* don't.” I sometimes wonder whether my teachers knew about this anger. My relations with them were entirely friendly whenever we met. This friendliness was not exactly hypocrisy on my part, since, as I say, the anger was not continuous but spasmodic, and I am not very good at being angry with people who are actually in the same room with me. (But I never once in a calmer moment repented these spasms of anger, which I always considered appropriate and fully justified.)

I can remember pretty well one feature of this period that is particularly relevant to my topic: what it was like not to have any religious beliefs. That is, I can remember pretty clearly certain episodes of thought that are possible only for the secular mind, but the memory is not “sympathetic”; it is a sort of looking at the past from the outside. Here is an analogy. Suppose that you now love someone you once hated. You might well be able to remember an episode during which your hatred manifested itself—say, in the writing of a letter in which you said terrible things to that person. You might remember very clearly, for example, hesitating between two turns of phrase, and deciding that one of them was the more likely to wound, and choosing it on that account. But since you now love that person, and (presumably) cannot feel the way you felt when you hated, there is a good sense in which you cannot remember what it was like to write the letter. You are looking at your past from outside.

I shall try to describe three of these “episodes of thought.”

First, I can remember having a picture of the cosmos, the physical universe, as a self-subsistent thing, something that is just *there* and requires no explanation. When I say a “having a picture,” I am trying to describe a state of mind that could be called up whenever I desired and was centered on a certain mental image. This mental image—it somehow represented the whole world—was associated with a felt conviction that what the image represented was self-subsistent. I can still call the image to mind (*I think* it's the same image), and it still represents the whole world, but it is now associated with a felt conviction that what it represents is *not* self-subsistent, that it must depend on something else, something that is not represented by any feature of the image, and must be, in some way that the experience leaves indeterminate, radically different in kind from what the image represents. Interestingly enough, there was a period of transition, a period during which I could move back and forth at will, in “duck-rabbit” fashion, between experiencing the image as representing the world as self-subsistent and experiencing the image as representing the world as dependent. I am not sure what period in my life, as measured by the guideposts of external biography, this transition period coincided with. I know that it is now impossible for me to represent the world to myself as anything but dependent.

The second memory has to do with the doctrine of the Resurrection of the Dead. I can remember this: trying to imagine myself as having undergone this resurrection, as having died and now being once more alive, as *waking up* after death. You might think it would be easy enough for the unbeliever to *imagine* this—no harder, say, than imagining the sun turning green or a tree talking. But—no doubt partly because the resurrection was something that was actually proposed for my belief, and no doubt partly because I as an unbeliever belonged to death's kingdom and had made a covenant with death—I encountered a kind of spiritual wall when I tried to imagine this. The whole weight of the material world, the world of the blind interaction of forces whose laws have no exceptions and in which an access of disorder can never be undone, would thrust itself into my mind with terrible force, as something almost tangible, and the effort of imagination would fail. I can remember episodes of this kind from outside. I can no longer recapture their character. I have nothing positive to put in their place, nothing that corresponds to seeing the world as dependent. But I can imagine the resurrection without hindrance (although my imaginings are no doubt almost entirely wrong) and assent, in my intellect, to a reality that corresponds to what I imagine.

The two “episodes” I have described were recurrent. I shall now describe a particular experience that was not repeated and was not very similar to any other experience I have had. I had just read an account of the death of Handel, who, dying, had expressed an eagerness to die and to meet his dear Savior, Jesus Christ, face to face. My reaction to this was negative and extremely vehement: a little explosion of contempt, modified by pity. It might be put in these words: “You poor booby. You cheat.” Handel had been *taken in*, I thought, and yet at the same time he was getting away with something. Although his greatest hope was an illusion, nothing could rob him of the

comfort of this hope, for after his death he would not exist and there would be no one there to see how wrong he had been. I don't know whether I would have disillusioned him if I could have, but I certainly managed simultaneously to believe that he was "of all men the most miserable" and that he was getting a pretty good deal. Of course, this reaction was mixed with my knowledge that the kind of experience I tried to describe in the preceding example would make Handel's anticipation of what was to happen after his death impossible for me. I suppose I regarded that experience as somehow veridical, and believed that Handel must have had such experiences, too, and must have been trained, or have trained himself, to ignore them.

In 1980 or thereabouts, I began to experience a sort of pressure to become a Christian: a vast discontent with *not* being a Christian, a pressure to *do something*. Presumably this pressure was of the same sort that had led me to pray for faith on that one occasion ten years earlier, but this was sustained. This went on and on. My mind at the time is not readily accessible to me in memory. I wish I had kept a journal. I know that sneers directed at God and the church, which—I hope I am not giving away any secret here—are very common in the academy, were becoming intolerable to me. (What was especially intolerable was the implied invitation to join in, the absolutely unexamined assumption that, because I was a member of the academic community, I would, of course, regard sneering at God and the church as meet, right, and even my bounden duty.) I perhaps did not have anything like a desire to turn to Christ as my Savior, or a desire to lead a godly, righteous, and sober life, but I did have a strong desire to belong to a Christian community of discourse, a community in which it was open to people to talk to each other in words like the ones that Lewis addresses to his correspondent in *Letters to an American Lady*. I envied people who could talk to one another in those terms. I know that I was becoming more and more repelled by the "great secular consensus" that comprises the world view of just about everyone connected with the universities, journalism, the literary and artistic intelligentsia, and the entertainment industry. I knew that, confused as I might be about many things, I was quite clear about one thing: I could not bear the thought of being a part of that consensus. What made it so repulsive to me can be summed up in a schoolyard *cri de coeur*: "They think they're so smart!" I was simply revolted by the malevolent, self-satisfied stupidity of the attacks on Christianity that proceeded from the consensus.

I remained in a state of uncertainty for some time. During this period, I described my state of mind by saying that I didn't know whether I believed or not. Eventually I performed an act of will. I asked Bill Alston (to his considerable astonishment) to put me in touch with a priest. The priest I was put in touch with was—at that time and in relation to that particular need—of no help to me, but my interview with him took place in his study, which was in a church building. While I was talking with him, it became clear to me that a large part of my difficulty with the church might be churches. It became clear to me that one fact about me that was of relevance to my condition was that I didn't want to start going to church. Well, I thought, at least that's a fact I can do something about. I decided to start going to church—simply to attend an

early Eucharist—every Sunday morning as a sort of observer, with no more commitment involved than five dollars for the collection plate. I began doing this. The first effect was that it put my wife into a fury, despite the fact that I was always home from church before she was awake. But I soon found that I liked going to church, and that an unconscious fear of churchgoing was no longer a barrier between me and the church. This would have been in September 1982, at just about the time of my fortieth birthday. The following May I was baptized. (I have just noted, while setting out the sequence of dates in my mind, that this took place nine years ago to the day.) Following my baptism, I received my first communion. Since then, the Sacrament has been the center of Christian devotional life for me. It is no more possible for me willfully to forego Holy Communion on a Sunday than for me, say, to slander a colleague or to refuse to pay a debt.

And since then I have been an Episcopalian. I regard myself as a Catholic, and the Anglican communion as a branch (separated from other branches by historical tragedy) of the Catholic church that is mentioned as an article of belief in the Creeds. I cannot easily see myself as a member of any other denomination, although I believe that the Episcopal Church is among the best possible illustrations of Robert Conquest's Second Law: Every organization appears to be headed by secret agents of its opponents. Eventually, I suppose, the high-minded progressives who control the denomination at the national level will do some truly appalling thing and I shall at last have to leave, but I hope I have a while left in the Episcopal Church, because I really do like the place. (An Anglican joke: "Why is Rome called the Eternal City? Because there's always Rome.")

As a Christian, I, of course, believe that conversions are the work of God and are thus largely invisible to the convert, save in their effects. Nevertheless, I believe, the convert must have turned to God and, in some fashion, have asked for His help. I have no useful memory of what I did to ask God for His help or of the form in which that help came. Naturally, I prayed—conditionally—but what it was about those prayers that was different from my prayer in the 1960s, or what it was that I did besides prayer, is unknown to me.

I was allowed the usual honeymoon. The counterattack occurred in 1985. As might be expected with a person like me, it was an intellectual counterattack. At least, it was an intellectual counterattack in the sense that it had to do with propositions and evidence and arguments, and not with personal tragedy or sexual temptation or distaste for liturgical innovation or disillusionment with the behavior of my fellow Christians. But it was not an intellectual counterattack in the sense that it had much respectable intellectual content. A great deal of its content, in fact, was simply ludicrous, and I was perfectly well aware of that at the time, but that did not make it any less effective. One part of the counterattack was a real intellectual difficulty: I was extremely worried by Jesus' apparent prediction of the end of the present age within the lifetime of some of the witnesses to his earthly ministry. Nowadays I would say that I don't expect that the New Testament always gives an exact account of Jesus' words, and that the passages that worried me are probably a conflation of his

prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem and his description of the End Times; I would say that this conflation was natural enough, given the beliefs of the early church. And I would add to this that I am not sure it is inconsistent with a robust and orthodox theology of the Incarnation to hold that Jesus himself believed in an imminent Parousia (although I am not entirely happy about that idea). And not only would I say these things nowadays, but I said them (to myself, just about daily) for several years in the mid-1980s. The difference is that now I am perfectly comfortable with these arguments, and then they seemed like a wretched subterfuge to me. It's not that I perceived some flaw in them that I was unable to deal with. I perceived no flaw in them. They simply seemed like a wretched subterfuge to me, and that is all that there was to say about the matter.

The other parts of the counterattack are so flimsy that I am ashamed to record them. One derived from a newspaper report that a certain biblical scholar (a man who I later learned had written a book the central thesis of which was that Jesus was a hallucinogenic mushroom) maintained that unpublished material from the Dead Sea Scrolls contained prototypes from which the Gospels were derived, prototypes that antedated the birth of Jesus. The other had its basis in the claims of some physicists and cosmologists to be able to show (or to be about to be able to show) that the cosmos was somehow a thing that had come into existence literally out of nothing—that is, without any causal antecedents whatever, either temporal or ontological. I knew what to say in response to these arguments, of course. Anyone who thought about it would. I knew that this scholar did not claim to have *seen* these Gospel prototypes; rather, he inferred their existence from scraps of information about the unpublished Dead Sea Scrolls material by an elaborate Rube Goldberg (or Heath Robinson) chain of reasoning; I knew that he was demonstrably regarded by many scholars as a crank and that his theory was endorsed by no one; I knew that he was fanatically hostile to Christianity. As to the physicists and cosmologists, their claim was philosophical nonsense, tricked out to look like sense by games played with the word 'nothing'. These things I knew then as well as I do now, but I could not make them real to myself. There was always a voice that whispered, "But this is not philosophy. You are not a biblical scholar or a physicist. You are out of your element here, and they are in theirs. Your criticisms are without value, you amateur."

The net result of my state of mind was fear. I was unable to read the Bible or to look at a newspaper article reporting the latest public pronouncement of some cosmologist about where the universe came from. And I was ashamed to seek help from my fellow Christians, since I knew that the things that were troubling me were nonsense, and I didn't want to look a fool. (And, at the same time, there was this quite inconsistent fear: Suppose that I did ask and was told, "You know, that's always worried me, too. I don't know what to say about that. And those counterarguments you keep rehearsing to yourself are worthless, and I'll tell you why.") Perhaps the best way to describe my state of mind would be by an analogy. You don't believe in ghosts, right? Well, neither do I. But how would you like to spend a night alone in a graveyard? I am subject to

night fears, and I can tell you that I shouldn't like it at all. And yet I am perfectly well aware that fear of ghosts is contrary to science, reason, and religion. If I were sentenced to spend a night alone in a graveyard, I should know beforehand that no piece of evidence was going to transpire during the night that would do anything to raise the infinitesimal prior probability of the hypothesis that there are ghosts. I should already know that twigs would snap and the wind moan and that there would be half-seen movements in the darkness. And I should know that the inevitable occurrences of these things would be of no evidential value whatever. And yet, after I had been frog-marched into the graveyard, I should feel a thrill of fear every time one of these things happened. I could reason with myself: "I believe that the dead are in Heaven or Hell, or else that they sleep until the General Resurrection. And if my religion is an illusion, then some form of materialism is the correct metaphysic, and materialism is incompatible with the existence of ghosts. And if the church and the materialists are both wrong and there are ghosts, what could be the harm in a ghost? What could such a poor, wispy thing do to one?" And what would the value of this very cogent piece of reasoning be? None at all, at least in respect of allaying my fear of ghosts.

Possibly, if one were subject to an irrational fear of ghosts, one would eventually lose it if one were forced to spend every night alone in a graveyard. Something like that seems to have happened to me as regards the irrational fears that underlay what I have called the counterattack. Eventually, they simply faded away. I am now unclear about what the time frame of all this was. I know that the full force of it lasted for several years and that it was horrible. I am sure that I could say nothing that would convey the horror of it to someone who had not had a similar experience, just as someone who was "afraid of ghosts" (without believing in their existence) could do nothing to convey to someone who was free from this fear what was so horrible about spending a night alone in a graveyard or an abandoned and isolated house. The fears, while they lasted, were tireless and persistent. (At one time I called them—to myself; I never spoke of these things, out of pride and shame—the barrage.) Reason is impotent in such situations, since one is already intellectually convinced that there is nothing to fear. (Fear replies, Ah, but you have reasoned wrong. "How have I reasoned wrong?" I said; you have reasoned wrong.) And prayer, whatever its objective benefits, brings no immediate psychological comfort, as it can do in many kinds of affliction; on the psychological level, prayer merely aggravates the fear that there is No One There by making the question whether there is anyone there momentarily inescapable, and letting the fears loose on it.

Somehow, with God's help, I got through this period. (I often wonder whether it was some kindergarten version of "the Dark Night of the Soul," but I have never really understood what that phrase means.) I hope it never returns. I hope that the part of me on which it operated is dead, swallowed up in that death into which we are baptized. But God has, as is His usual practice, given me no guarantees, and, for all I know, it could all start again tomorrow.

There is not much more to tell about my life that is relevant to my topic. In 1987, my first wife, for reasons that I do not understand, insisted on a divorce. (This is perhaps the only bad thing that has ever happened to me, at least as the world counts bad things. I do not think I should make much of a martyr; I have not had the training.) The divorce was granted the following year, and the year after that I married Elisabeth Bolduc. Several years earlier, her husband had moved out and left her with a three-week-old baby and two older children. We met and were married in the church in which I had been baptized and confirmed.¹ Lisette, as my wife is usually called, is—besides being a deeply Christian woman—an extrovert with a very strong personality and a vigorous emotional life. She thinks I am too intellectual and introverted and is determined to draw me out of myself. She may be succeeding. And then again, I may be too old a dog to learn new tricks.

At present, my religious life is in what is sometimes called a dry period. I have trouble praying and “finding time” to read the Bible. I have almost no sense of myself as a sinner who needs the saving power of Christ, although, of course, I fully accept the *proposition* that I am a sinner who needs Christ. I can see perfectly well my pride and anger and sloth and lust and self-centeredness and callousness. I can see perfectly well that pride and anger and sloth and lust and self-centeredness and callousness are sins. What I cannot do is to make the obvious logical consequence of these two objects of intellectual awareness real to myself. All of the particular acts that fall under these general headings (pride, etc.) “feel” all right to me because they are done by me—that is, in *these* mitigating circumstances, which only I appreciate. (Of course it was excusable for me to answer him in those words after he looked at me like *that*.) Nevertheless, whether I should be or not, I am not greatly troubled or uneasy about this. I am somehow confident that God, having brought my intellect (at least to some degree) under His control, is patiently working inward and is beginning to achieve some sort of mastery over my passions and my appetites. I believe that parts of me that were diseased but vigorous ten years ago have been killed and replaced with grafts of living, healthy tissue. But it is obvious from my behavior and the shameful inner thoughts that I reveal to no one but God (and I sometimes catch myself thinking in ways that seem to presuppose that I can hide these thoughts even from Him) that the process has a long way to go. I often feel as if God is saying to me (when I have formed, say, some shameful plan of revenge and humiliation), “You know, if it weren’t for Me, you would actually carry out that plan. Don’t suppose that you are really capable of resisting the temptation to do things like that. In letting you have these thoughts, I am showing you what you would do if I ever left you to yourself, even for a moment.”

“YES, YES autobiographical narrative is all very well, but we want to know how you can possibly believe all that stuff.”

A couple of years ago, I wrote a paper about New Testament criticism, which contained the following passage:

I am a convert. For the first forty years of my life I was outside the Church. For much of my life, what I believed about the Church was a mixture of fact and hostile invention, some of it asinine and some of it quite clever. Eventually, I entered the Church, an act that involved assenting to certain propositions. I believe that I had, and still have, good reasons for assenting to those propositions, although I am not sure what those reasons are. Does that sound odd? It should not. I mean this. I am inclined to think that my reasons for assenting to those propositions could be written down in a few pages—that I could actually do this. But I know that if I did, there would be many non-Christians, people just as intelligent as I am, who would be willing to accept without reservation everything I had written down, and who would yet remain what they had been: untroubled agnostics, aggressive atheists, pious Muslims, or whatever. And there are many who would say that this shows that what I had written down could not really constitute good reasons for assenting to those propositions. If it did (so the objection would run), reading what I had written on those pages would convert intelligent agnostics, atheists, and Muslims to Christianity—or would at least force them into a state of doublethink or intellectual crisis or cognitive dissonance. Perhaps that’s right. If it is, then among my reasons there must be some that can’t be communicated—or I lack the skill to communicate them—, like my reasons for believing that Jane is angry: something about the corners of her mouth and the pitch of her voice, which I can’t put into words.²

I read the paper that contained this passage at a conference on philosophy and New Testament criticism at Notre Dame University, and Bas van Fraassen, who was in the audience, told me afterward that he did not think that I could find it as easy to write down “my reasons for assenting to these propositions” as I supposed. I had to admit that it was possible that he was right. To this day, I am not sure. But I am now going to put the matter to the test.

Let me begin with a fact about philosophy. Philosophers do not agree about anything to speak of. And why not? How can it be that equally intelligent and well-trained philosophers can disagree about the freedom of the will or nominalism or the covering-law model of scientific explanation when each is aware of all of the arguments and distinctions and other relevant consider-

ations that the others are aware of? How can we philosophers possibly regard ourselves as justified in believing anything of philosophical significance under these conditions? How can I believe (as I do) that free will is incompatible with determinism or that unrealized possibilities are not physical objects or that human beings are not four-dimensional things extended in time as well as in space when David Lewis—a philosopher of truly formidable intelligence and insight and ability—rejects these things I believe and is aware of and understands perfectly every argument that I could bring in their defense?

Well, I *do* believe these things. And I believe that I am justified in believing them. And I am confident that I am right. But how can I take these positions? I don't know. That is itself a philosophical question, and I have no firm opinion about its correct answer. I suppose my best guess is that I enjoy some sort of philosophical insight that, for all his other merits, is somehow denied to Lewis. And this would have to be an insight that is incommunicable—at least I don't know how to communicate it—for I have done all I can to communicate it to Lewis, and he has understood perfectly everything I have said, and he has not come to share my conclusions. But maybe my best guess is wrong. I'm confident about only one thing in this area: The question must have some good answer. For not only do my beliefs about these questions seem to me to be undeniably *true*, but (quite independently of any consideration of which theses it is that seem to me to be true), I don't want to be forced into a position in which I accept no philosophical thesis of any consequence. Let us call this unattractive position "philosophical skepticism." (Note that I am not using this phrase in its usual sense of "comprehensive and general skepticism based on philosophical argument.") I think that any philosopher who does not wish to be a philosophical skeptic—I know of no philosopher who *is* a philosophical skeptic—must agree with me that this question has some good answer. Whatever the reason, it must be possible for one to have good and sufficient reasons for accepting a philosophical thesis when there are philosophers who, by all objective and external criteria, are at least equally well qualified to pronounce on that thesis and who reject it.

Will someone say that philosophy is a special case? Perhaps because nothing really hangs on philosophical questions, and a false or unjustified philosophical opinion is therefore harmless? Or because philosophy is in some sense not about matters of empirical fact? As to the first of these two suggestions, I think it is false that nothing hangs on philosophical questions. What people have believed about the philosophical theses advanced by—for example—Plato, Locke, and Marx has had profound effects on history. I don't know what the world would be like if everyone who ever encountered philosophy immediately became, and thereafter remained, a philosophical skeptic, but I'm willing to bet it would be a vastly different world.

The second suggestion is trickier. Its premise is not that it doesn't make any difference what people believe about philosophical questions; it's rather that the world would look exactly the same whether any given philosophical thesis was true or false. I think that that's a dubious assertion, but rather than address it, I will simply change the subject.

Let us consider politics.

Almost everyone will admit that it makes a difference what people believe about politics, and it would be absurd to say that propositions like "Capital punishment is an ineffective deterrent" or "Nations that do not maintain a strong military capability actually increase the risk of war" are not about matters of empirical fact. And yet people disagree about these propositions (and scores of others of equal importance), and their disagreements about them bear a disquieting resemblance to the disagreements of philosophers about nominalism and free will and the covering-law model. That is, their disagreements are matters of interminable debate, and impressive authorities can be found on both sides of many of the interminable debates.

It is important to realize that this feature of philosophy and politics is not a universal feature of human discourse. It is clear, for example, that someone who believes in astrology believes in something that is simply indefensible. It would be hard to find a philosopher who believed that every philosopher who disagreed with his or her position on nominalism held a position that was indefensible in the same way that a belief in astrology was indefensible. It might be easier to find someone who held the corresponding position about disputed and important political questions. I suspect that there really are people who think that those who disagree with them about the deterrent effect of capital punishment or the probable consequences of unilateral disarmament are not only mistaken but hold beliefs that are indefensible in the way that a belief in astrology is indefensible. I can only say that I regard this attitude as ludicrous. On each side of many interminably debated political questions—it is not necessary to my argument to say *all*—one can find well-informed (indeed, immensely learned) and highly intelligent men and women who adhere to the very highest intellectual standards. And this is simply not the case with debates about astrology.

Everyone who is intellectually honest will admit this. And yet, few will react to this state of affairs by becoming political skeptics, by declining to have any political beliefs that are undisputed by reputable authorities. But how can this rejection of political skepticism be defended? How can responsible political thinkers believe that the Syndicalist Party is the last, best hope for Ruritania when they know full well that there are well-informed (even immensely learned) and highly intelligent people who argue vehemently—all the while adhering to the highest intellectual standards—that a Syndicalist government would be the ruin of Ruritania? Do the friends of Syndicalism claim to see gaps in the arguments of their opponents, "facts" that they have cited that are not really facts, real facts that they have chosen not to mention, a hidden agenda behind their opposition to Syndicalism? No doubt they do. Nevertheless, if they are intelligent and intellectually honest, they will be aware that if these claims were made in public debate, the opponents of Syndicalism would probably be able to muster a very respectable rebuttal. The friends of Syndicalism will perhaps be confident that they could effectively meet the points raised in this rebuttal, but, if they are intelligent and intellectually honest, they will be aware . . . and so, for all practical purposes, *ad infinitum*.

I ask again: What could it be that justifies us in rejecting political skepticism? How can I believe that my political beliefs are justified when these beliefs are rejected by people whose qualifications for engaging in political discourse are as impressive as David Lewis's qualifications for engaging in philosophical discourse? These people are aware of (at least) all the evidence and all the arguments that I am aware of, and they are (at least) as good at evaluating evidence and arguments as I. How, then, can I maintain that the evidence and arguments I can adduce in support of my beliefs actually justify these beliefs? If this evidence and these arguments are capable of that, then why aren't they capable of convincing these other people that these beliefs are correct? Well, as with philosophy, I am inclined to think that I must enjoy some sort of incommunicable insight that the others, for all their merits, lack. I am inclined to think that "the evidence and arguments I can adduce in support of my beliefs" do not constitute the totality of my justification for these beliefs. But all that I am willing to say for sure is that *something* justifies me in rejecting political skepticism, or at least that it is *possible* that something does: that the conclusion that one is not justified in holding any "controversial" political beliefs is not a necessary truth.

Now let us turn to questions of religion. Is religion different from philosophy and politics in the respects we have been discussing? It is an extremely popular position that religion is different. Or, at least, it must be that many antireligious philosophers and other writers hostile to religious belief hold this position, for it seems to be presupposed by almost every aspect of their approach to the subject of religious belief. And yet, this position seems never to have been explicitly stated, much less argued for. Let us call it the Difference Thesis. A good example of the Difference Thesis at work is provided by W. K. Clifford's famous essay "The Ethics of Belief."³ One of the most interesting facts about "The Ethics of Belief" is that nowhere in it is religious belief explicitly mentioned.⁴ It would, however, be disingenuous in the extreme to say that this essay is simply about the ethics of belief in general and is no more directed at religious belief than at any other kind of belief. "Everyone knows," as the phrase goes, that Clifford's target is religious belief. (Certainly the editors of anthologies know this. "The Ethics of Belief" appears in just about every anthology devoted to the philosophy of religion. It has never appeared in an anthology devoted to epistemology.) The real thesis of Clifford's essay is that religious beliefs—belief in God; belief in an afterlife; belief in the central historical claims of Judaism or Christianity or Islam—are always or almost always held in ways that violate the famous ethico-epistemic principle: It is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence. If, moreover, he is of the opinion that beliefs in any other general category are always or almost always (or typically or rather often) held in ways that violate his principle, this is certainly not apparent.

Let us call this principle—"It is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone . . ."—Clifford's Principle. It is interesting to note that Clifford's Principle is almost never mentioned except in hostile examinations of religious belief, and that the antireligious writers who mention it never apply it to anything but

religious beliefs. (With the exception of illustrative examples—like Clifford's example of the irresponsible shipowner—that are introduced in the course of explaining its content.) It is this that provides the primary evidence for my contention that many antireligious philosophers and other writers against religion tacitly accept the Difference Thesis. The fact that they apply Clifford's Principle only to religious beliefs is best explained by the assumption that they accept the Difference Thesis. The cases of Marxism and Freudianism are instructive examples of what I am talking about. It is easy to point to philosophers who believe that Marxism and Freudianism are nonsense: absurd parodies of scientific theories that get the real world wildly wrong. Presumably these philosophers do not believe that Marxism and Freudianism were adequately supported by the evidence that was available to Marx and Freud—or that they are adequately supported by the evidence that is available to any of the latter-day adherents of Marxism and Freudianism. But never once has any writer charged that Marx or Freud blotted his epistemic escutcheon by failing to apportion belief to evidence. I challenged anyone to find me a passage (other than an illustrative passage of the type I have mentioned) in which any devotee of Clifford's Principle has applied it to anything but religious belief. And yet, practically all philosophers—the literature will immediately demonstrate this to the most casual inquirer—subscribe to theses an obvious logical consequence of which is that the world abounds in gross violations of Clifford's Principle that have nothing to do with religion.

An explanation of the widespread tacit acceptance of the Difference Thesis is not far to seek. If Clifford's Principle were generally applied in philosophy (or in politics or historiography or even in many parts of the natural sciences), it would have to be applied practically everywhere. If its use became general, we'd all be constantly shoving it in one another's faces. And there would be no comfortable reply open to most of the recipients of a charge of violating Clifford's Principle. If I am an archaeologist who believes that an artifact found in a Neolithic tomb was a religious object used in a fertility rite, and if my rival, Professor Graves, believes that it was used to wind flax, how can I suppose that my belief is supported by the evidence? If my evidence really supports my belief, why doesn't it convert Professor Graves, who is as aware of it as I am, to my position? If we generally applied Clifford's Principle, we'd all have to become agnostics as regards most philosophical and political questions, or we'd have to find some reasonable answer to the challenge: "In what sense can the evidence you have adduced support or justify your belief when there are many authorities as competent as you who regard it as unconvincing?" But no answer to this challenge is evident, and religion seems to be the only area of human life in which very many people are willing to be agnostics about the answers to very many questions.

It might, however, be objected that what I have been representing as obvious considerations are obvious only on a certain conception of the nature of evidence. Perhaps the Difference Thesis is defensible because the evidence that some people have for their philosophical and political (and archaeological and historiographical . . .) beliefs consists partly of the deliverances of that

incommunicable “insight” that I speculated about earlier. This objection would seem to be consistent with everything said in “The Ethics of Belief,” for Clifford nowhere tells his readers what evidence is. If “evidence” is evidence in the courtroom or laboratory sense (photographs, transcripts of sworn statements, the pronouncements of expert witnesses, tables of figures), then “the evidence” pretty clearly does not support our philosophical and political beliefs. Let such evidence be eked out with logical inference and private sense experience and the memory of sense experience (my private experience and my memories, as opposed to my testimony about my experience and memories, cannot be entered as evidence in a court of law or published in *Physical Review Letters*, but they can be part of my evidence for my beliefs—or so the epistemologists tell us), and it still seems to be true that “the evidence” does not support our philosophical and political beliefs. It is not that such evidence is impotent: It can support—I hope—many life-and-death courtroom judgments and such scientific theses as that the continents are in motion. But it does not seem to be sufficient to justify most of our philosophical and political beliefs, or our philosophical and political beliefs, surely, would be far more uniform than they are. If “evidence” must be of the courtroom-and-laboratory sort, how can the Difference Thesis be defended?

If, however, “evidence” can include “insight” or some other incommunicable element—my private experience and my memories are not necessarily incommunicable—it may be that some of the philosophical and political beliefs of certain people are justified by the evidence available to them. But if evidence is understood in this way, how can anyone be confident that some of the religious beliefs of some people are not justified by the evidence available to them? If evidence can include incommunicable elements, how can anyone be confident that all religious believers are in violation of Clifford’s Principle? If “evidence” can include the incommunicable, how can the Difference Thesis be defended?

All that I have said so far in this section amounts to a polemic against what I perceive as a widespread double standard in writings about the relation of religious belief to evidence and argument. This double standard consists in setting religious belief a test it could not possibly pass, and in studiously ignoring the fact that almost none of our beliefs on any subject could possibly pass this test.

I ask the reader to abandon this double standard. I ask the reader not to demand that my arguments meet standards modeled on courtroom rules of evidence or the editorial requirements of the *Journal of Molecular Biology*.

In the sequel, I will present some arguments for the Christian faith. To set out these arguments, in my judgment, is to present those who attend to them with good reasons for accepting that faith. The arguments will almost certainly not convince anyone, but then such arguments as I might give for the truth or falsity of nominalism or regarding the deterrent powers of capital punishment would almost certainly not convince anyone either. It is often said that you can’t argue people into faith. Well, I don’t want to *dispute* that statement, but I do want to deprecate the idea that it is something worth saying. What *can* you argue

people into? Faith—Christian faith, that is—is believing what the church says (and continuing to believe it even when it is under the sort of “night in the graveyard” attack that I tried to describe in the preceding section). Would anyone say that you can’t argue people into believing Plato’s account of the trial of Socrates or into believing what the Democratic Party says about the superiority of its platform to that of the Republicans? I suppose that there is an element of truth in these two statements—argument is rarely coercive; in most areas of life, the best argument does not guarantee converts, even among the ideally rational—but argument is hardly irrelevant to the question whether one should believe the statements of Plato and the Democrats. In point of fact, no one ever does say things like this. The fact that people go about saying that you can’t argue people into faith, and saying this as if it were an intelligent thing to say, is simply one more example of the double standard that I have been attacking.

There are several things I am not going to discuss that I might be expected to discuss in connection with arguments for the Christian faith.

I am not going to discuss “arguments for the existence of God.” Although I think that some versions of two of these arguments—the Design Argument and the Cosmological Argument—are as good as any philosophical argument that has ever been presented for any conclusion, I don’t think that they have any more to do with my religious beliefs than, say, arguments for the existence of other minds have to do with my belief that my wife would never lie to me or my belief that democracy is a good thing. (I am going to touch on some matters related to the Design Argument, but I am in no sense going to *defend* that argument.)

I am not going to discuss “the problem of evil.” I have said what I have to say on this topic elsewhere.⁵ I have always regarded the problem of evil as simply one more philosophical problem: Every important system of belief raises philosophical problems, and the problem of evil is one that is raised by all religions that are founded on belief in a loving and all-powerful God. I think, of course, that what I have said in response to this problem is right. But that’s a mere philosophical opinion. On a religious level, my belief is simply that there are good reasons for the evils we see in the world—and that this would be true even if everything I have said on the subject is worthless. If I may interject an autobiographical note at this point, I will mention that I have never had the least tendency to react to the evils of the world by saying, “How *could* there be a loving God who allows these things?” My immediate emotional reaction has rather been: “There *must* be a God who will wipe away every tear; there *must* be a God who will repay.” (Or this has been my reaction as a believer. I don’t think that as an unbeliever I had any sort of emotional reaction to the evils of the world.)

I am not going to discuss Christian mysteries—the Trinity, the Incarnation, the Eucharist, the Atonement. I have discussed two of these elsewhere,⁶ but, on the religious level, my belief is that these apparently impossible things are real and are therefore possible. Christian mysteries are News, and the recipients of news are not always in a position to understand it perfectly. I believe

that in relation to the Christian mysteries, we Christians are like people who have never seen a mirror, or even a reflection in a pond, trying to grasp the nature of a mirror from listening to one of their fellows who has been shown a looking glass by a traveler. Perhaps the closest analogy the observer of the mirror can find is provided by pictures scratched in the sand: "A 'mirror' is a kind of flat plate that shows pictures like the ones we scratch in the sand, but they're three-dimensional—looking at a mirror is almost like looking through a window, even though the mirror has hardly any thickness and you just see an ordinary surface if you turn it round and look at the back—and they're in color, and they're absolutely perfect pictures (except that they're backward), and they change and move just the way real things do, and the mirror always shows pictures of the things right in front of it." One can easily imagine the conceptual havoc a skeptical philosopher among these people could wreak on this attempt at description. Nevertheless, considering the situation of the speaker and his audience, it's a good, practical description of a mirror. (It would, for example, almost certainly enable someone who had never seen a mirror to recognize a mirror on his first encounter with one.) In my view, credal descriptions of the Trinity and the Incarnation are good, practical descriptions of real things, descriptions that will do till we no longer see through a glass darkly. I am confident that they are at least as good as descriptions of curved space or the wave-particle duality in works of popular science.

I do not propose to say anything about religions other than Christianity. I have discussed this topic elsewhere and I have nothing more to say about it.⁷

I do not propose to discuss miracles and questions about the believability of reports of events that are contrary to the laws of nature. This is an important subject and one that I certainly should say something about, given the nature of my topic, but I do not have the space. If I had had sufficient foresight, I should already have written an essay on miracles that I could refer you to. Sorry.

Now, finally . . .

Each of us accepts certain authorities and certain traditions. You may think that you are an epistemic engine that takes sensory input (that "fancifully fanciless medium of unvarnished news") and generates assignments of probabilities to propositions by means of a set of rules that yields the most useful (useful for dealing with the future stream of sensory input) probability assignments in most possible worlds. In fact, however, you trust a lot of people and groups of people and—within very broad limits—believe what they tell you. And this is not because the epistemic engine that is yourself has processed a lot of sensory data and, in consequence, assigned high probabilities to propositions like "Dixy Lee Ray is a reliable source of information on ecological matters" or "Most things that the *Boston Globe* says about the homeless are true." You may have done some of that, but you haven't had time to do very much of it.

As regards questions about the nature of the world as a whole and the place

of humanity in the world, it is statistically very likely that you trust one or the other of two authorities: the Church or the Enlightenment. (But some readers of this essay will trust the Torah or the Koran or even—I suppose this is remotely possible—a person or book that claims access to some occult, esoteric wisdom.) What I propose to do in the sequel is to explain why I, who once trusted the Enlightenment, now trust the Church.

There is, I believe, an identifiable and cohesive historical phenomenon that named itself the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century and which, although it long ago abandoned the name, still exists. Like the Church, it does not speak with one voice. Like the Church, it has no central government. Like the Church, it is made up of many groups, some of which heartily detest many of the others—some of which, indeed, regard themselves as its sole true representatives and all others who claim to be its representatives as wolves in sheep's clothing. Like the Church, it has a creed, although, unlike the Church's creeds, its creed has never received an official formulation.⁸ But that is a minor point. Its creed can be written down, and here it is:

There is no God. There is, in fact, nothing besides the physical cosmos that science investigates. Human beings, since they are a part of this cosmos, are physical things and therefore do not survive death. Human being are, in fact, animals among other animals and differ from other animals only in being more complex. Like other animals, they are a product of uncaring and unconscious physical processes that did not have them, or anything else, in mind. There is, therefore, nothing external to humanity that is capable of conferring meaning or purpose on human existence. In the end, the only evil is pain and the only good is pleasure. The only purpose of morality and politics is the minimization of pain and the maximization of pleasure. Human beings, however, have an unfortunate tendency to wish to deny these facts and to believe comforting myths according to which they have an eternal purpose. This irrational component in the psyches of most human beings—it is the great good fortune of the species that there are a few strong-minded progressives who can see through the comforting myths—encourages the confidence game called religion. Religions invent complicated and arbitrary moral codes and fantastic future rewards and punishments in order to consolidate their own power. Fortunately, they are gradually but steadily being exposed as frauds by the progress of science (which was invented by strong-minded progressives), and they will gradually disappear through the agency of scientific education and enlightened journalism.

Various Enlightenment “denominations” such as Marxism or Positivism or Freudianism or Social Darwinism would insist that this statement of the Enlightenment creed omits certain extremely important propositions—even propositions that are absolutely crucial to an understanding of the world and humanity’s place in the world. But I have tried simply to capture the highest common factor of the various schools of thought that compose the Enlightenment—the Apostles’ Creed of the Enlightenment, as it were.

The Enlightenment has had its chance with me, and I have found it wanting. I was once one of its adherents, and now I am an apostate. On the level of intellectual argument and evidence, it leaves a lot to be desired. And its social consequences have been horrible.

I am going to compare the attractiveness of the Church and the Enlightenment. I will group my comparisons into three parts. First, it seems to me, the teachings of the Church are, as I shall say, “congruent” with the facts of science and history in a way that the “creed” of the Enlightenment is not, and I shall discuss this. Secondly, I shall compare the “fruits” of the Church with the fruits of the Enlightenment. Thirdly, I shall compare the effects of adherence to the Church and to the Enlightenment in the lives of individuals.

The first matter for discussion is congruency.

The preferred universe of the Enlightenment was constructed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It is infinite in space and time, and it consists entirely of matter in motion. This universe was incompatible with the content of nineteenth-century science, even at the beginning of the century, and science became less and less hospitable to it as the century progressed. Nevertheless, this universe—that is, this picture of the universe—persisted in the popular imagination (which is what it was designed for) throughout the century, and it can be found in some circles even today. Today this picture is simply impossible. Present-day science gives us a universe that began to exist a specific number of years ago and may well be spatially finite; it is, moreover, governed by laws that contain a lot of apparently arbitrary numbers, and if these numbers were only a bit different, there would be no life: Only a vanishingly small region in the space of all possible sets of physical laws is occupied by sets of laws that permit the existence of life, and the one universe there is governed by a set of laws that falls within that minuscule region. It is, of course, possible to explain these things in terms other than those of theism. My point is that the Christian is right at home in such a universe, whereas the adherent of the Enlightenment would much prefer the universe of nineteenth-century popular science. That, after all, is the universe that was constructed by the imagination of the Enlightenment when the facts still allowed that imagination free play. But it is the universe that was constructed to fit the imaginations of Christians (unless its source was actually in divine revelation) that turned out to be consistent with what science has discovered. (Let’s hear nothing about “fundamentalism.” Some Christians are fundamentalists, and are consequently unhappy with the universe of modern cosmology. But fundamentalism is one of the accidents of Christianity, not a part of its essence. If St. Thomas Aquinas was a fundamentalist in the current sense

of the word, St. Augustine was not. And Aquinas, when he discusses Augustine’s thesis that the “six days” of Genesis are a figurative description of six aspects of the created world, simply says that Augustine was wrong; he does not say that Augustine’s views were heretical. A fundamentalist-turned-logical-positivist once called me a wishy-washy theological liberal because I read the book of Genesis in a way that was compatible with modern cosmology. I asked him whether he thought that Augustine was a wishy-washy theological liberal. “Yes,” he said.)

Coming down to more modern times, cosmologically speaking, what the Enlightenment would really like is a universe bursting with life and chock-full of rational species.⁹ But no one knows anything to speak of about the origin of life on the earth except that it is at present one of the great scientific mysteries. There is, therefore, no scientific reason to think that life is something that happens “automatically.” It is pretty certain that there is no life elsewhere in the solar system, and the gleanings of the “Search for Extra-Terrestrial Intelligence” have not been very encouraging to those who would like to think of the Orion Spur (our own little galactic neighborhood) as festooned with technological civilizations like ornaments on the Christmas tree it rather resembles. When these facts are combined with the fact that rationality has evolved only once on the Earth (as opposed to forty times for vision and four for flight; and each of these evolutionary inventions is spread over hundreds of thousands of species, while rationality’s meager score is one), and the fact that this event would not have happened if a comet or asteroid had not happened to cause the mass extinctions of 65 million years ago, it begins to seem unlikely that the Enlightenment will get what it wants in this area. The Christian, on the other hand, is right at home in a universe in which humanity is the only rational species, or is one of a small handful of them.

The Enlightenment would like it if humanity were continuous with other terrestrial animals, or at least very much like some of them. The Enlightenment would like this so much that it has actually managed to convince itself that it is so. It has even managed to convince itself that modern science has proved this. I remember reading a very amusing response made by David Berlinski to Stephen Jay Gould’s statement that modern science was rapidly removing every excuse that anyone had ever had for thinking that we were much different from our closest primate relatives.¹⁰ Berlinski pointed out that you can always make two things sound similar (or “different only in degree”) if you describe them abstractly enough: “What Canada geese do when they migrate is much like what we do when we jump over a ditch: In each case, an organism’s feet leave the ground, it moves through the air, and it comes down some distance away. The difference between the two accomplishments is only a matter of degree.” I am also put in mind of a cartoon Phillip Johnson once showed me: A hostess is introducing a human being and a chimp at a cocktail party. “You two will have a lot to talk about,” she says, “you share 99 percent of your DNA.” I’m sorry if I seem to be making a joke of this, but . . . well, I *am* making of joke of this. I admit it. Why shouldn’t I? The idea that there isn’t a vast, radical difference, a chasm, between human beings and all other

terrestrial species is simply a very funny idea. It's like the idea that Americans have a fundamental constitutional right to own automatic assault weapons. Its consequences apart, it's simply a very funny idea, and there's nothing much one can do about it except to make a joke of it. You certainly wouldn't want to invest much time in an argument with someone who would believe it in the first place.

The Enlightenment has, historically speaking, felt a certain affection for European civilization. (Admittedly, this affection is not what it used to be.) After all, European civilization produced the Enlightenment, so it can't be all bad. Nevertheless, the single greatest factor in the development of European civilization was the Church, so it can hardly be all good either. Best, perhaps, to stress its similarities to other civilizations (no doubt we'd find native "Enlightenments" bravely struggling against the local superstitions in those other civilizations if we looked closely enough) and to ascribe its bad aspects to the Church and its good elements to the Enlightenment or to such "Morning Stars of the Enlightenment" as Roger Bacon and Copernicus. The main problem confronting this Enlightenment strategy is science.

Modern science—the kind of science of which Newton's derivation of Kepler's law of planetary motion is a paradigm—has arisen only once in history. Oh, there has been some observational astronomy here and some attempt at systematic medical knowledge there. The achievements of the Greeks in taking the first steps down the path of science were magnificent, particularly in descriptive astronomy and statics—that is, in scientific studies that were essentially applied geometry. But the Greeks took a few steps down the road of science and faltered.

Here is the story the Enlightenment tells. There would have been a scientific revolution like that of sixteenth-century Europe in the classical world if the biblical literalism and otherworldliness of Christianity had not stifled ancient science and created the Dark Ages. Over a millennium later, science and the scientific method were reborn in the mind of Galileo (or maybe Copernicus had something to do with it). The Church persecuted Galileo, but it failed to kill the infant he had fathered and has been steadily losing ground to science ever since. (If you would like to see this story set out in more detail, consult A. D. White's *History of the Warfare of Science and Theology*.)

I don't want to get into an historical argument. I will simply tell another story, a story that is, in my view, better supported by the evidence. (This view is, of course, the view of an amateur, but I have, I suppose, as much right to it as any follower of the Enlightenment who was not a trained historian of science has had to the story told in the preceding paragraph.¹¹)

Ancient science discovered very little after about the time of the birth of Christ—which amounts to pretty quick work if Christianity stifled ancient science. The modern growth of science did not begin suddenly in the sixteenth century but was continuous with the natural philosophy of the High Middle Ages. (This has been well documented by Pierre Duhem.) There has been little persecution of science by the Church. There is nothing in the history of the relations of science and Christianity that can be compared with the Lysenko

era in Soviet biology or the condition of science in Germany under the Nazis. When one looks carefully at the persecution of Galileo, the debate between Huxley and Bishop Wilberforce, or the Scopes trial, one finds that most of what one thought one had known about them isn't true, and that the real episodes do little to support the Enlightenment picture of a perpetual "warfare of science and theology."

Just as rationality has "happened" only once in the history of terrestrial life (unlike vision or flight), so science has "happened" only once in the history of humanity (unlike writing or the calendar). And the unique occurrence of science—*real* science, which does not stop with precise and systematic descriptions of phenomena but goes on to probe their underlying causes—happened in a civilization that was built upon the Church. The task of explaining why there was no science in India or China developed into something of an industry in the eighteenth century. To someone who shared the values of Voltaire, it was extremely puzzling that "rational" Confucian China, an ancient and settled civilization with a long history of scholarship and a demonstrated capacity for mechanical invention, should never have developed science. The failure of the much admired classical world to develop science in the modern sense could be blamed on Christianity, but what was it to be blamed on in the case of China? After all, science had flowered in monk-ridden Europe, and it could hardly, therefore, be a particularly frail blossom¹²; why, then, not in China? The question was never satisfactorily answered. It has since been largely ignored. Two devices contribute to this. First, there is a tendency to use the word 'science' so broadly that at least some "science" can be found practically anywhere. If this does not solve the problem, it helps to sweep it under the carpet. Secondly, there is a tendency to identify the history of the world with the history of Europe. While this tendency has lately been much deplored by some of the current representatives of the Enlightenment (and rightly so), it has been useful to the Enlightenment, for it enables one to think of the birth of science as something that belongs to the history of "the world" rather than to the history of a particular civilization; since there is only one world, this makes the unique birth of science seem somehow less puzzling.

I would suggest that science is an outgrowth of Western Latin Christianity, connected with it in much the same way as Gothic architecture. (That is, the connections are historical and causal, not logical, and the causation is not inevitable.) I would suggest that the Christian world view of the High Middle Ages produced a mental climate that made the birth of science possible.¹³ (The suggestion has sometimes been made by representatives of the Enlightenment that a belief in miracles is inimical to science. Well, those who actually were responsible for the birth of science—Galileo and Newton, for example—believed in all the miracles of the New Testament. It really is very hard to see how those who believe that, in the normal course of events, nature works by mechanical causes are going to be less effective scientists if they believe that miracles occur at special junctures in what Christians call salvation history—or even that they happen frequently at Lourdes. The real conceptual enemies of science are astrology and magic. There was a very dangerous outbreak of

serious interest in astrology and magic during the Renaissance, which the Church worked very hard to suppress.)

The fact that the single birth of science occurred in Christendom is, therefore, a fact that is not congruent with the creed of the Enlightenment. It must, therefore, either be ignored or explained away by the Enlightenment. Christians, however, will be comfortable with the fact that the single most powerful instrument for understanding the world developed in a culture that had been shaped by (as they believe) a unique revelation of the mind and purposes of the Creator of that world.

I have left what I believe to be the single most important congruency for last.¹⁴

All humans beings are deeply, radically evil. (Are there no exceptions to this generalization? If there are, they are so rare that it is extremely unlikely that you or I have ever met one.) This evil may be only potential, but it is real. (In some cases, it may be comparable to an as yet asymptomatic but deadly and inoperable cancerous tumor.) This fact can be hard for the citizens of a truly civilized society to realize, for it is the business of civilization to train people from birth not even to deliberate about certain acts. (We do not want our fellows to regard murder as a matter for rational deliberation.) It is, moreover, the business of civilization to attempt so to arrange matters that if any individual *does* regard rape or murder or fraud or bearing false witness as a matter for deliberation, the contemplated act be fairly obviously unprofitable. But human history shows that the viewpoint of civilized people is parochial. It shows, moreover, that civilization is not necessarily a stable condition and that people who live in a civilized society have no right to expect that their great-grandchildren—or they themselves in their old age—will live in a civilized society.

The Christian doctrine of original sin comprises an etiology, a diagnosis, and a prognosis. I will mention only the diagnosis and one-half of the prognosis: We are deeply, radically evil, and this condition is unalterable by any natural means. The Enlightenment, of course, does not accept this thesis. The Enlightenment holds either that human beings are naturally good or that they are neither good nor bad but simply infinitely malleable. In either case, the horrible way that human beings treat one another is regarded as a social artifact, and as therefore eliminable, or at least reducible to tolerable proportions, by some form or other of social reorganization. This reorganization (whose nature representatives of the Enlightenment discover by thinking very hard about how society should be organized) will, as the case may be, allow the natural goodness of human beings to flourish or mold them into a form in which they will behave only in desirable ways. The reorganization is humanly possible, and when it has been achieved, it will be stable. Rousseau and B. F. Skinner represent this point of view in its purest, most innocent form (innocent, that is, of contact with reality). But there are much shrewder thinkers who hold it in some recognizable form. It is not clear to me how anyone could ever actually have held such a position, but that anyone could hold it in the late twentieth century is believable only because there it is, right before our eyes.

The Christian is able to have a realistic view of the human past and present. The representative of the Enlightenment cannot. (At any rate, most of them *don't*. I concede that a few of the people who have described themselves as “humanists” have had a realistic view of human nature. But they have never been listened to by the body of the Enlightenment.) It is extremely unfortunate that some Christians have abandoned the doctrine of original sin. As someone, Chesterton perhaps, remarked, they have abandoned the only Christian dogma that can actually be empirically proved. (True as regards the diagnosis and one-half of the prognosis, at any rate.)

The Christian is also able to have a realistic view of himself or herself. As one Christian writer of the present century remarked, “We are none of us very nice.” When I look back on the days of my allegiance to the Enlightenment, I discover that this allegiance was primarily a device to assist me in admiring myself. I still admire myself, I’m afraid, but at least I have silenced the voice of one flatterer. (“How intelligent you are,” the Enlightenment would whisper in my ear, “how progressive, how, well, *enlightened*.”) It may well be that not every adherent of the Enlightenment has used it that way; I do not claim to be able to look into the souls of the living, much less the long dead. But to read such Enlightenment figures as Hume or Voltaire with Christian eyes is to see every possible opportunity for self-admiration taken; and Voltaire and Hume, like me in my own Enlightenment days, do not seem even to be able to get on with the business of self-admiration without perpetual sneers at “milkmaids” (Voltaire)—that is, at the great mass of people who keep the wheels turning while the Enlightenment sips its chocolate and peers at them through its quizzing glass. (The eighteenth-century Enlightenment—the Enlightenment proper, so to call it—no doubt hated kings and priests just as it said it did, but its real driving negative emotion was contempt for subjects and churchgoers. This is still true of the current representatives of the Enlightenment, *mutatis mutandis*.) I must admit, however, that I am not in a position to feel too terribly superior to Voltaire and Hume and my own past self. In theory, I accept the words of the hymn: “Foul I to thy fountain fly/Wash me Saviour, or I die.” In practice, of course, I mostly think I’m a pretty fine fellow. (I mean, I not only have all my native niceness, but I’m *religious* as well.¹⁵) But I’m sorry. Or I’m sorry I’m not sorry. And this is simple realism, however disinclined my heart may be to follow my head in this realism. The Enlightenment seems to be incapable of such realism.

I will now turn to my second kind of argument. “By their fruits ye shall know them,” said Jesus. He was, perhaps, referring only to preachers and the doctrines they preached, but the saying has usually been taken in a more general sense (possibly under the influence of St. Paul on the fruit of the Spirit), and that is the way I shall take it.

I have mentioned one of the “fruits” of the Church: modern science. (I remind the Christian reader that I am at this point discussing only things whose existence would be admitted by a non-Christian.) There are others. One might mention democracy (we must remember that no Greek *polis*, if it existed today, would be described as a democracy), the concept of universal

human rights and its embodiment in working constitutions, and the rule of law (law as opposed both to the momentary will of the sovereign and to unalterable custom). Like science, these things are, according to the Enlightenment, inventions of the Enlightenment. But they arose in Christian nations, and the individuals who contributed to their development were mostly Christians. I concede that the debt owed by all who cherish these things to certain representatives of the Enlightenment is very great. Thomas Jefferson certainly comes to mind. (If anti-Christians can admire certain Christians—St. Francis, for example—despite the fact that they were Christians, I suppose it is allowable for me to admire certain representatives of the Enlightenment like Jefferson, despite their allegiance to the Enlightenment.) In fact, however, those Enlightenment figures who actually contributed to the development of those benign social institutions that are among Europe's greatest inventions were very imperfectly and selectively de-Christianized. If you want to see the social fruits of the Enlightenment in their pure form, you must look at the contributions to history of those who had consciously and decisively separated themselves from the Christian tradition and who based their political activities solely on Enlightenment theories. There is no point in looking at people like Tom Paine and Karl Marx, who never actually held the reins of political power, for there is no way of determining how they would have used the forces of coercion that power places at one's disposal when they were faced with recalcitrant political reality. I would suggest Robespierre and Lenin as instructive examples.

The Enlightenment makes much of the suffering and death caused by the awful things Christians have done—the Crusades and the Inquisition seem to be the standard examples, although if I were to give the Enlightenment advice on how to conduct its case, I would suggest that it pay more attention to the Thirty Years' War. But with whatever justification these things can be ascribed to the Christian religion, such episodes as the Terror of the 1790s, the Great Terror of the 1930s, and Pol Pot's experiment in social engineering in the 1970s can with the same justification be ascribed to the Enlightenment. And these caused thousands of times as many deaths and incomparably greater suffering than all of the pogroms and religious wars in the history of Europe. The Crusades et al. were quite ordinary episodes in the immemorial string of crimes that mainly compose what the world calls history and what St. Paul called this present darkness. The French Revolution was, as Burke was the first to realize, something new, a new kind of horror. The new kind of horror did not, of course, really hit its stride till about seventy years ago. Let no one say that I have blamed the great post-Christian horrors of the last two centuries on the Enlightenment. My claim is this: Lay out an argument for the conclusion that responsibility for the crimes of the Crusaders and the Inquisition is to be laid at the door of Christianity, and I will produce a parallel argument of about equal merit—not very great, in my opinion—for the conclusion that responsibility for the crimes of the Committee of Public Safety, the Soviet Communist Party, and the Khmer Rouge is to be laid at the door of the Enlightenment.

Whether or not the Enlightenment is responsible for the French Revolution and Pol Pot, it has nothing positive to offer humanity. It cannot legitimately claim to be the author of science or democracy, and its creed leaves only an aching emptiness at the spiritual level. In matters of the spirit, it bakes no bread. In its attempts to undermine Christian belief, it has opened the door to all manner of substitutes that are, by its own standards—standards it has borrowed from the Church; it cannot create standards, but can only edit the standards that the Church has made common currency—even worse than Christianity. The cult of nation-state, Naziism, Satanism, "the jargon of authenticity," New Age fluff, and what is this year called "theory" in literature departments have rushed in to fill the vacuum in the human heart that the Enlightenment has created. As Chesterton remarked, when people stop believing in God, they are not going to start believing in nothing; they are going to start believing in everything. In the end, the Enlightenment cannot survive; even if (by the standards of the world) it should destroy the Church, what replaces the Church at the social and cultural level will destroy the Enlightenment. Saturn's children will devour him. Those who doubt this should reflect on the actual fate of liberal humanism under Hitler or on the probable fate of liberal humanism under a politically established Age of Aquarius or under a triumphalist reign of "theory" in the universities.

Finally, I wish to consider the effects of the Church on individual lives. Here I must be brief, for there is no way that I can convey the evidence I am in possession of to you. I am, therefore, not talking about things whose existence is uncontroversial, although it is also true that I shall not be asserting the existence of anything that is in principle incompatible with the Enlightenment world view.

There are many atheists I know, old-fashioned atheists of the Enlightenment type, who are singularly impressive people, people whose lives and behavior are worthy of the highest admiration. ("How, then, can you, as a Christian believe that without conversion and repentance these admirable people are lost?" That question is not to the present point, but I will make one brief remark. I would look at the issue raised by this question from the other end: In the fact that even these admirable people cannot justify themselves before God, we see why it is that conversion and repentance are all the more necessary for the rest of us.) But each of these people is impressive in his or her own way. There are Christians I know, however, who are very impressive people, and their impressiveness is of a distinctively Christian sort. A common thread runs through their very diverse lives, and it is a Christian thread. I have never been able to discern an "Enlightenment" thread that runs through the lives of the admirable atheists of my acquaintance. There are five or six Christians I know who, for all the rich individuality of their lives and personalities, are like lamps, each shining with the same dearly familiar, uncreated light that shines in the pages of the New Testament. I can no more doubt this judgment than I can doubt many of my much more everyday sorts of judgment to the effect that this or that person is kind or generous or honest or loving. When one is in the presence of this light—when one so much as listens

to one of these people speak—it is very difficult indeed to believe that one is not in the presence of a living reality that transcends their individual lives. But there is nothing more I can say about this (except perhaps to say that I am sure that the reason I do not see *more* Christians as lamps is to be found in my own limitations; I have no tendency to believe that the people who look this way to me are closer to God than any other Christians are). I mention it only because not to mention it would misrepresent my claims about the reasons I have for being a Christian.

All of the things I have mentioned—congruency, the fruits of the Church, my perception of the lives of some of my Christian friends—are, in the meditation of my heart, woven together into a seamless garment. When I take all of these things into account, it seems to me that I must conclude that the Church speaks with authority. I do not see how anyone could regard the Enlightenment—or any individual Enlightenment “denomination”—as an authoritative voice. Its creed is not congruent with the world we live in, the social consequences of its influence have been disastrous, and it has nothing at all to offer “milkmaids” and nothing but opportunities for self-admiration to offer the intellectual and governing classes. If two voices tell radically different stories about the world and the place of humanity in the world, one speaking with authority and one with a meretricious pretense to authority, it does not follow that the former is right. Maybe no one is right. (The stories are logical contraries, not contradictories.) It is even possible that the meretricious posturer is right. But there is no way to believe only the logical consequences of what is uncontroversial and to believe very much, and no one—unless it were the inhabitants of some asylum—believes only the logical consequences of what is uncontroversial. It seems to me, however, that anyone who believes the Church in the world as it is in a pretty good epistemic position—at any rate, a better epistemic position than anyone else who is actually capable of functioning in the world. Maybe the only people who occupy a defensible epistemic position are skeptics—political and philosophical skeptics as well as religious skeptics. There is no way to show that that thesis is false. If there were, there would be a philosophically adequate refutation of skepticism. I believe, however, that the epistemic position of the Christian is demonstrably superior to any nonskeptical position, and it is for this thesis that I have tried to argue.

I am fully aware that my arguments will convert no one who is a firm adherent of any system of belief incompatible with Christianity. (If anyone who reads this essay thereupon becomes a Christian, that person was already a Christian—as regards propositional belief—when he began to read it; he just wasn’t yet aware of the fact.) As I have pointed out, however, I could do no better with arguments for any controversial philosophical or political thesis—that is, for any philosophical or political thesis that is of any interest or importance.

I do not mean to suggest that my acceptance of the Church as an authority rests on my own unaided rational evaluation of the arguments I have given. No one who believes the Church could take that position, for the Church

teaches that without the help of God, no one comes to Christian belief. But, for all that, the arguments I have given may provide sufficient rational support for (or good reasons for accepting) Christian belief. An argument may provide sufficient rational support for a belief and yet be impotent to produce that belief in some (or all) of those who hear and understand the argument. Almost everyone would admit this as a general truth, whatever disagreements there might be about particular cases. I expect that all readers of this essay will grant that there are arguments that provide sufficient rational support for the following propositions: “Jewish blood cannot be distinguished from Teutonic blood under a microscope”; “The earth is considerably more than 6,000 years old”; “The pyramids are not the work of extraterrestrial beings.” And yet, there are those who have heard the arguments and deny the propositions. What I would say about the arguments that I have given is that, first, these arguments do lend rational support to Christian belief (but this assertion is not a part of my Christian faith; it is merely one of my opinions) and, secondly, I require God’s help to find them convincing—indeed, even to find them faintly plausible. Hume has said, “Mere reason is insufficient to convince us of its [the Christian religion’s] veracity: and whoever is moved by *faith* to assent to it is conscious of a continued miracle in his own person, which subverts all the principles of his understanding, and gives him a determination to believe what is most contrary to custom and experience.” The Christian who ignores Hume’s ironic intent and examines this statement seriously will find that it is very close to the truth in one way and very far from it in another. God’s subversive miracle is indeed required for Christian belief, but what this miracle subverts is not the understanding but the flesh, the old Adam, our continued acquiescence in our inborn tendency to worship at an altar on which we have set ourselves. (For this is what Hume, although he does not know it, really means by “custom and experience.”) And by this miracle the understanding is set free.

Notes

1. I had considerable difficulty with the notion of remarriage. But there is little doubt that both my wife’s first marriage and mine were invalid by the standards of Rome—hers in fact *has* been annulled, in a proceeding instituted by her former husband—and I suppose that there is no point in being more Catholic than the pope.

2. “Critical Studies of the New Testament and the User of the New Testament” in *Hermes and Athena: Biblical Exegesis and Philosophical Theology*, Eleonore Stump and Thomas Flint (eds.) (South Bend, Ind. University of Notre Dame Press, 1993), pp. 159–190. The quoted passage occurs on p. 176f. The paper will be reprinted in my *God, Knowledge, and Mystery: Essays in Philosophical Theology*, forthcoming from Cornell University Press.

3. In *Lectures and Essays* (London: Macmillan, 1879).

4. To be precise, there are a few glancing references to religion in the essay, but the fact that they are references to religion, while it doubtless has its polemical function, is never essential to the point that Clifford is making. Clifford’s ship

owner, it will be remembered, comes to his dishonest belief partly because he puts his trust in Providence. Another of Clifford's illustrative cases is built round an actual Victorian scandal (described in coyly abstract terms: "There was once a certain island in which . . .") involving religious persecution. But in neither case is the proposition that is dishonestly accepted without sufficient evidence a religious or theological proposition.

5. See "The Magnitude, Duration, and Distribution of Evil: A Theodicy," *Philosophical Topics* 16, 2 (1988), pp. 161-187, and "The Problem of Evil, the Problem of Air, and the Problem of Silence," *Philosophical Perspectives* 5 (1991), pp. 135-165. The latter will be reprinted, along with responses to some critics of the paper, in Daniel Howard-Snyder (ed.), *The Evidential Argument from Evil*, forthcoming from Indiana University Press. Both papers will be reprinted in *God, Knowledge, and Mystery*.

6. See "And Yet They Are Not Three Gods But One God," in Thomas V. Morris (ed.), *Philosophy and the Christian Faith* (South Bend, Ind.: Notre Dame University Press, 1988), pp. 241-278, and "Not by Confusion of Substance But by Unity of Person," in a *Festschrift* for Richard Swinburne, edited by Alan Padgett, to be published by Oxford University Press. Both essays will be reprinted in *God, Knowledge, and Mystery*.

7. See "Non Est Hick," in Thomas M. Senior (ed.), *The Rationality of Belief and the Plurality of Faith*. The essay will be reprinted in *God, Knowledge, and Mystery*.

8. See, however, the two "humanist manifestos" issued by the American Humanist Association. They are printed together in *Humanist Manifestoes I and II* (Buffalo, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 1973). They are pretty mealy-mouthed compared with the "creed" in the text, and they are written in the worst sort of academic prose ("the nature of the universe depicted by modern science makes unacceptable any supernatural or cosmic guarantees of human values"), but they come to much the same thing.

9. For evidence that this is what the Enlightenment would really like, see Thomas V. Morris, *The Logic of God Incarnate* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press), pp. 170-181.

10. I am sorry to say that I do not remember where I read this.

11. My amateurish views on the history of science have been deeply influenced by the work of Stanley L. Jaki. I refer the interested reader to his Gifford Lectures, published as *The Road of Science and the Ways to God* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978).

12. But the story about this is somewhat confused. The Enlightenment believed that the young Church had stifled the vigorous adolescent science of antiquity but that the powerful Church of the sixteenth century was unable to dispose of the infant science of its day.

13. I have said something about the way in which (in my view) the Christian world view made the birth of science possible in a note (number 15) to "Non Est Hick."

14. George Mavrodes has presented a very interesting congruency argument in his essay "Religion and the Queerness of Morality," in Robert Audi and William J. Wainwright (eds.), *Rationality, Religious Belief, and Moral Commitment: New Essays in the Philosophy of Religion* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1986), pp. 213-226. Mavrodes' thesis is that Christianity—or, more generally, a certain kind of theism—is congruent with a belief in the reality of moral obligation and that the creed of the Enlightenment is not.

15. I have borrowed this marvelous sentence from a talk I once heard Eleonore Stump give.

SEEK AND YOU

WILL FIND

Michael J. Murray

During the spring of 1983 I began my third semester in college giving serious consideration to the thought of becoming a philosophy major. I had taken a few courses and found the subject intriguing. More influential in my own considerations was the fact that I had recently converted to Christianity and had been encouraged by some early mentors in the faith to read the works of various Christian philosophers, both contemporary and classical. One evening that semester, I was studying for an upcoming exam when a friend, John, came to the door. From the look on his face, I knew he was after something; what, I wasn't sure. I had known John since arriving at college, having met him at the Christian Fellowship meetings on campus. John had grown up in a devoutly Christian home and had