

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN

Must the Church Surrender to Unbelief?

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The present age is frankly atheistic. Two centuries ago, and even later, when a person thought he must discard the notion that there is a personal God, that He rules the universe, and that He has set up a means of communicating with men, he kept that thought mostly to himself. If the fact became known to others, he was regarded as a sort of curiosity and was pitied by some and detested by most men. Nowadays the person who denies the

8) Praeterquam quod prophetis usitatum est propter certitudinem vaticiniorum res futuras verbis praeteriti temporis exprimere, respectus hic [Jes. 53] habetur ad fructum passionis Christi, qui se ad Vetus Testamentum non minus extendit quam ad Novum, unde agnus dicitur occisus ab origine mundi. Profuit Christi passio, antequam fuit; quid ergo mirum, quod verbis praeteriti temporis ea exprimatur. (J. Gerhard, *Loci*, III.)

9) In the writings of Thucydides and Xenophon everybody would understand the clause τοῦ ἀρνίου τοῦ ἐσφαγμένου ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου to mean: "The Lamb that was slain from the foundation of the world."

10) Duo rehero: Unum, ita ordinata esse verba Apoc. XIII, 8, ut clare testentur, Christum esse occisum ab origine mundi. Et quanquam verborum trajectiones non sunt plane insolentes in codice sacro, tamen eae nunquam admittendae sunt, nisi ubi evidens id urgeat necessitas, quae hic nulla est. Alterum: non posse inscribi homines ab origine mundi libro agni mactati, nisi agnus ab origine sit mactatus. Quocirca si vel maxime admittitur trajectio verborum, quam Sociniani tantopere urgent, incolumis adhuc perstat nostra probatio. (Brochmand, *Systema*, II, p. 208.)

existence of God is not afraid, is even eager, to let men know the fact and takes pride in his denial.

Modern atheism is aggressive. It is out to conquer the world. It points with pride to its achievements. In the Church it is fast demolishing the authority of the Bible and of creeds that appeal to the Bible. In the State it has swept aside the claim of sovereigns that they rule by divine right and has set up the rule of the people. The aristocracy of the classes is made to yield to the democracy of the masses. Vast changes are being introduced in the social relations of men: the old-time home, with the husband the head of the wife and the parents the responsible and respected guardians of their children, is passing away. Marriage is being regarded as an event in biology and, together with its results, as entirely at the option of the individual. The industrial world no longer knows the master mechanic, an expert in his profession, with his apprentices. Slavery, it is said, has been abolished. Commerce no longer tries simply to supply merchandise for known wants, but creates wants which it purposes to supply and by means of psychology develops selling into a fine art and buying by means of the science of economics into mortgaging a person's earning powers, economic possibilities, and opportunities. The modern ideal in education is not the teaching of known facts by a qualified instructor, but the theory of non-restraint, which means standing by and letting the pupil discover facts, with unbounded liberty of choice as to subjects and methods of study. In the arts of music, painting, sculpture, drama, old standards are vanishing under revolutionizing impulses. Just how and to what extent the atheistic tendency of the age connects with these details is by no means plain, but that they are paraded as trophies of atheism and that atheism is becoming militant because of them, no one who has even a superficial knowledge of the modern mind will question.

Modern atheism is intolerant. It has no patience with old beliefs, standards of a past age, established institutions. It wants to disestablish what is settled, and reorganize life on a new basis of its own truths, its own ethics, and its own esthetics. The old order is denounced as superstition, old fogysm, and a bane upon the society of mankind because it checks what is called "progress." Actual persecution of the advocates of the old order is going on; only the instruments of torture applied in former times are not used because the new age has found more exquisite ones.

Now, we have to live in this new world, and some of us find it difficult to adjust themselves to the changed and changing condi-

tions. Some are being shaken in their faith. Can we do nothing to make our life more tolerable? Are there any lessons that we ought to draw for our spiritual life from the present state of affairs?

Three hundred years ago, during similar ravages upon the faith, the General Superintendent of Halle Dr. John Olearius sang, and taught his brethren in the faith to sing:—

*Lass dich keine Furcht verführen,
Wuerd' die Welt gleich umgekehrt.*

(Let no terror e'er seduce you,
Though the world turn upside down.)

In these days, when the world is becoming topsyturvy, there are two outstanding lessons that we may take to heart, with the result that we can look fearlessly at what is going on. Both relate to the use of human reason in the pursuit of the sciences; for it is the sciences, especially natural science, that is bringing on the present condition.

I.

In the first place, we must not underestimate human reason. It is a divine gift. "I believe that God has made me . . . and given me my reason," we confess with Luther, even now, after the Fall. Partly in the human intellect did the divine image in man reside. God has many purposes in thus differentiating between man and His other creatures. Consider only one: man was given the earth to subdue, and he was appointed to labor. There was afterwards added to his labor the element of sorrow, but labor was not abrogated on account of sin, nor was man excused from the task of subduing the earth.

Now, this term "subduing" means "mastering" the earth. Untold wealth of substances, marvelous forces, were stored in the earth, which God gave over to Adam as his field of activity. All these Adam was to learn to understand and to conquer, so as to make them serve his interests.

It was a vast task; it embraced the five continents and the seven seas, what is on the surface of the globe and beneath it; the powers of the elements, the character of the seasons, the virtues of plants, the habits of animals, the qualities of stones and metals, the movements of the heavenly bodies, and millions of details in every department of his pursuits.

It was a task that was to engage many men; therefore God provided, through marriage, for a host of helpers to Adam. The first twain were to be "fruitful and multiply and replenish" the earth, fill it with their offspring. The replenishing process was to

go hand in hand with the subduing process. As the problem of conquering the earth proceeded, it would become more complicated and difficult, requiring the brain and the brawn of many men. There would have to be cooperative effort and division of labor, with specialization of tasks.

Man was started in this task with agriculture. Already in the first generation crop- and cattle-raising were distinct pursuits. Very soon the rural life was exchanged by some for city life, which brought a host of city problems. The use of materials having been discovered, the crafts and industries and arts arose. Building was commenced, which required knowledge of the quality of various building materials, and the knowledge of mathematics to put them properly together. As the race pushed outward from its earliest home, every new land which it entered must have afforded it new fields for study. As men came to a river and finally to the ocean, they learned to swim and to navigate, by man-power and by wind-power. When they came out of the plain, level country into a mountainous country, locomotion and transportation presented new problems.

Necessity, the mother of inventions, and experience, the fruit of long labor, continually contributed towards advancement and improvement. What had been done once in crude style was done better the next time.

The mighty struggle of the divinely appointed lords of the earth, the sea, and the air (Gen. 1, 26) was not limited as regards time when the first men were appointed to it. It was evidently to go on until it should please the almighty Creator, the Ruler of all things, to terminate it just by such a fiat as that by which His sovereign will called things that were not into being. The powers with which He had fitted out His foremost creature, man, were to be employed to their fullest extent, and man's loyalty to his Maker was to be tested to the utmost by the laborious tasks that were laid upon him.

In the duty imposed upon man of subduing the earth is bound up every progress that the race has achieved during six thousand years, every discovery it has made, every lesson it has learned by study and experience. Moreover, whatever still remains unaccomplished in the task of subduing, every advance from past conquests to future ones, every new achievement which may teach man better to understand and more efficiently to exercise his lordship over creation, is likewise embraced in man's primeval duty. There is to be no abatement of effort at these tasks, until God Himself

summons the laborers at the eventide of their lives or at the consummation of the universe to a cessation from their labors, to their rest and reward.

I have so far purposely refrained from a discussion of the blighting effect of sin on man's power to conquer this temporary abode of his, the earth. I purpose to do that later. For the present it is essential to our study that we note three facts:—

First, the original plan of God when He appointed man to the task of conquering the earth was not abrogated by the fall of man into sin, just as little as the divine Law which the sinner had broken was put out of commission by man's first disobedience. The original order: "Be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth and subdue it" is still in force; only man now works at his gigantic tasks with vastly reduced powers of body and mind and under influences which make his work disgustingly irksome and consequently spoil his endeavors, turning them aside from their glorious end and goal of magnifying His Maker with all his soul and all his mind and all his strength to the hideous purpose of being the sworn enemy of God and man, *viz.*, of dishonoring and unseating and destroying the very thought of God in the minds of men.

Down the corridors of men's consciences the voice of God is still thundering in the stern demands of the Law which was written in their hearts: "Thou shalt!" and "Thou shalt not!" and men cannot rid themselves of the consciousness of their moral duties and responsibilities, although all their puny efforts at compliance with this Law turn out the sorriest failures. Just so this great universe in which God placed His chief handiwork is still calling out to men: Know and master me! The stars in their courses, the gorgeous firmament, the ebbs and tides of the ever-restless seas, the winds and hurricanes, the myriad voices of dell and meadow, fen and moor, the countless substances which a bountiful Creator has scattered over the earth and stored in its subterranean vaults, the wonders of the ingenious mind of men and its workings during the history of the human race, — all raise their voices in a mighty chorus summoning man to his unfinished world-task.

Above all their shouts, however, is raised the urging voice of the Spirit of God in His holy Book, which in the prophets and the psalms, in the sermons of our incarnate Lord and of His apostle among the philosophers of Greece on Mars Hill, and in hundreds of passing references to the facts and phenomena of nature and strange developments of history, invites us to understand our God also by means of what He has made and what He is preserving.

Every department of true science, by which we understand the knowledge of facts, is thrown open to us, and we are bidden to walk in and learn what we can learn. There is no premium put on indifference and sloth; rather we are warned not to tie even our meagerest talent in a napkin and hide it in the ground, but to use it to the limit of our resources and opportunities. We are stewards also of these mercies of our heavenly Father and will have to render an account of the use we have made of them.

Secondly, this universe is in three distinct ways connected in Scripture with the Lord Jesus: 1. It was He through whom things were *spoken into existence* at the beginning. He is that eternal Word which was in the beginning with God and was God and without whom not anything was made that was made.

2. It is He who *sustains* the entire creation of God, bearing it up by the word of His power and giving all things their consistence, their proper relation to each other, and their coherence. It is He in whom we live and move and have our being. Everything that is and happens in the wide, wide world must serve the purpose of Him to whom has been given all power in heaven and earth and who has been appointed to be the Head of the Church, to minister to all her needs from the abundance of His vast wealth and energy.

3. It is Jesus, the Creator and Sustainer of the world, who is appointed the *Judge of the world*. Before His awful throne the entire race of men, from Adam to the last infant born on Judgment Day, will one day stand breathless, awaiting the award of righteousness on their doings. This relation of the universe to the Son of God and the Son of Mary naturally extends also to the primeval task of man of subduing the earth. That is a task which is under the constant surveillance and guidance of Jesus. What a mighty incentive to every study and endeavor to achieve the original task laid upon mankind is furnished by a reflection that in these studies and endeavors the shadow of the Lord of lords and King of kings, our Redeemer, falls across our paths and shelters our efforts!

Thirdly, while sin has wrecked man's earliest good fortune, the regenerating grace of God, through the word of the great reconciliation which Christ effected for mankind with God, begins to reconstruct the broken tools with which the lords of the earth must work at their task of subduing the earth. There is a regeneration of the darkened understanding and of the perverted will of man which aids in the conquest also of his earthly tasks. The Christian scientist finds in the new life which divine grace has quickened in

him a mighty additional impulse to go into fields of study and endeavor in which others have failed, and had to fail, because they were too much encumbered with things that incapacitated them for their work.

II.

Equally as fatal as underestimating the powers of human reason would be the contrary error of overestimating them. This is, since the Fall, a most popular error, so deeply rooted in the natural thoughts which corrupt man cherishes concerning himself that nothing but the mighty power of divine grace in regeneration can pluck it out of his heart.

It was not so from the beginning. Man in his original state of integrity and innocence was indeed conscious of his godlikeness and the glorious heritage of a divinely gifted and directed intellect and the pure, noble impulses of a will entirely in subjection to the supreme will of his Creator. But he was also conscious of his being a creature, of the finite and limited quality of his endowments, and of his constant dependence in everything upon the Author of his existence. He could know and discover many things, but he could not hope to attain to omniscience and intuitive knowledge such as God possesses.

In all his study and research, man came to a barrier beyond which his intellect could not pass. A similar trammel confined his will within a province that did not take in the sovereign and omnipotent will of God. Man before the Fall was content with his lot and found his delight in using his created, finite powers in the field of activities that was assigned to him. He was not haunted by a desire to rise above his station, and the foolhardy notion did not obsess him that because he could accomplish some things, he could do all things. He would not, after swimming across the river Phrat have begun to brag that he could swim across the Mediterranean.

All this was changed when man yielded to the wily suggestion of his tempter that he could be like God if he would only disregard, and boldly break through, the limits which his Maker had set for him. Then began man's unholy pursuit after knowledge and efficiency. Instead of being led with ever-increasing wonder and love to closer intimacy with the great God who had made this splendid universe and placed him in it as the object of His fondest affection, with the privilege of using it all in the service of God and his own advantage, fallen man managed utterly to forget the difference between his puny self and his exalted Maker and was

led into rank disbelief even of the existence of God, which all created things continued to proclaim to him and which his own reason, aided by his five senses, constantly asserts to him. The thought of God, once a source of unbounded happiness to him, now filled him with dismay, and the dismay, becoming intensified when he found himself baffled in his unholy aspirations, rose to hatred of God and was voiced in man's defiant determination to be the architect of his own fortune, to construct a world to suit himself and to believe anything rather than what God has said. Atheistic infidelity became the dominant characteristic of this man, who had taken the devil for his schoolmaster and was laboring under him to gain a lamentable proficiency in godlessness.

Everything that man, fallen from his first estate, conceived in thought, everything that he desired, planned, spoke, acted, had now come under the tyranny of devilish and selfish motives. The world lay still before him after he had sinned, and the command to subdue it was still ringing in his memory. But he went at the task fired with a heaven-storming ambition to set himself up as the lord of the earth in a new sense, namely, as lord in his own right. He built walled cities for his greater safety and as bases of his conquering exploits. He invented cunning devices for destruction; the spirit of war was in his restless blood. He made himself a tyrant over his brothers and then made them his slaves. Every step forward in knowledge and discovery fostered his self-trust and increased his boldness, until he planned in boundless arrogance to build a tower that was to reach to heaven.

God halted his mad exploits and thwarted his infidel designs by acts of fearful vengeance. But man spurned every humiliating lesson and increased his abomination in the earth. He opposed, most of all, the efforts which God, in mercy, made to reclaim him from his apostate state and turned all his ingenuity and power to the task of suppressing the truths of salvation by a Redeemer whom God would provide. He loathed the company of those who penitently acknowledged their sin, their guilt, and their corruption and made them the butt of ridicule and the bearers of his hostile dislike. The first human blood that was spilled on earth was that of a person whom God loved, and it was spilled for the reason that God loved the humility and the faith of that person.

Six thousand years are nearly finished during which renegade man has been busy at the old scheme of setting himself up in perfect self-sufficiency as God. Great have been his material achievements even in his abandoned state of alienation from God. Mighty

civilizations have been built up by fallen man, achievements have been made by him in scientific investigation, in literature, in the arts, in commerce. But on all of them was found stamped the impress of man's vanity. They were all made to serve the self-glorification of individuals or the claim of the nobility of the inborn excellence of the entire race.

Not from God and heavenly things did men any longer draw their chief inspiration and their highest delights, but from the material values and comforts which they could wrest from created substances. Not to the realm of the invisible and the eternal, but to this transitory existence with its constantly decaying treasures did they direct their highest and strongest aspirations. God was not in all their thought by any voluntary reflection of their own, and whenever He was forced upon their notice against their will, He was to them an object of aversion and loathing.

Paul, in the opening chapter of Romans, is not a gloomy pessimist and misanthrope when, with inspired pen, he depicts the panorama of the cultured corruptions of his day for the thoughtful study of earnest men in all ages, but he is a faithful recorder of dreadful facts. Archeological research at most of the centers of ancient civilization has more than borne out his description of the degrading character of man's planning and doing, even when he appears at his best.

Later generations of men alienated from God have at times tried to borrow some rays of light and some beautiful tints for their paintings of man's glory from the Christian religion; but even their cultural achievements were essentially of the same type as those that lie buried below the sands of Egypt, the ruins of Babylon and Athens and Greece. The curse of the righteous God has long fallen on all the godless glamor of our times as it fell on that of the early godless races. The forms of vanity were always changing; the spirit producing them remains ever the same.

Now, these achievements of antiquity and, still more, those of our times are the constant themes of eulogistic oratory. The modern scientist uses much of his time in weaving garlands for his brow and inviting the admiring acclaim of the multitude for himself because he has advanced so wonderfully far. Has he really? If it has been possible to accomplish so much with the mere wreckage of the human intellect and will, after sin and its long train of hideous consequences entered the world, what would have been accomplished if sin had never come? Is there any reason to believe that electricity would not have been discovered by Adam as he

proceeded with his task of subduing the earth; that great facts regarding the powers of nature and the invisible relations existing between substances upon which later generations stumbled, as it were, by accident would not have been laid bare much sooner and developed much more highly in the process of men's ordinary labor?

Instead of joining in the selfish eulogies in which the modern man indulges concerning our advanced culture, we should be amply justified in deploring that really so little has been accomplished in so long a time and that in the mean time some ingenuities which the race evidently had possessed in remote times have been lost again and some discoveries have had to be made over again.

God permits these achievements of men who have renounced Him simply because He remains true to the original order of the universe in which He placed man. There was to be, not evolution, but progressive development of the resources of creation. In the command to labor issued to man at the beginning there was included the promise of divine blessing upon all labor of men. After the first catastrophe, which by God's righteous anger overwhelmed the world in the Flood, the rainbow in the clouds was solemnly chosen as a memorial of the Almighty's faithful adherence to His primeval plan of recurring seasons and their natural phenomena. God proposed to make His sun to rise on the good and on the evil and to send rain on the field of the wicked farmer as well as on that of his pious neighbor. He is constantly fulfilling the promises of the Fourth Commandment. He honors instances of chastity and honest dealing and charity with temporal rewards even in pagan lands.

That is why there is any progress made at all in the pursuits of men. Whether men know it and acknowledge it or not, it is nevertheless true that every good gift and every perfect gift still comes down from above, from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variableness neither shadow of turning.

God chooses at times the strangest, oddest vehicles as carriers of His benefactions to men. He could make an ass deliver a message to a prophet; He could make a Christ-hating high priest serve as a most eloquent expounder of the sacrificial meaning of Christ's death; He could have the Easter tidings of the Redeemer's victory over death proclaimed to the rebellious spirits confined in hell's prison before they were published on earth. He points a lesson to the children of light from the wisdom of the children of this world. All these things He has been doing not only in

Bible times, but is still doing to-day; not only in some, but in all affairs of men; not only in their ordinary pursuits at gaining a livelihood, but in their most extraordinary exploits in the fields of science.

Let no one, therefore, permit himself to be deceived into a false estimate of what ungodly men have accomplished. There is bias in every claim which they set up against the Christian religion on the basis of their achievements. That bias and prejudice is created not only by their natural blindness as regards spiritual affairs, which fills the heart of every man, but it often springs from particular animosity caused by special experiences in the lives of these people.

A prejudiced person cannot tell an unvarnished tale. His false heart betrays him into overstatements and understatements, into coloring his accounts, and into imagining facts and suppressing facts. Also in the world of scientists the wish is often the father of the thought, and hypotheses and theories are made to serve where facts fail. The Christian religion has nothing to fear from real, well-established facts of science. Whatever is not a fact cannot live; it brings the germ of death with it at its birth; it defeats itself. Falsehoods and misstatements have short legs. They may put on scientific seven-league boots, but they do not run far. Even when they still seem to exert power after they have been exposed, that is only a sham power like the muscular contortions of the serpent that continue for a time after the reptile has been slain. Besides, there are also honest scientists, who furnish the very weapons that are needed for overcoming the biased scientists.

But even if the pursuits of science in any department were intensified a thousandfold and still larger and more astonishing additions were made to the world's knowledge of created things, there will be no finality about the results of men's research. The primitive order to man to subdue the earth remains in force, and that means: Keep on toiling, learning, conquering! It is not for you to say when you shall have finished. From every attempt at magnifying human accomplishments there will be a reversal. Men will brag about having built unsinkable ships until they sink, and their mouths are stopped for a season. The limitations imposed upon man by the Creator at the beginning will remain. Man is indeed God's foremost creature, but he will never be anything else than a creature. Above all man's efforts at learning there is always the depths of the riches of both the wisdom and the knowl-

edge of God, whose judgments are unsearchable and whose ways are past finding out, whose mind no one will know, and to whom no one here below will give counsel and direction.

Even in His special relation to sinful man, in His holy Book, God has not so utterly poured forth His mind that there remains nothing to reveal and that there is nothing in His essence and workmanship that the mortal and finite mind could not encompass. Even in the light of revelation, man is told that here below he can but know in part and prophesy in part. Intuitive and perfect knowledge is attainable to man only when the sad encumbrance of his sin and passions drop from him, when he enters the light of glory, and, with his original state of innocence restored, sees God as He is, when all his yearning is turned into satisfaction and faith is merged into the vision beatific. Let men in the sweat of their brow learn and study, search and delve, dig and test, millions of results of their labors; that is what they were appointed to, and that labor, if honestly performed, will be blessed to them and, if pursued with a penitent and believing heart, may lead them closer to God and the kernel and core of matters. Christianity will have no quarrel with such science. If not so pursued, science will meet with disaster after disaster as finite mind dashes its head against the adamant rock of the infinite and inscrutable will and majesty of God.

The Church will outlast all ravages of infidel science. It is built on the Rock, which is Christ. All the rage of the heathen, all the vain imaginings of earth's great Johnnies, all the picked legions of hell, shall not prevail against it; for so the mouth of unerring Truth has spoken for a solemn warning to every unsanctified and unchristian endeavor and for the blessed comfort of Christ's humble saints. Let all the forces of wicked learning rally under the banner of the arch-deceiver, they will only march to their Armageddon. For the sovereign Lord of lords brings to naught the devices of evil men and takes the wily in their own craftiness; and when they think they have climbed to the pinnacle of wisdom, He reveals them as men who know nothing, as men who are puffed up with the vanity of their little learning, and as fools. Towering over the wreck of time the cross on which the Holy One of God died also for the Voltaires and Darwins and Haeckels of the world of learned and cultured godlessness will stand to the end of time, a beacon to light every weary heart to the peace of God that passes understanding. The sacred Book, whose chief message is concerning His merciful mission, will gather new glory as

philosophy after philosophy goes into the academic discard, and men will continue to love the Book of books also for what it has truthfully recorded about the beginning and end of all things and will take up the glad strain of the ancient singer: "With Thee is the fountain of light; in Thy light shall we see light."
