

“SAID THE FOOL IN HIS HEART: ‘THERE IS NO GOD’”

In the Nicene Creed as well as in that of the Apostles', Catholics profess their belief in one God, who is the Creator of heaven and earth. The Fourth Lateran Council, which convened in the year 1215, sets forth, in addition to what these Creeds contain, certain facts concerning God's nature and attributes. The Vatican Council, which assembled in the year 1869, after confirming the Lateran declarations, proceeded to state some significant truths regarding God's relation to man and man's relation to God. For having declared that there is "one true and living God, Creator and Lord of heaven and earth, almighty, eternal, immense, incomprehensible, infinite in intelligence, in will and in all perfection"; and that "this one, only, true God, of His own goodness and almighty power . . . created out of nothing . . . both the spiritual and the corporeal creature, to wit, the angelic and the mundane; and afterwards the human creature, as partaking in a sense of both, consisting of spirit and of body,"¹ the Vatican Council, in the following chapter stated that, "holy Mother Church holds and teaches that God, the beginning and end of all things, may be certainly known by the natural light of human reason by means of created things—'for² the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made.'"³ Thus we have it on the infallible authority of the teaching Church that it is possible for man to convince himself, from certain observable things in nature, that an intelligent, supreme Being exists. Among the arguments derived "from observable things in nature" the one most easily grasped by the ordinary mind is commonly called the "argument from design." And there are instances on record of light being brought to minds sunk in the darkness of infidelity, by means of this argument.

For example, it is related that some freethinkers were once dining at the same table with a gentleman of sound learning and deep religious convictions.⁴ Having spent much time in sneer-

¹ Fourth Lateran Council, cap. I de Fide Catholica.

² Vatican Council, cap. II de Revelatione.

³ Romans i, 20.

⁴ Short Answers to Objections. by Rev. L. A. Lambert, Springfield, Mass., 1915.

ing at the idea of a God, the pretended philosophers requested their Christian companion to state his opinion regarding the matter. A clock which stood in the room, was striking just as the Christian was addressed. Pointing to the timepiece he said, "Gentlemen, do you hear the sound of that beautiful clock?" "Yes," they answered. "Well," he continued "the various parts which compose that clock fell together of their own accord and produced that wonderful mechanism. And not only that, but all the parts of the big town clock which regulates this one, also combined themselves by pure chance and so made it. Nor is that all; there is a still bigger clock than any of these. It is the town clock for all towns; one in fact which regulates all timepieces. They call it the clock of the universe. Its great dial is the sun, which appears morning after morning quickening whole nations into activity and directing the world. And yet there are some people so foolish as to say that even it is the result of chance." The would-be infidels were silent. The speaker then pointed out to them that just as it would be unreasonable to say that even the smallest watch could exist and keep time without a watchmaker, so it would be incomparably more absurd to assert that the earth, moon and stars could exist and continue to play their parts in the wonderful sidereal system, with their accustomed regularity and perfection, without the work and guidance of an almighty Master's hand. Whereupon the freethinkers, it is said, made frank admission that the way they had been viewing the matter was not in accordance with the rules of common sense. A brief consideration of the marvelous ordering of the planets, of the transcendent harmoniousness of their actions and interactions and of the stupendous scale of their operations, had convinced the scoffers that no other explanation could logically be offered than to say that an intelligent Being must exist who governs all by His infinite power. Reflection for but a few moments on much matters had satisfied their minds that

Before man laughed or wept or was,
The one eternal, unmade Cause
Had fashioned forms which dotted space
And testified before His Face
That they were governed by His laws.

In a general way let us contemplate a little further the firmamental system, basing our observations on both our own personal experience and the statements of trustworthy scientists

of the astronomical world.⁵ On a bright night one can behold with the naked eye some 4,000 fixed stars.⁶ The number increases in proportion as one uses telescopes or even ordinary opera glasses with lenses of greater size. The telescope in use in the Lick Observatory at Mt. Hamilton, California, whose lens is three feet in diameter, enables one to gaze at 100,000,000 stars. This number however by no means represents all existing stellar bodies. A modern astronomical writer says: "The total number of stars is to be counted by the hundreds of millions."⁷ Bayne in "The Pith of Astronomy" tells us that about 20,000 stars are known to exist for every one we can see with the unaided eye.⁸ All the fixed stars which the telescope discloses are much larger than the earth, which, as we know, is 8,000 miles in diameter. As a matter of fact the earth, mighty though it be in itself, is a very insignificant and inglorious little speck when compared with many heavenly orbs that astronomers have become acquainted with, by means of powerful, scientific instruments. The earth revolves on its axis every twenty-four hours and encircles the sun once in every three-hundred and sixty-five days. While doing this it is at an average distance of 93,000,000 miles from the sun. The moon, our satellite, has been called our next-door neighbor, being separated from us by the paltry span of 240,000 miles. Besides rotating on its axis, which it does every twenty-seven and one-third days, the moon keeps revolving around the earth in about the same length of time. It is due to the approximate identity of these two periods that the same side of the moon is continuously presented to our view. The planet in question is said to be a dead cinder, the light it gives us being light reflected from the sun. The moon has no atmosphere and consequently is supposed to have no inhabitants. It serves the earth very materially by purifying the oceans, doing this by causing the periodic entering and receding of the tides. These operations of the earth and moon are carried on with faultless regularity and continuity. The same unerring punctuality marks all known cosmic activities. The earth which, as said above, keeps re-

⁵ Data here used taken chiefly from "Man's place in Visible Creation." By Rev. Fred A. Houck, Chicago, 1915.

⁶ Strictly speaking there are no fixed stars. The term here means the stars beyond the realm of the Solar System.

⁷ Houck, p. 43.

⁸ Bayne, p. 82; Houck, p. 44.

volving about the sun while rotating on its axis, is rushing along at the rate of eighteen and one-half miles per second. Yet it always reaches successive points on scheduled time to the moment; and this not only in its rotational turn but also in the enormous orbit of its greater whirl.

Besides the earth and the moon, and still not so far away as to be among the fixed stars are a number of other planets which are incessantly revolving around the same central sun. Many of them are comparatively small and insignificant like the earth, such as Mars, Venus, Mercury, Eros, and dozens and dozens of others. There are four however which in size are almost incredibly gigantic and are well-nigh ineffable in the astounding circle of their swing. These four are Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus and Neptune. Each of these has its clientele of satellites perpetually clustered about it and each in its own space-spurning orbit periodically rounds an appointed path about the sun—never an instant tardy, never a second too soon. We will obtain a faint notion of the respective sizes of these planets by comparing them with the earth. The last named body is 8,000 miles in diameter. Uranus is 32,000 and Neptune 35,000. Saturn, which was the most distant planet known to the ancient astronomers, but which is now known to be exceeded in distance from the earth by both Uranus and Neptune, has a total diameter of 168,000 miles. This number however includes the additional magnitude of Saturn's thick belt of satellites. Jupiter, the largest of the quartette, has an actual diameter of 86,000 miles, making it 1300 times the size of the globe on which we live. Although Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus and Neptune in their revolutions around the sun, move in the same direction, their orbits are not equidistant from that center. Uranus has an average distance of 1782 million miles from the sun and completes one trip around that body every eighty-four years. Neptune—from the earth the most remote known planet in the solar system—has an average distance from the sun of 2793 million miles. For a single circuit it requires 168 years. One might be led to think that since Neptune consumes nearly a century and three-quarters in making one revolution, it must travel but slowly. Yet by the application of mathematics to these facts we arrive at the further information that during that century and three-quarters Neptune traverses a distance of approximately 17,000 million miles and to accomplish the feat must sweep through space at a rate of more

than three miles per second; which means that it travels twelve times as rapidly as a ball shot from a cannon's mouth. Saturn's mean remoteness from the sun is 886,000 million miles. Once in thirty years it compasses its course. Of the four planets under consideration Jupiter is nearest the sun, being, upon an average, but 483 million miles distant from it. Its period of revolution is a little less than twelve years. The reason why the term “average” or “mean distance” is used here is that the orbits or paths followed by these planets are not perfect circles. At times the planets are much farther removed from the sun than they are at other times.

And the sun itself! In the solar system what a climax do it and its action constitute in the awful ensemble of sidereal effects! Great as are the other planets, wonderful as is their action in scope, in speed and in tireless fidelity to invariable rules, the sun is yet a far more marvelous body. This colossal luminary is 850,000 miles in diameter. Its volume is more than 1,000,000 times that of the earth. Its function is to give heat and light to, and to serve as a center of revolution for its numerous satellites, which owe their governance in a great measure to its attractive and controlling power. And so excellently does the sun perform its function that everything is order and regularity, everything harmony and magnificent routine. How then can reasonable minds avoid the conclusion that an intelligent Designer is responsible for it all? How can some men view the incomprehensible operations of the planets, steadied as these planets are and moving in space without visible support, performing with constancy and minute exactness their stupendous tasks, directed ever by a force unseen—how can men contemplate such things and yet deny that that unseen force is the efficacious will of an infinitely perfect Being whom Christians call their God?

Epicurus of pagan antiquity and many modern materialists have held that the world as we have it, might be ascribed to the chance accretion of eternally-existing atoms. As reasonably, and more reasonably, might we say that the same blind cause placed in their present positions the letters, syllables, words and sentences which go to make up an unabridged dictionary. The effect is too well ordered to admit of its having been brought about by a cause devoid of intellect and free will. In this connection the Angelic Doctor, St. Thomas of Aquin, says that one

way of proving the existence of God is "taken from the governance of the world; for we see that things which lack intelligence, such as natural bodies, act for some purpose, which fact is evident from their acting always or nearly always, in the same way, so as to obtain the best result. Hence it is plain that not fortuitously but designedly, do they achieve their purpose. Whatever lacks intelligence cannot fulfill some purpose unless it is directed by some being endowed with intelligence and knowledge; as the arrow is shot to its mark by the archer. Therefore some intelligent being exists by whom all natural things are ordained towards a definite purpose; and this being we call God."⁹

The same thought is thus expressed by Cicero: "If," he says, "when we enter a house, or a school or a hall of justice, we at once trace the order, method and discipline therein observed to some cause, and conclude that there is some one who commands and to whom obedience is paid; how much more, when we see the wonderful motions and revolutions of such a prodigious number of heavenly bodies, continuing with unimpaired regularity for endless ages, ought we to be convinced that these movements are governed and directed by an intelligent Being."¹⁰

One of Napoleon's officers asked him one day how he could believe in God since he had never seen Him. "Listen and I will tell you" replied the great general: "You say I have talent for war and yet you have never seen that talent. But you know I possess it because my victories prove that it exists and therefore no one calls it into question. But which of my greatest victories can be compared with the wonders of creation, which all bear testimony to the existence of God? What military movements can bear any comparison with the movements of the heavenly bodies? My victories make you believe in me; the wonders of the universe make me believe in God."¹¹ "Tell me" cried a Christian controversialist, "who flung these blazing suns into space and fixed their orbits by immutable laws, and I care not what name you give that power, it will be the God in whom I believe. In defining creative energy, choose your own terms, and whether expressed in the language of savage or scientist, it will spell

⁹ Summa Theologica, I Q 2 a 3.

¹⁰ De natura Deorum L. II. C. V. Cf Our Christian Heritage, Card. Gibbons.

¹¹ Houck, Op. cit. p. 61.

Supreme Intelligence—Omnipotence—and will introduce man to a 'Being whose Power is equal to His Will.'"¹²

Addison beautifully expresses the argument from design when he says:

"The spacious firmament on high,
With all its blue ethereal sky,
And spangled heavens, a shining frame,
Their great Original proclaim.
The unwearied sun, from day to day,
Does his Creator's power display,
And publish forth to every land
The work of an Almighty hand.
Soon as the evening's shades prevail,
The moon takes up the wondrous tale,
And nightly to the listening earth,
Repeats the story of her birth;
Whilst all the stars that round her burn,
And all the planets in their turn,
Confirm the tidings as they roll
And spread the truth from pole to pole.
What though in solemn silence all
Move round this dark terrestrial ball;
What though no real voice sound
Amidst their radiant orbs be found;
In reason's ear they all rejoice
And utter forth in glorious voice,
Forever singing as they shine:
'The Hand that made us is divine.'"¹³

Surely 'twas the fool who said in his heart, "there is no God."¹⁴

¹² C. A. Windle Debate with Ward, Chicago, 1911. Cf "The God Idea" in "Windle's Word Pictures." Chicago, 1919.

¹⁴ Ps. 52, I.

¹³ Works Vol. I Divine Ode p. 202.

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