Why I Believe in God

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You have noticed, haven't you, that in recent times certain scientists like Dr. James Jeans and Sir Arthur Eddington, as well as some outstanding philosophers like Dr. C.E.M. Joad, have had a good deal to say about religion and God? Scientists Jeans and Eddington are ready to admit that there may be something to the claims of men who say they have had an experience of God, while Philosopher Joad says that the "obtrusiveness of evil" has virtually compelled him to look into the argument for God's existence afresh. Much like modernist theologian Dr. Reinhold Niebuhr who talks about original sin, Philosopher Joad speaks about evil as being ineradicable from the human mind.

Then, too, you have on occasion asked yourself whether death ends all. You have recalled, perhaps, how Socrates the great Greek philosopher, struggled with that problem the day before he drank the hemlock cup. Is there anything at all, you ask yourself, to the idea of a judgment after death? Am I quite sure, you say, that there is not? How do I know that there is no God?

In short, as a person of intelligence, having a sense of responsibility, you have from time to time asked yourself some questions about the foundation of your thought and action. You have looked into, or at least been concerned about, what the philosophers call your theory of reality . So when I suggest that you spend a Sunday afternoon with me discussing my reasons for believing in God, I have the feeling that you are basically interested in what I am proposing for discussion.

To make our conversation more interesting, let's start by comparing notes on our past. That will fit in well with our plan, for the debate concerning heredity and environment is prominent in our day. Perhaps you think that the only real reason I have for believing in God is the fact that I was taught to do so in my early days. Of course I don't think that is really so. I don't deny that I was taught to believe in God when I was a child, but I do affirm that since I have grown up I have heard a pretty full statement of the argument against belief in God. And it is after having heard that argument that I am more than ever ready to believe in God. Now, in fact, I feel that the whole of history and civilization would be unintelligible to me if it were not for my belief in God. So true is this, that I propose to argue that unless God is back of everything, you cannot find meaning in anything. I cannot even argue for belief in Him, without already having taken Him for granted. And similarly I contend that you cannot argue against belief in Him unless you also first take Him for granted. Arguing about God's existence, I hold, is like arguing about air. You may affirm that air exists, and I that it does not. But as we debate the point, we are both breathing air all the time. Or to use another illustration, God is like the emplacement on which must stand the very guns that are supposed to shoot Him out of existence. However if, after hearing my story briefly, you still think it is all a matter of heredity and environment, I shall not disagree too violently. My whole point will be that there is perfect harmony between my belief as a child and my belief as a man, simply because God is Himself the environment by which my early life was directed and my later life made intelligible to myself.

The "Accident of Birth"

We are frequently told that much in our life depends on "the accident of birth". In ancient time some men were said to spring full-grown from the foreheads of the gods. That, at any rate, is not true today. Yet I understand the next best thing happened to you. You were born, I am told, in Washington, D.C., under the shadow of the White House. Well, I was born in a little thatched roof house with a cow barn attached, in Holland. You wore "silver slippers" and I wore wooden shoes.

Is this really important for our purpose? Not particularly, but it is important that neither of us was born in Guadalcanal or Timbuktu. Both of us, I mean, were born in the midst and under the influence of "Christian civilization." We shall limit our discussion, then, to the "God of Christianity." I believe, while you do not believe or are not sure that you do believe, in this particular kind of God. That will give point to our discussion. For surely there is no sense in talking about the existence of God, without knowing what kind of God it is who may or may not exist.

So much then we have gained. We at least know in general what sort of God we are going to make the subject for our conversation. If now we can come to a similar preliminary agreement as to the standard or test by which to prove or disprove God's existence, we can proceed. You, of course, do not expect me to bring God into the room here so that you may see Him. If I were able to do that, He would not be the God of Christianity. All that you expect me to do is to make it reasonable for you to believe in God. And I should like to respond quickly by saying that that is just what I am trying to do. But a moment's thought makes me hesitate. If you really do not believe in God, then you naturally do not believe that you are his creature. I, on the other hand, who do believe in God also believe, naturally, that it is reasonable for God's creature to believe in God. So I can only undertake to show that, even if it does not appear reasonable to you, it is reasonable for you, to believe in God.

I see you are getting excited. You feel a little like a man who is about to undergo a major operation. You realize that if you are to change your belief about God, you will also have to change your belief about yourself. And you are not quite ready for that. Well, you may leave if you desire. I certainly do not wish to be impolite. I only thought that as an intelligent person you would be willing to hear the "other side" of the question. And after all I am not asking you to agree with what I say. We have not really agreed on what we mean by God more than in a general and formal way. So also we need not at this point agree on the standard or test in more than a general or formal way. You might follow my argument, just for argument's sake.

Childhood

To go on, then, I can recall playing as a child in a sandbox built into a corner of the hay-barn. From the hay-barn I would go through the cow-barn to the house. Built into the hay-barn too, but with doors opening into the cow-barn, was a bed for the working-man. How badly I wanted permission to sleep in that bed for a night! Permission was finally given. Freud was still utterly unknown to me, but I had heard about ghosts and "forerunners of death." That night I heard the cows jingle their chains. I knew there were cows and that they did a lot of jingling with their chains, but after a while I was not quite certain that it was only the cows that made all the noises I heard. Wasn't there someone walking down the aisle back of the cows, and wasn't he approaching my bed? Already I had been taught to say my evening prayers. Some of the words of that prayer were to this effect: "Lord, convert me, that I may be converted." Unmindful of the paradox, I prayed that prayer that night as I had never prayed before.

I do not recall speaking either to my father or mother about my distress. They would have been unable to provide the modern remedy. Psychology did not come to their library table — not even The Ladies Home Journal ! Yet I know what they would have said. Of course there were no ghosts, and certainly I should not be afraid anyway, since with body and soul I belonged to my Savior who died for me on the Cross and rose again that His people might be saved from Hell and go to Heaven! I should pray earnestly and often that the Holy Spirit might give me a new heart so that I might truly love God instead of sin and myself.

How do I know that this is the sort of thing they would have told me? Well, that was the sort of thing they spoke about from time to time. Or rather, that was the sort of thing that constituted the atmosphere of our daily life. Ours was not in any sense a pietistic family. There were not any great emotional outbursts on any occasion that I recall. There was much ado about making hay in the summer and about caring for the cows and sheep in the winter, but round about it all there was a deep conditioning atmosphere. Though there were no tropical showers of revivals, the relative humidity was always very high. At every meal the whole family was present. There was a closing as well as an opening prayer, and a chapter of the Bible was read each time. The Bible was read through from Genesis to Revelation. At breakfast or at dinner, as the case might be, we would hear of the New Testament, or of "the children of Gad after their families, of Zephon and Haggi and Shuni and Ozni, of Eri and Areli." I do not claim that I always fully understood the meaning of it all. Yet of the total effect there can be no doubt. The Bible became for me, in all its parts, in every syllable, the very Word of God. I learned that I must believe the Scripture story, and that "faith" was a gift of God. What had happened in the past, and particularly what had happened in the past in Palestine, was of the greatest moment to me. In short, I was brought up in what Dr. Joad would call "topographical and temporal parochialism." I was "conditioned" in the most thorough fashion. I could not help believing in God — in the God of Christianity — in the God of the whole Bible!

Living next to the Library of Congress, you were not so restricted. Your parents were very much enlightened in their religious views. They read to you from some Bible of the World instead of from the Bible of Palestine. No, indeed, you correct me, they did no such thing. They did not want to trouble you about religious matters in your early days. They sought to cultivate the "open mind" in their children.

Shall we say then that in my early life I was conditioned to believe in God, while you were left free to develop your own judgment as you pleased? But that will hardly do. You know as well as I that every child is conditioned by its environment. You were as thoroughly conditioned not to believe in God as I was to believe in God. So let us not call each other names. If you want to say that belief was poured down my throat, I shall retort by saying that unbelief was poured down your throat. That will get us set for our argument.

Early Schooling

To the argument we must now shortly come. Just another word, however, about my schooling. That will bring all the factors into the picture.

I was not quite five when somebody — fortunately I cannot recall who — took me to school. On the first day I was vaccinated and it hurt. I can still feel it. I had already been to church. I recall that definitely because I would sometimes wear my nicely polished leather shoes. A formula was read over me at my baptism which solemnly asserted that I had been conceived and born in sin, the idea being that my parents, like all men, had inherited sin from Adam, the first man and the representative of the human race. The formula further asserted that though thus conditioned by inescapable sin I was, as a child of the Covenant, redeemed in Christ. And at the ceremony my parents solemnly promised that as soon as I should be able to understand they would instruct me in all these matters by all the means at their disposal.

It was in pursuance of this vow that they sent me to a Christian grade school. In it I learned that my being saved from sin and my belonging to God made a difference for all that I knew or did. I saw the power of God in nature and His providence in the course of history. That gave the proper setting for my salvation, which I had in Christ. In short, the whole wide world that gradually opened up for me through my schooling was regarded as operating in its every aspect under the direction of the all-powerful and all-wise God whose child I was through Christ. I was to learn to think God's thoughts after him in every field of endeavor.

Naturally there were fights on the "campus" of the school and I was engaged in some — though not in all — of them. Wooden shoes were wonderful weapons of war. Yet we were strictly forbidden to use them, even for defensive purposes. There were always lectures both by teachers and by parents on sin and evil in connection with our martial exploits. This was especially the case when a regiment of us went out to do battle with the pupils of the public school. The children of the public school did not like us. They had an extensive vocabulary of vituperation. Who did we think we were anyway? We were goody goodies — too good to go to the public school! "There! take that and like it!" We replied in kind. Meanwhile our sense of distinction grew by leaps and wounds. We were told in the evening that we must learn to bear with patience the ridicule of the "world." Had not the world hated the church, since Cain's time?

How different your early schooling was! You went to a "neutral" school. As your parents had done at home, so your teachers now did at school. They taught you to be "open-minded." God was not brought into connection with your study of nature or history. You were trained without bias all along the line.

Of course, you know better now. You realize that all that was purely imaginary. To be "without bias" is only to have a particular kind of bias. The idea of "neutrality" is simply a colorless suit that covers a negative attitude toward God. At least it ought to be plain that he who is not for the God of Christianity is against Him. You see, the world belongs to Him, and that you are His creature, and as such are to own up to that fact by honoring Him whether you eat or drink or do anything else. God says that you live, as it were, on His estate. And His estate has large ownership signs placed everywhere, so that he who goes by even at seventy miles an hour cannot but read them. Every fact in this world, the God of the Bible claims, has His stamp indelibly engraved upon it. How then could you be neutral with respect to such a God? Do you walk about leisurely on a Fourth of July in Washington wondering whether the Lincoln Memorial belongs to anyone? Do you look at "Old Glory" waving from a high flagpole and wonder whether she stands for anything? Does she require anything of you, born an American citizen as you are? You would deserve to suffer the fate of the "man without a country" if as an American you were neutral to America. Well, in a much deeper sense you deserve to live forever without God if you do not own and glorify Him as your Creator. You dare not manipulate God's world and least of all yourself as His image-bearer, for your own final purposes. When Eve became neutral as between God and the Devil, weighing the contentions of each as though they were inherently on the face of them of equal value, she was in reality already on the side of the devil!

There you go again getting excited once more. Sit down and calm yourself. You are open-minded and neutral are you not? And you have learned to think that any hypothesis has, as a theory of life, an equal right to be heard with any other, have you not? After all I am only asking you to see what is involved in the Christian conception of God. If the God of Christianity exists, the evidence for His existence is abundant and plain so that it is both unscientific and sinful not to believe in Him. When Dr. Joad, for example says: "The evidence for God is far from plain," on the ground that if it were plain everybody would believe in Him, he is begging the question. If the God of Christianity does exist, the evidence for Him must be plain. And the reason, therefore, why "everybody" does not believe in Him must be that "everybody" is blinded by sin. Everybody wears colored glasses. You have heard the story of the valley of the blind. A young man who was out hunting fell over a precipice into the valley of the blind. There was no escape. The blind men did not understand him when he spoke of seeing the sun and the colors of the rainbow, but a fine young lady did understand him when he spoke the language of love. The father of the girl would not consent to the marriage of his daughter to a lunatic who spoke so often of things that did not exist. But the great psychologists of the blind men's university offered to cure him of his lunacy by sewing up his eyelids. Then, they assured him, he would be normal like "everybody" else. But the simple seer went on protesting that he did see the sun.

So, as we have our tea, I propose not only to operate on your heart so as to change your will, but also on your eyes so as to change your outlook. But wait a minute. No, I do not propose to operate at all. I myself cannot do anything of the sort. I am just mildly suggesting that you are perhaps dead, and perhaps blind, leaving you to think the matter over for yourself. If an operation is to be performed it must be performed by God Himself.

Later Schooling

Meanwhile let us finish our story. At ten I came to this country and after some years decided to study for the ministry. This involved preliminary training at a Christian preparatory school and college. All my teachers were pledged to teach their subjects from the Christian point of view. Imagine teaching not only religion but algebra from the Christian point of view! But it was done. We were told that all facts in all their relations, numerical as well as others, are what they are because of God's all comprehensive plan with respect to them. Thus the very definitions of things would not merely be incomplete but basically wrong if God were left out of the picture. Were we not informed about the views of others? Did we not hear about evolution and about Immanuel Kant, the great modern philosopher who had conclusively shown that all the arguments for the existence of God were invalid? Oh, yes, we heard about all these things, but there were refutations given and these refutations seemed adequate to meet the case.

In the Seminaries I attended, namely Calvin, and Princeton before its reorganization along semi-modernist lines in 1929, the situation was much the same. So for instance Dr. Robert Dick Wilson used to tell us, and, as far as we could understand the languages, show us from the documents, that the "higher critics" had done nothing that should rightfully damage our child-like faith in the Old Testament as the Word of God. Similarly Dr. J. Gresham Machen and others made good their claim that New Testament Christianity is intellectually defensible and that the Bible is right in its claims. You may judge of their arguments by reading them for yourself. In short, I heard the story of historic Christianity and the doctrine of God on which it is built over and over from every angle by those who believed it and were best able to interpret its meaning.

The telling of this story has helped, I trust, to make the basic question simple and plain. You know pretty clearly now what sort of God it is of which I am speaking to you. If my God exists it was He who was back of my parents and teachers. It was He who conditioned all that conditioned me in my early life. But then it was He also who conditioned everything that conditioned you in your early life. God, the God of Christianity, is the All-Conditioner!

As the All-Conditioner, God is the All-Conscious One. A God Who is to control all things must control them "by the counsel of His will." If He did not do this, He would Himself be conditioned. So then I hold that my belief in Him and your disbelief in Him are alike meaningless except for Him.

Objections Raised

By this time you are probably wondering whether I have really ever heard the objections which are raised against belief in such a God. Well, I think I have. I heard them from my teachers who sought to answer them. I also heard them from teachers who believed they could not be answered. While a student at Princeton Seminary I attended summer courses in the Chicago Divinity School. Naturally I heard the modern or liberal view of Scripture set forth fully there. And after graduation from the Seminary I spent two years at Princeton University for graduate work in philosophy. There the theories of modern philosophy were both expounded and defended by very able men. In short I was presented with as full a statement of the reasons for disbelief as I had been with the reasons for belief. I heard both sides fully from those who believed what they taught.

You have compelled me to say this by the look on your face. Your very gestures suggest that you cannot understand how any one acquainted with the facts and arguments presented by modern science and philosophy can believe in a God who really created the world, who really directs all things in the world by a plan to the ends He has in view for them. Well, I am only one of many who hold to the old faith in full view of what is said by modern science, modern philosophy, and modern Biblical criticism.

Obviously I cannot enter into a discussion of all the facts and all the reasons urged against belief in God. There are those who have made the Old Testament, as there are those who have made the New Testament, their life-long study. It is their works you must read for a detailed refutation of points of Biblical criticism. Others have specialized in physics and biology. To them I must refer you for a discussion of the many points connected with such matters as evolution. But there is something that underlies all these discussions. And it is with that something that I now wish to deal.

You may think I have exposed myself terribly. Instead of talking about God as something vague and indefinite, after the fashion of the modernist, the Barthians, and the mystic, a God so empty of content and remote from experience as to make no demands upon men, I have loaded down the idea of God with "antiquated" science and "contradictory" logic. It seems as though I have heaped insult upon injury by presenting the most objectionable sort of God I could find. It ought to be very easy for you to prick my bubble. I see you are ready to read over my head bushels of facts taken from the standard college texts on physics, biology, anthropology, and psychology, or to crush me with your sixty-ton tanks taken from Kant's famous book, The Critique of Pure Reason . But I have been under these hot showers now a good many times. Before you take the trouble to open the faucet again there is a preliminary point I want to bring up. I have already referred to it when we were discussing the matter of test or standard.

The point is this. Not believing in God, we have seen , you do not think yourself to be God's creature. And not believing in God you do not think the universe has been created by God. That is to say, you think of yourself and the world as just being there. Now if you actually are God's creature, then your present attitude is very unfair to Him. In that case it is even an insult to Him. And having insulted God, His displeasure rests upon you. God and you are not on "speaking terms." And you have very good reasons for trying to prove that He does not exist. If He does exist, He will punish you for your disregard of Him. You are therefore wearing colored glasses. And this determines everything you say about the facts and reasons for not believing in Him. You have had your picnics and hunting parties there without asking His permission. You have taken the grapes of God's vineyard without paying Him any rent and you have insulted His representatives who asked you for it.

I must make an apology to you at this point. We who believe in God have not always made this position plain. Often enough we have talked with you about facts and sound reasons as though we agreed with you on what these really are. In our arguments for the existence of God we have frequently assumed that you and we together have an area of knowledge on which we agree. But we really do not grant that you see any fact in any dimension of life truly. We really think you have colored glasses on your nose when you talk about chickens and cows, as well as when you talk about the life hereafter. We should have told you this more plainly than we did. But we were really a little ashamed of what would appear to you as a very odd or extreme position. We were so anxious not to offend you that we offended our own God. But we dare no longer present our God to you as smaller or less exacting than He really is. He wants to be presented as the All-Conditioner, as the emplacement on which even those who deny Him must stand.

Now in presenting all your facts and reasons to me, you have assumed that such a God does not exist. You have taken for granted that you need no emplacement of any sort outside of yourself. You have assumed the autonomy of your own experience. Consequently you are unable — that is, unwilling — to accept as a fact any fact that would challenge your self-sufficiency. And you are bound to call that contradictory which does not fit into the reach of your intellectual powers. You remember what old Procrustes did. If his visitors were too long, he cut off a few slices at each end; if they were too short, he used the curtain stretcher on them. It is that sort of thing I feel that you have done with every fact of human experience. And I am asking you to be critical of this your own most basic assumption. Will you not go into the basement of your own experience to see what has been gathering there while you were busy here and there with the surface inspection of life? You may be greatly surprised at what you find there.

To make my meaning clearer, I shall illustrate what I have said by pointing out how modern philosophers and scientists handle the facts and doctrines of Christianity.

Basic to all the facts and doctrines of Christianity and therefore involved in the belief in God, is the creation doctrine. Now modern philosophers and scientists as a whole claim that to hold such a doctrine or to believe in such a fact is to deny our own experience. They mean this not merely in the sense that no one was there to see it done, but in the more basic sense that it is logically impossible. They assert that it would break the fundamental laws of logic.

The current argument against the creation doctrine derives from Kant. It may fitly be expressed in the words of a more recent philosopher, James Ward: "If we attempt to conceive of God apart from the world, there is nothing to lead us on to creation" (Realm of Ends , p. 397). That is to say, if God is to be connected to the universe at all, he must be subject to its conditions. Here is the old creation doctrine. It says that God has caused the world to come into existence. But what do we mean by the word "cause"? In our experience, it is that which is logically correlative to the word "effect". If you have an effect you must have a cause and if you have a cause you must have an effect. If God caused the world, it must therefore have been because God couldn't help producing an effect. And so the effect may really be said to be the cause of the cause. Our experience can therefore allow for no God other than one that is dependent upon the world as much as the world is dependent upon Him.

The God of Christianity cannot meet these requirements of the autonomous man. He claims to be all-sufficient. He claims to have created the world, not from necessity but from His free will. He claims not to have changed in Himself when He created the world. His existence must therefore be said to be impossible and the creation doctrine must be said to be an absurdity.

The doctrine of providence is also said to be at variance with experience. This is but natural. One who rejects creation must logically also reject providence. If all things are controlled by God's providence, we are told, there can be nothing new and history is but a puppet dance.

You see then that I might present to you great numbers of facts to prove the existence of God. I might say that every effect needs a cause. I might point to the wonderful structure of the eye as evidence of God's purpose in nature. I might call in the story of mankind through the past to show that it has been directed and controlled by God. All these evidences would leave you unaffected. You would simply say that however else we may explain reality, we cannot bring in God. Cause and purpose, you keep repeating, are words that we human beings use with respect to things around us because they seem to act as we ourselves act, but that is as far as we can go.

And when the evidence for Christianity proper is presented to you the procedure is the same. If I point out to you that the prophecies of Scripture have been fulfilled, you will simply reply that it quite naturally appears that way to me and to others, but that in reality it is not possible for any mind to predict the future from the past. If it were, all would again be fixed and history would be without newness and freedom.

Then if I point to the many miracles, the story is once more the same. To illustrate this point I quote from the late Dr. William Adams Brown, an outstanding modernist theologian. "Take any of the miracles of the past," says Brown, "The virgin birth, the raising of Lazarus, the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Suppose that you can prove that these events happened just as they are claimed to have happened. What have you accomplished? You have shown that our previous view of the limits of the possible needs to be enlarged; that our former generalizations were too narrow and need revision; that problems cluster about the origin of life and its renewal of which we had hitherto been unaware. But the one thing which you have not shown, which indeed you cannot show, is that a miracle has happened; for that is to confess that these problems are inherently insoluble, which cannot be determined until all possible tests have been made" (God at Work, New York, 1933, p. 169). You see with what confidence Brown uses this weapon of logical impossibility against the idea of a miracle. Many of the older critics of Scripture challenged the evidence for miracle at this point or at that. They made as it were a slow, piece-meal land invasion of the island of Christianity. Brown, on the other hand, settles the matter at once by a host of stukas from the sky. Any pill boxes that he cannot destroy immediately, he will mop up later. He wants to get rapid control of the whole field first. And this he does by directly applying the law of non-contradiction. Only that is possible, says Brown, in effect, which I can show to be logically related according to my laws of logic. So then if miracles want to have scientific standing, that is be recognized as genuine facts, they must sue for admittance at the port of entry to the mainland of scientific endeavor. And admission will be given as soon as they submit to the little process of generalization which deprives them of their uniqueness. Miracles must take out naturalization papers if they wish to vote in the republic of science and have any influence there.

Take now the four points I have mentioned — creation, providence, prophecy, and miracle. Together they represent the whole of Christian theism. Together they include what is involved in the idea of God and what He has done round about and for us. Many times over and in many ways the evidence for all these has been presented. But you have an always available and effective answer at hand. It is impossible! It is impossible! You act like a postmaster who has received a great many letters addressed in foreign languages. He says he will deliver them as soon as they are addressed in the King's English by the people who sent them. Till then they must wait in the dead letter department. Basic to all the objections the average philosopher and scientist raises against the evidence for the existence of God is the assertion or the assumption that to accept such evidence would be to break the rules of logic.

I see you are yawning. Let us stop to eat supper now. For there is one more point in this connection that I must make. You have no doubt at some time in your life been to a dentist. A dentist drills a little deeper and then a little deeper and at last comes to the nerve of the matter.

Now before I drill into the nerve of the matter, I must again make apologies. The fact that so many people are placed before a full exposition of the evidence for God's existence and yet do not believe in Him has greatly discouraged us. We have therefore adopted measures of despair. Anxious to win your good will, we have again compromised our God. Noting the fact that men do not see, we have conceded that what they ought to see is hard to see. In our great concern to win men we have allowed that the evidence for God's existence is only probably compelling. And from that fatal confession we have gone one step further down to the point where we have admitted or virtually admitted that it is not really compelling at all. And so we fall back upon testimony instead of argument. After all, we say, God is not found at the end of an argument; He is found in our hearts. So we simply testify to men that once we were dead, and now we are alive, that once we were blind and that now we see, and give up all intellectual argument.

Do you suppose that our God approves of this attitude of His followers? I do not think so. The God who claims to have made all facts and to have placed His stamp upon them will not grant that there is really some excuse for those who refuse to see. Besides, such a procedure is self-defeating. If someone in your home town of Washington denied that there was any such thing as a United States Government would you take him some distance down the Potomac and testify to him that there is? So your experience and testimony of regeneration would be meaningless except for the objective truth of the objective facts that are presupposed by it. A testimony that is not an argument is not a testimony either, just as an argument that is not a testimony is not even an argument.

Waiving all this for the moment, let us see what the modern psychologist of religion, who stands on the same foundation with the philosopher, will do to our testimony. He makes a distinction between the raw datum and its cause, giving me the raw datum and keeping for himself the explanation of the cause. Professor James H. Leuba, a great psychologist of Bryn Mawr, has a procedure that is typical. He says, "The reality of any given datum — of an immediate experience in the sense in which the term is used here, may not be impugned: When I feel cold or warm, sad or mirthful, discouraged or confident, I am cold, sad, discouraged, etc., and every argument which might be advanced to prove to me that I am not cold is, in the nature of the case, preposterous; an immediate experience may not be controverted; it cannot be wrong." All this seems on the surface to be very encouraging. The immigrant is hopeful of a ready and speedy admittance. However, Ellis Island must still be passed. "But if the raw data of experience are not subject to criticism, the causes ascribed to them are. If I say that my feeling of cold is due to an open window, or my state of exultation to a drug, or my renewed courage to God, my affirmation goes beyond my immediate experience; I have ascribed a cause to it, and that cause may be the right or the wrong one." (God or Man, New York, 1933, p. 243.) And thus the immigrant must wait at Ellis Island a million years. That is to say, I, as a believer in God through Christ, assert that I am born again through the Holy Spirit. The Psychologist says that is a raw datum of experience and as such incontrovertible. We do not, he says, deny it. But it means nothing to us. If you want it to mean something to us you must ascribe a cause to your experience. We shall then examine the cause. Was your experience caused by opium or God? You say by God. Well, that is impossible since as philosophers we have shown that it is logically contradictory to believe in God. You may come back at any time when you have changed your mind about the cause of your regeneration. We shall be glad to have you and welcome you as a citizen of our realm, if only you take out your naturalization papers!

We seem now to have come to a pretty pass. We agreed at the outset to tell each other the whole truth. If I have offended you it has been because I dare not, even in the interest of winning you, offend my God. And if I have not offended you I have not spoken of my God. For what you have really done in your handling of the evidence for belief in God, is to set yourself up as God. You have made the reach of your intellect, the standard of what is possible or not possible. You have thereby virtually determined that you intend never to meet a fact that points to God. Facts, to be facts at all — facts, that is, with decent scientific and philosophic standing — must have your stamp instead of that of God upon them as their virtual creator.

Of course I realize full well that you do not pretend to create redwood trees and elephants. But you do virtually assert that redwood trees and elephants cannot be created by God. You have heard of the man who never wanted to see or be a purple cow. Well, you have virtually determined that you never will see or be a created fact. With Sir Arthur Eddington you say as it were, "What my net can't catch isn't fish."

Nor do I pretend, of course, that once you have been brought face to face with this condition, you can change your attitude. No more than the Ethiopian can change his skin or the leopard his spots can you change your attitude. You have cemented your colored glasses to your face so firmly that you cannot even take them off when you sleep. Freud has not even had a glimpse of the sinfulness of sin as it controls the human heart. Only the great Physician through His blood atonement on the Cross and by the gift of His Spirit can take those colored glasses off and make you see facts as they are, facts as evidence, as inherently compelling evidence, for the existence of God.

It ought to be pretty plain now what sort of God I believe in. It is God, the All-Conditioner. It is the God who created all things, Who by His providence conditioned my youth, making me believe in Him, and who in my later life by His grace still makes me want to believe in Him. It is the God who also controlled your youth and so far has apparently not given you His grace that you might believe in Him.

You may reply to this: "Then what's the use of arguing and reasoning with me?" Well, there is a great deal of use in it. You see, if you are really a creature of God, you are always accessible to Him. When Lazarus was in the tomb he was still accessible to Christ who called him back to life. It is this on which true preachers depend. The prodigal [son] thought he had clean escaped from the father's influence. In reality the father controlled the "far country" to which the prodigal had gone. So it is in reasoning. True reasoning about God is such as stands upon God as upon the emplacement that alone gives meaning to any sort of human argument. And such reasoning, we have a right to expect, will be used of God to break down the one-horse carriage of human autonomy.

But now I see you want to go home. And I do not blame you; the last bus leaves at twelve. I should like to talk again another time. I invite you to come to dinner next Sunday. But I have pricked your bubble, so perhaps you will not come back. And yet perhaps you will. That depends upon the Father's pleasure. Deep down in your heart you know very well that what I have said about you is true. You know there is no unity in your life. You want no God who by His counsel provides for the unity you need. Such a God, you say, would allow for nothing new. So you provide your own unity. But this unity must, by your own definition, not kill that which is wholly new. Therefore it must stand over against the wholly new and never touch it at all. Thus by your logic you talk about possibles and impossibles, but all this talk is in the air. By your own standards it can never have anything to do with reality. Your logic claims to deal with eternal and changeless matters; and your facts are wholly changing things; and "never the twain shall meet." So you have made nonsense of your own experience. With the prodigal you are at the swine-trough, but it may be that, unlike the prodigal, you will refuse to return to the father's house.

On the other hand by my belief in God I do have unity in my experience. Not of course the sort of unity that you want. Not a unity that is the result of my own autonomous determination of what is possible. But a unity that is higher than mine and prior to mine. On the basis of God's counsel I can look for facts and find them without destroying them in advance. On the basis of God's counsel I can be a good physicist, a good biologist, a good psychologist, or a good philosopher. In all these fields I use my powers of logical arrangement in order to see as much order in God's universe as it may be given a creature to see. The unities, or systems that I make are true because [they are] genuine pointers toward the basic or original unity that is found in the counsel of God.

Looking about me I see both order and disorder in every dimension of life. But I look at both of them in the light of the Great Orderer Who is back of them. I need not deny either of them in the interest of optimism or in the interest of pessimism. I see the strong men of biology searching diligently through hill and dale to prove that the creation doctrine is not true with respect to the human body, only to return and admit that the missing link is missing still. I see the strong men of psychology search deep and far into the sub-consciousness, child and animal consciousness, in order to prove that the creation and providence doctrines are not true with respect to the human soul, only to return and admit that the gulf between human and animal intelligence is as great as ever. I see the strong men of logic and scientific methodology search deep into the transcendental for a validity that will not be swept away by the ever-changing tide of the wholly new, only to return and say that they can find no bridge from logic to reality, or from reality to logic. And yet I find all these, though standing on their heads, reporting much that is true. I need only to turn their reports right side up, making God instead of man the center of it all, and I have a marvelous display of the facts as God has intended me to see them.

And if my unity is comprehensive enough to include the efforts of those who reject it, it is large enough even to include that which those who have been set upright by regeneration cannot see. My unity is that of a child who walks with its father through the woods. The child is not afraid because its father knows it all and is capable of handling every situation. So I readily grant that there are some "difficulties" with respect to belief in God and His revelation in nature and Scripture that I cannot solve. In fact there is mystery in every relationship with respect to every fact that faces me, for the reason that all facts have their final explanation in God Whose thoughts are higher than my thoughts, and Whose ways are higher than my ways. And it is exactly that sort of God that I need. Without such a God, without the God of the Bible, the God of authority, the God who is self-contained and therefore incomprehensible to men, there would be no reason in anything. No human being can explain in the sense of seeing through all things, but only he who believes in God has the right to hold that there is an explanation at all.

So you see when I was young I was conditioned on every side; I could not help believing in God. Now that I am older I still cannot help believing in God. I believe in God now because unless I have Him as the All-Conditioner, life is Chaos.

I shall not convert you at the end of my argument. I think the argument is sound. I hold that belief in God is not merely as reasonable as other belief, or even a little or infinitely more probably true than other belief; I hold rather that unless you believe in God you can logically believe in nothing else. But since I believe in such a God, a God who has conditioned you as well as me, I know that you can to your own satisfaction, by the help of the biologists, the psychologists, the logicians, and the Bible critics reduce everything I have said this afternoon and evening to the circular meanderings of a hopeless authoritarian. Well, my meanderings have, to be sure, been circular; they have made everything turn on God. So now I shall leave you with Him, and with His mercy.

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Why I Believe in God

Cornelius Van Til

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You have noticed, haven't you, that in recent times certain scientists like Dr. James Jeans and Sir Arthur Eddington, as well as some outstanding philosophers like Dr. C.E.M. Joad, have had a good deal to say about religion and God? Scientists Jeans and Eddington are ready to admit that there may be something to the claims of men who say they have had an experience of God, while Philosopher Joad says that the "obtrusiveness of evil" has virtually compelled him to look into the argument for God's existence afresh. Much like modernist theologian Dr. Reinhold Niebuhr who talks about original sin, Philosopher Joad speaks about evil as being ineradicable from the human mind.

Then, too, you have on occasion asked yourself whether death ends all. You have recalled, perhaps, how Socrates the great Greek philosopher, struggled with that problem the day before he drank the hemlock cup. Is there anything at all, you ask yourself, to the idea of a judgment after death? Am I quite sure, you say, that there is not? How do I know that there is no God?

In short, as a person of intelligence, having a sense of responsibility, you have from time to time asked yourself some questions about the foundation of your thought and action. You have looked into, or at least been concerned about, what the philosophers call your theory of reality . So when I suggest that you spend a Sunday afternoon with me discussing my reasons for believing in God, I have the feeling that you are basically interested in what I am proposing for discussion.

To make our conversation more interesting, let's start by comparing notes on our past. That will fit in well with our plan, for the debate concerning heredity and environment is prominent in our day. Perhaps you think that the only real reason I have for believing in God is the fact that I was taught to do so in my early days. Of course I don't think that is really so. I don't deny that I was taught to believe in God when I was a child, but I do affirm that since I have grown up I have heard a pretty full statement of the argument against belief in God. And it is after having heard that argument that I am more than ever ready to believe in God. Now, in fact, I feel that the whole of history and civilization would be unintelligible to me if it were not for my belief in God. So true is this, that I propose to argue that unless God is back of everything, you cannot find meaning in anything. I cannot even argue for belief in Him, without already having taken Him for granted. And similarly I contend that you cannot argue against belief in Him unless you also first take Him for granted. Arguing about God's existence, I hold, is like arguing about air. You may affirm that air exists, and I that it does not. But as we debate the point, we are both breathing air all the time. Or to use another illustration, God is like the emplacement on which must stand the very guns that are supposed to shoot Him out of existence. However if, after hearing my story briefly, you still think it is all a matter of heredity and environment, I shall not disagree too violently. My whole point will be that there is perfect harmony between my belief as a child and my belief as a man, simply because God is Himself the environment by which my early life was directed and my later life made intelligible to myself.

The "Accident of Birth"

We are frequently told that much in our life depends on "the accident of birth". In ancient time some men were said to spring full-grown from the foreheads of the gods. That, at any rate, is not true today. Yet I understand the next best thing happened to you. You were born, I am told, in Washington, D.C., under the shadow of the White House. Well, I was born in a little thatched roof house with a cow barn attached, in Holland. You wore "silver slippers" and I wore wooden shoes.

Is this really important for our purpose? Not particularly, but it is important that neither of us was born in Guadalcanal or Timbuktu. Both of us, I mean, were born in the midst and under the influence of "Christian civilization." We shall limit our discussion, then, to the "God of Christianity." I believe, while you do not believe or are not sure that you do believe, in this particular kind of God. That will give point to our discussion. For surely there is no sense in talking about the existence of God, without knowing what kind of God it is who may or may not exist.

So much then we have gained. We at least know in general what sort of God we are going to make the subject for our conversation. If now we can come to a similar preliminary agreement as to the standard or test by which to prove or disprove God's existence, we can proceed. You, of course, do not expect me to bring God into the room here so that you may see Him. If I were able to do that, He would not be the God of Christianity. All that you expect me to do is to make it reasonable for you to believe in God. And I should like to respond quickly by saying that that is just what I am trying to do. But a moment's thought makes me hesitate. If you really do not believe in God, then you naturally do not believe that you are his creature. I, on the other hand, who do believe in God also believe, naturally, that it is reasonable for God's creature to believe in God. So I can only undertake to show that, even if it does not appear reasonable to you, it is reasonable for you, to believe in God.

I see you are getting excited. You feel a little like a man who is about to undergo a major operation. You realize that if you are to change your belief about God, you will also have to change your belief about yourself. And you are not quite ready for that. Well, you may leave if you desire. I certainly do not wish to be impolite. I only thought that as an intelligent person you would be willing to hear the "other side" of the question. And after all I am not asking you to agree with what I say. We have not really agreed on what we mean by God more than in a general and formal way. So also we need not at this point agree on the standard or test in more than a general or formal way. You might follow my argument, just for argument's sake.

Childhood

To go on, then, I can recall playing as a child in a sandbox built into a corner of the hay-barn. From the hay-barn I would go through the cow-barn to the house. Built into the hay-barn too, but with doors opening into the cow-barn, was a bed for the working-man. How badly I wanted permission to sleep in that bed for a night! Permission was finally given. Freud was still utterly unknown to me, but I had heard about ghosts and "forerunners of death." That night I heard the cows jingle their chains. I knew there were cows and that they did a lot of jingling with their chains, but after a while I was not quite certain that it was only the cows that made all the noises I heard. Wasn't there someone walking down the aisle back of the cows, and wasn't he approaching my bed? Already I had been taught to say my evening prayers. Some of the words of that prayer were to this effect: "Lord, convert me, that I may be converted." Unmindful of the paradox, I prayed that prayer that night as I had never prayed before.

I do not recall speaking either to my father or mother about my distress. They would have been unable to provide the modern remedy. Psychology did not come to their library table — not even The Ladies Home Journal ! Yet I know what they would have said. Of course there were no ghosts, and certainly I should not be afraid anyway, since with body and soul I belonged to my Savior who died for me on the Cross and rose again that His people might be saved from Hell and go to Heaven! I should pray earnestly and often that the Holy Spirit might give me a new heart so that I might truly love God instead of sin and myself.

How do I know that this is the sort of thing they would have told me? Well, that was the sort of thing they spoke about from time to time. Or rather, that was the sort of thing that constituted the atmosphere of our daily life. Ours was not in any sense a pietistic family. There were not any great emotional outbursts on any occasion that I recall. There was much ado about making hay in the summer and about caring for the cows and sheep in the winter, but round about it all there was a deep conditioning atmosphere. Though there were no tropical showers of revivals, the relative humidity was always very high. At every meal the whole family was present. There was a closing as well as an opening prayer, and a chapter of the Bible was read each time. The Bible was read through from Genesis to Revelation. At breakfast or at dinner, as the case might be, we would hear of the New Testament, or of "the children of Gad after their families, of Zephon and Haggi and Shuni and Ozni, of Eri and Areli." I do not claim that I always fully understood the meaning of it all. Yet of the total effect there can be no doubt. The Bible became for me, in all its parts, in every syllable, the very Word of God. I learned that I must believe the Scripture story, and that "faith" was a gift of God. What had happened in the past, and particularly what had happened in the past in Palestine, was of the greatest moment to me. In short, I was brought up in what Dr. Joad would call "topographical and temporal parochialism." I was "conditioned" in the most thorough fashion. I could not help believing in God — in the God of Christianity — in the God of the whole Bible!

Living next to the Library of Congress, you were not so restricted. Your parents were very much enlightened in their religious views. They read to you from some Bible of the World instead of from the Bible of Palestine. No, indeed, you correct me, they did no such thing. They did not want to trouble you about religious matters in your early days. They sought to cultivate the "open mind" in their children.

Shall we say then that in my early life I was conditioned to believe in God, while you were left free to develop your own judgment as you pleased? But that will hardly do. You know as well as I that every child is conditioned by its environment. You were as thoroughly conditioned not to believe in God as I was to believe in God. So let us not call each other names. If you want to say that belief was poured down my throat, I shall retort by saying that unbelief was poured down your throat. That will get us set for our argument.

Early Schooling

To the argument we must now shortly come. Just another word, however, about my schooling. That will bring all the factors into the picture.

I was not quite five when somebody — fortunately I cannot recall who — took me to school. On the first day I was vaccinated and it hurt. I can still feel it. I had already been to church. I recall that definitely because I would sometimes wear my nicely polished leather shoes. A formula was read over me at my baptism which solemnly asserted that I had been conceived and born in sin, the idea being that my parents, like all men, had inherited sin from Adam, the first man and the representative of the human race. The formula further asserted that though thus conditioned by inescapable sin I was, as a child of the Covenant, redeemed in Christ. And at the ceremony my parents solemnly promised that as soon as I should be able to understand they would instruct me in all these matters by all the means at their disposal.

It was in pursuance of this vow that they sent me to a Christian grade school. In it I learned that my being saved from sin and my belonging to God made a difference for all that I knew or did. I saw the power of God in nature and His providence in the course of history. That gave the proper setting for my salvation, which I had in Christ. In short, the whole wide world that gradually opened up for me through my schooling was regarded as operating in its every aspect under the direction of the all-powerful and all-wise God whose child I was through Christ. I was to learn to think God's thoughts after him in every field of endeavor.

Naturally there were fights on the "campus" of the school and I was engaged in some — though not in all — of them. Wooden shoes were wonderful weapons of war. Yet we were strictly forbidden to use them, even for defensive purposes. There were always lectures both by teachers and by parents on sin and evil in connection with our martial exploits. This was especially the case when a regiment of us went out to do battle with the pupils of the public school. The children of the public school did not like us. They had an extensive vocabulary of vituperation. Who did we think we were anyway? We were goody goodies — too good to go to the public school! "There! take that and like it!" We replied in kind. Meanwhile our sense of distinction grew by leaps and wounds. We were told in the evening that we must learn to bear with patience the ridicule of the "world." Had not the world hated the church, since Cain's time?

How different your early schooling was! You went to a "neutral" school. As your parents had done at home, so your teachers now did at school. They taught you to be "open-minded." God was not brought into connection with your study of nature or history. You were trained without bias all along the line.

Of course, you know better now. You realize that all that was purely imaginary. To be "without bias" is only to have a particular kind of bias. The idea of "neutrality" is simply a colorless suit that covers a negative attitude toward God. At least it ought to be plain that he who is not for the God of Christianity is against Him. You see, the world belongs to Him, and that you are His creature, and as such are to own up to that fact by honoring Him whether you eat or drink or do anything else. God says that you live, as it were, on His estate. And His estate has large ownership signs placed everywhere, so that he who goes by even at seventy miles an hour cannot but read them. Every fact in this world, the God of the Bible claims, has His stamp indelibly engraved upon it. How then could you be neutral with respect to such a God? Do you walk about leisurely on a Fourth of July in Washington wondering whether the Lincoln Memorial belongs to anyone? Do you look at "Old Glory" waving from a high flagpole and wonder whether she stands for anything? Does she require anything of you, born an American citizen as you are? You would deserve to suffer the fate of the "man without a country" if as an American you were neutral to America. Well, in a much deeper sense you deserve to live forever without God if you do not own and glorify Him as your Creator. You dare not manipulate God's world and least of all yourself as His image-bearer, for your own final purposes. When Eve became neutral as between God and the Devil, weighing the contentions of each as though they were inherently on the face of them of equal value, she was in reality already on the side of the devil!

There you go again getting excited once more. Sit down and calm yourself. You are open-minded and neutral are you not? And you have learned to think that any hypothesis has, as a theory of life, an equal right to be heard with any other, have you not? After all I am only asking you to see what is involved in the Christian conception of God. If the God of Christianity exists, the evidence for His existence is abundant and plain so that it is both unscientific and sinful not to believe in Him. When Dr. Joad, for example says: "The evidence for God is far from plain," on the ground that if it were plain everybody would believe in Him, he is begging the question. If the God of Christianity does exist, the evidence for Him must be plain. And the reason, therefore, why "everybody" does not believe in Him must be that "everybody" is blinded by sin. Everybody wears colored glasses. You have heard the story of the valley of the blind. A young man who was out hunting fell over a precipice into the valley of the blind. There was no escape. The blind men did not understand him when he spoke of seeing the sun and the colors of the rainbow, but a fine young lady did understand him when he spoke the language of love. The father of the girl would not consent to the marriage of his daughter to a lunatic who spoke so often of things that did not exist. But the great psychologists of the blind men's university offered to cure him of his lunacy by sewing up his eyelids. Then, they assured him, he would be normal like "everybody" else. But the simple seer went on protesting that he did see the sun.

So, as we have our tea, I propose not only to operate on your heart so as to change your will, but also on your eyes so as to change your outlook. But wait a minute. No, I do not propose to operate at all. I myself cannot do anything of the sort. I am just mildly suggesting that you are perhaps dead, and perhaps blind, leaving you to think the matter over for yourself. If an operation is to be performed it must be performed by God Himself.

Later Schooling

Meanwhile let us finish our story. At ten I came to this country and after some years decided to study for the ministry. This involved preliminary training at a Christian preparatory school and college. All my teachers were pledged to teach their subjects from the Christian point of view. Imagine teaching not only religion but algebra from the Christian point of view! But it was done. We were told that all facts in all their relations, numerical as well as others, are what they are because of God's all comprehensive plan with respect to them. Thus the very definitions of things would not merely be incomplete but basically wrong if God were left out of the picture. Were we not informed about the views of others? Did we not hear about evolution and about Immanuel Kant, the great modern philosopher who had conclusively shown that all the arguments for the existence of God were invalid? Oh, yes, we heard about all these things, but there were refutations given and these refutations seemed adequate to meet the case.

In the Seminaries I attended, namely Calvin, and Princeton before its reorganization along semi-modernist lines in 1929, the situation was much the same. So for instance Dr. Robert Dick Wilson used to tell us, and, as far as we could understand the languages, show us from the documents, that the "higher critics" had done nothing that should rightfully damage our child-like faith in the Old Testament as the Word of God. Similarly Dr. J. Gresham Machen and others made good their claim that New Testament Christianity is intellectually defensible and that the Bible is right in its claims. You may judge of their arguments by reading them for yourself. In short, I heard the story of historic Christianity and the doctrine of God on which it is built over and over from every angle by those who believed it and were best able to interpret its meaning.

The telling of this story has helped, I trust, to make the basic question simple and plain. You know pretty clearly now what sort of God it is of which I am speaking to you. If my God exists it was He who was back of my parents and teachers. It was He who conditioned all that conditioned me in my early life. But then it was He also who conditioned everything that conditioned you in your early life. God, the God of Christianity, is the All-Conditioner!

As the All-Conditioner, God is the All-Conscious One. A God Who is to control all things must control them "by the counsel of His will." If He did not do this, He would Himself be conditioned. So then I hold that my belief in Him and your disbelief in Him are alike meaningless except for Him.

Objections Raised

By this time you are probably wondering whether I have really ever heard the objections which are raised against belief in such a God. Well, I think I have. I heard them from my teachers who sought to answer them. I also heard them from teachers who believed they could not be answered. While a student at Princeton Seminary I attended summer courses in the Chicago Divinity School. Naturally I heard the modern or liberal view of Scripture set forth fully there. And after graduation from the Seminary I spent two years at Princeton University for graduate work in philosophy. There the theories of modern philosophy were both expounded and defended by very able men. In short I was presented with as full a statement of the reasons for disbelief as I had been with the reasons for belief. I heard both sides fully from those who believed what they taught.

You have compelled me to say this by the look on your face. Your very gestures suggest that you cannot understand how any one acquainted with the facts and arguments presented by modern science and philosophy can believe in a God who really created the world, who really directs all things in the world by a plan to the ends He has in view for them. Well, I am only one of many who hold to the old faith in full view of what is said by modern science, modern philosophy, and modern Biblical criticism.

Obviously I cannot enter into a discussion of all the facts and all the reasons urged against belief in God. There are those who have made the Old Testament, as there are those who have made the New Testament, their life-long study. It is their works you must read for a detailed refutation of points of Biblical criticism. Others have specialized in physics and biology. To them I must refer you for a discussion of the many points connected with such matters as evolution. But there is something that underlies all these discussions. And it is with that something that I now wish to deal.

You may think I have exposed myself terribly. Instead of talking about God as something vague and indefinite, after the fashion of the modernist, the Barthians, and the mystic, a God so empty of content and remote from experience as to make no demands upon men, I have loaded down the idea of God with "antiquated" science and "contradictory" logic. It seems as though I have heaped insult upon injury by presenting the most objectionable sort of God I could find. It ought to be very easy for you to prick my bubble. I see you are ready to read over my head bushels of facts taken from the standard college texts on physics, biology, anthropology, and psychology, or to crush me with your sixty-ton tanks taken from Kant's famous book, The Critique of Pure Reason . But I have been under these hot showers now a good many times. Before you take the trouble to open the faucet again there is a preliminary point I want to bring up. I have already referred to it when we were discussing the matter of test or standard.

The point is this. Not believing in God, we have seen , you do not think yourself to be God's creature. And not believing in God you do not think the universe has been created by God. That is to say, you think of yourself and the world as just being there. Now if you actually are God's creature, then your present attitude is very unfair to Him. In that case it is even an insult to Him. And having insulted God, His displeasure rests upon you. God and you are not on "speaking terms." And you have very good reasons for trying to prove that He does not exist. If He does exist, He will punish you for your disregard of Him. You are therefore wearing colored glasses. And this determines everything you say about the facts and reasons for not believing in Him. You have had your picnics and hunting parties there without asking His permission. You have taken the grapes of God's vineyard without paying Him any rent and you have insulted His representatives who asked you for it.

I must make an apology to you at this point. We who believe in God have not always made this position plain. Often enough we have talked with you about facts and sound reasons as though we agreed with you on what these really are. In our arguments for the existence of God we have frequently assumed that you and we together have an area of knowledge on which we agree. But we really do not grant that you see any fact in any dimension of life truly. We really think you have colored glasses on your nose when you talk about chickens and cows, as well as when you talk about the life hereafter. We should have told you this more plainly than we did. But we were really a little ashamed of what would appear to you as a very odd or extreme position. We were so anxious not to offend you that we offended our own God. But we dare no longer present our God to you as smaller or less exacting than He really is. He wants to be presented as the All-Conditioner, as the emplacement on which even those who deny Him must stand.

Now in presenting all your facts and reasons to me, you have assumed that such a God does not exist. You have taken for granted that you need no emplacement of any sort outside of yourself. You have assumed the autonomy of your own experience. Consequently you are unable — that is, unwilling — to accept as a fact any fact that would challenge your self-sufficiency. And you are bound to call that contradictory which does not fit into the reach of your intellectual powers. You remember what old Procrustes did. If his visitors were too long, he cut off a few slices at each end; if they were too short, he used the curtain stretcher on them. It is that sort of thing I feel that you have done with every fact of human experience. And I am asking you to be critical of this your own most basic assumption. Will you not go into the basement of your own experience to see what has been gathering there while you were busy here and there with the surface inspection of life? You may be greatly surprised at what you find there.

To make my meaning clearer, I shall illustrate what I have said by pointing out how modern philosophers and scientists handle the facts and doctrines of Christianity.

Basic to all the facts and doctrines of Christianity and therefore involved in the belief in God, is the creation doctrine. Now modern philosophers and scientists as a whole claim that to hold such a doctrine or to believe in such a fact is to deny our own experience. They mean this not merely in the sense that no one was there to see it done, but in the more basic sense that it is logically impossible. They assert that it would break the fundamental laws of logic.

The current argument against the creation doctrine derives from Kant. It may fitly be expressed in the words of a more recent philosopher, James Ward: "If we attempt to conceive of God apart from the world, there is nothing to lead us on to creation" (Realm of Ends , p. 397). That is to say, if God is to be connected to the universe at all, he must be subject to its conditions. Here is the old creation doctrine. It says that God has caused the world to come into existence. But what do we mean by the word "cause"? In our experience, it is that which is logically correlative to the word "effect". If you have an effect you must have a cause and if you have a cause you must have an effect. If God caused the world, it must therefore have been because God couldn't help producing an effect. And so the effect may really be said to be the cause of the cause. Our experience can therefore allow for no God other than one that is dependent upon the world as much as the world is dependent upon Him.

The God of Christianity cannot meet these requirements of the autonomous man. He claims to be all-sufficient. He claims to have created the world, not from necessity but from His free will. He claims not to have changed in Himself when He created the world. His existence must therefore be said to be impossible and the creation doctrine must be said to be an absurdity.

The doctrine of providence is also said to be at variance with experience. This is but natural. One who rejects creation must logically also reject providence. If all things are controlled by God's providence, we are told, there can be nothing new and history is but a puppet dance.

You see then that I might present to you great numbers of facts to prove the existence of God. I might say that every effect needs a cause. I might point to the wonderful structure of the eye as evidence of God's purpose in nature. I might call in the story of mankind through the past to show that it has been directed and controlled by God. All these evidences would leave you unaffected. You would simply say that however else we may explain reality, we cannot bring in God. Cause and purpose, you keep repeating, are words that we human beings use with respect to things around us because they seem to act as we ourselves act, but that is as far as we can go.

And when the evidence for Christianity proper is presented to you the procedure is the same. If I point out to you that the prophecies of Scripture have been fulfilled, you will simply reply that it quite naturally appears that way to me and to others, but that in reality it is not possible for any mind to predict the future from the past. If it were, all would again be fixed and history would be without newness and freedom.

Then if I point to the many miracles, the story is once more the same. To illustrate this point I quote from the late Dr. William Adams Brown, an outstanding modernist theologian. "Take any of the miracles of the past," says Brown, "The virgin birth, the raising of Lazarus, the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Suppose that you can prove that these events happened just as they are claimed to have happened. What have you accomplished? You have shown that our previous view of the limits of the possible needs to be enlarged; that our former generalizations were too narrow and need revision; that problems cluster about the origin of life and its renewal of which we had hitherto been unaware. But the one thing which you have not shown, which indeed you cannot show, is that a miracle has happened; for that is to confess that these problems are inherently insoluble, which cannot be determined until all possible tests have been made" (God at Work, New York, 1933, p. 169). You see with what confidence Brown uses this weapon of logical impossibility against the idea of a miracle. Many of the older critics of Scripture challenged the evidence for miracle at this point or at that. They made as it were a slow, piece-meal land invasion of the island of Christianity. Brown, on the other hand, settles the matter at once by a host of stukas from the sky. Any pill boxes that he cannot destroy immediately, he will mop up later. He wants to get rapid control of the whole field first. And this he does by directly applying the law of non-contradiction. Only that is possible, says Brown, in effect, which I can show to be logically related according to my laws of logic. So then if miracles want to have scientific standing, that is be recognized as genuine facts, they must sue for admittance at the port of entry to the mainland of scientific endeavor. And admission will be given as soon as they submit to the little process of generalization which deprives them of their uniqueness. Miracles must take out naturalization papers if they wish to vote in the republic of science and have any influence there.

Take now the four points I have mentioned — creation, providence, prophecy, and miracle. Together they represent the whole of Christian theism. Together they include what is involved in the idea of God and what He has done round about and for us. Many times over and in many ways the evidence for all these has been presented. But you have an always available and effective answer at hand. It is impossible! It is impossible! You act like a postmaster who has received a great many letters addressed in foreign languages. He says he will deliver them as soon as they are addressed in the King's English by the people who sent them. Till then they must wait in the dead letter department. Basic to all the objections the average philosopher and scientist raises against the evidence for the existence of God is the assertion or the assumption that to accept such evidence would be to break the rules of logic.

I see you are yawning. Let us stop to eat supper now. For there is one more point in this connection that I must make. You have no doubt at some time in your life been to a dentist. A dentist drills a little deeper and then a little deeper and at last comes to the nerve of the matter.

Now before I drill into the nerve of the matter, I must again make apologies. The fact that so many people are placed before a full exposition of the evidence for God's existence and yet do not believe in Him has greatly discouraged us. We have therefore adopted measures of despair. Anxious to win your good will, we have again compromised our God. Noting the fact that men do not see, we have conceded that what they ought to see is hard to see. In our great concern to win men we have allowed that the evidence for God's existence is only probably compelling. And from that fatal confession we have gone one step further down to the point where we have admitted or virtually admitted that it is not really compelling at all. And so we fall back upon testimony instead of argument. After all, we say, God is not found at the end of an argument; He is found in our hearts. So we simply testify to men that once we were dead, and now we are alive, that once we were blind and that now we see, and give up all intellectual argument.

Do you suppose that our God approves of this attitude of His followers? I do not think so. The God who claims to have made all facts and to have placed His stamp upon them will not grant that there is really some excuse for those who refuse to see. Besides, such a procedure is self-defeating. If someone in your home town of Washington denied that there was any such thing as a United States Government would you take him some distance down the Potomac and testify to him that there is? So your experience and testimony of regeneration would be meaningless except for the objective truth of the objective facts that are presupposed by it. A testimony that is not an argument is not a testimony either, just as an argument that is not a testimony is not even an argument.

Waiving all this for the moment, let us see what the modern psychologist of religion, who stands on the same foundation with the philosopher, will do to our testimony. He makes a distinction between the raw datum and its cause, giving me the raw datum and keeping for himself the explanation of the cause. Professor James H. Leuba, a great psychologist of Bryn Mawr, has a procedure that is typical. He says, "The reality of any given datum — of an immediate experience in the sense in which the term is used here, may not be impugned: When I feel cold or warm, sad or mirthful, discouraged or confident, I am cold, sad, discouraged, etc., and every argument which might be advanced to prove to me that I am not cold is, in the nature of the case, preposterous; an immediate experience may not be controverted; it cannot be wrong." All this seems on the surface to be very encouraging. The immigrant is hopeful of a ready and speedy admittance. However, Ellis Island must still be passed. "But if the raw data of experience are not subject to criticism, the causes ascribed to them are. If I say that my feeling of cold is due to an open window, or my state of exultation to a drug, or my renewed courage to God, my affirmation goes beyond my immediate experience; I have ascribed a cause to it, and that cause may be the right or the wrong one." (God or Man, New York, 1933, p. 243.) And thus the immigrant must wait at Ellis Island a million years. That is to say, I, as a believer in God through Christ, assert that I am born again through the Holy Spirit. The Psychologist says that is a raw datum of experience and as such incontrovertible. We do not, he says, deny it. But it means nothing to us. If you want it to mean something to us you must ascribe a cause to your experience. We shall then examine the cause. Was your experience caused by opium or God? You say by God. Well, that is impossible since as philosophers we have shown that it is logically contradictory to believe in God. You may come back at any time when you have changed your mind about the cause of your regeneration. We shall be glad to have you and welcome you as a citizen of our realm, if only you take out your naturalization papers!

We seem now to have come to a pretty pass. We agreed at the outset to tell each other the whole truth. If I have offended you it has been because I dare not, even in the interest of winning you, offend my God. And if I have not offended you I have not spoken of my God. For what you have really done in your handling of the evidence for belief in God, is to set yourself up as God. You have made the reach of your intellect, the standard of what is possible or not possible. You have thereby virtually determined that you intend never to meet a fact that points to God. Facts, to be facts at all — facts, that is, with decent scientific and philosophic standing — must have your stamp instead of that of God upon them as their virtual creator.

Of course I realize full well that you do not pretend to create redwood trees and elephants. But you do virtually assert that redwood trees and elephants cannot be created by God. You have heard of the man who never wanted to see or be a purple cow. Well, you have virtually determined that you never will see or be a created fact. With Sir Arthur Eddington you say as it were, "What my net can't catch isn't fish."

Nor do I pretend, of course, that once you have been brought face to face with this condition, you can change your attitude. No more than the Ethiopian can change his skin or the leopard his spots can you change your attitude. You have cemented your colored glasses to your face so firmly that you cannot even take them off when you sleep. Freud has not even had a glimpse of the sinfulness of sin as it controls the human heart. Only the great Physician through His blood atonement on the Cross and by the gift of His Spirit can take those colored glasses off and make you see facts as they are, facts as evidence, as inherently compelling evidence, for the existence of God.

It ought to be pretty plain now what sort of God I believe in. It is God, the All-Conditioner. It is the God who created all things, Who by His providence conditioned my youth, making me believe in Him, and who in my later life by His grace still makes me want to believe in Him. It is the God who also controlled your youth and so far has apparently not given you His grace that you might believe in Him.

You may reply to this: "Then what's the use of arguing and reasoning with me?" Well, there is a great deal of use in it. You see, if you are really a creature of God, you are always accessible to Him. When Lazarus was in the tomb he was still accessible to Christ who called him back to life. It is this on which true preachers depend. The prodigal [son] thought he had clean escaped from the father's influence. In reality the father controlled the "far country" to which the prodigal had gone. So it is in reasoning. True reasoning about God is such as stands upon God as upon the emplacement that alone gives meaning to any sort of human argument. And such reasoning, we have a right to expect, will be used of God to break down the one-horse carriage of human autonomy.

But now I see you want to go home. And I do not blame you; the last bus leaves at twelve. I should like to talk again another time. I invite you to come to dinner next Sunday. But I have pricked your bubble, so perhaps you will not come back. And yet perhaps you will. That depends upon the Father's pleasure. Deep down in your heart you know very well that what I have said about you is true. You know there is no unity in your life. You want no God who by His counsel provides for the unity you need. Such a God, you say, would allow for nothing new. So you provide your own unity. But this unity must, by your own definition, not kill that which is wholly new. Therefore it must stand over against the wholly new and never touch it at all. Thus by your logic you talk about possibles and impossibles, but all this talk is in the air. By your own standards it can never have anything to do with reality. Your logic claims to deal with eternal and changeless matters; and your facts are wholly changing things; and "never the twain shall meet." So you have made nonsense of your own experience. With the prodigal you are at the swine-trough, but it may be that, unlike the prodigal, you will refuse to return to the father's house.

On the other hand by my belief in God I do have unity in my experience. Not of course the sort of unity that you want. Not a unity that is the result of my own autonomous determination of what is possible. But a unity that is higher than mine and prior to mine. On the basis of God's counsel I can look for facts and find them without destroying them in advance. On the basis of God's counsel I can be a good physicist, a good biologist, a good psychologist, or a good philosopher. In all these fields I use my powers of logical arrangement in order to see as much order in God's universe as it may be given a creature to see. The unities, or systems that I make are true because [they are] genuine pointers toward the basic or original unity that is found in the counsel of God.

Looking about me I see both order and disorder in every dimension of life. But I look at both of them in the light of the Great Orderer Who is back of them. I need not deny either of them in the interest of optimism or in the interest of pessimism. I see the strong men of biology searching diligently through hill and dale to prove that the creation doctrine is not true with respect to the human body, only to return and admit that the missing link is missing still. I see the strong men of psychology search deep and far into the sub-consciousness, child and animal consciousness, in order to prove that the creation and providence doctrines are not true with respect to the human soul, only to return and admit that the gulf between human and animal intelligence is as great as ever. I see the strong men of logic and scientific methodology search deep into the transcendental for a validity that will not be swept away by the ever-changing tide of the wholly new, only to return and say that they can find no bridge from logic to reality, or from reality to logic. And yet I find all these, though standing on their heads, reporting much that is true. I need only to turn their reports right side up, making God instead of man the center of it all, and I have a marvelous display of the facts as God has intended me to see them.

And if my unity is comprehensive enough to include the efforts of those who reject it, it is large enough even to include that which those who have been set upright by regeneration cannot see. My unity is that of a child who walks with its father through the woods. The child is not afraid because its father knows it all and is capable of handling every situation. So I readily grant that there are some "difficulties" with respect to belief in God and His revelation in nature and Scripture that I cannot solve. In fact there is mystery in every relationship with respect to every fact that faces me, for the reason that all facts have their final explanation in God Whose thoughts are higher than my thoughts, and Whose ways are higher than my ways. And it is exactly that sort of God that I need. Without such a God, without the God of the Bible, the God of authority, the God who is self-contained and therefore incomprehensible to men, there would be no reason in anything. No human being can explain in the sense of seeing through all things, but only he who believes in God has the right to hold that there is an explanation at all.

So you see when I was young I was conditioned on every side; I could not help believing in God. Now that I am older I still cannot help believing in God. I believe in God now because unless I have Him as the All-Conditioner, life is Chaos.

I shall not convert you at the end of my argument. I think the argument is sound. I hold that belief in God is not merely as reasonable as other belief, or even a little or infinitely more probably true than other belief; I hold rather that unless you believe in God you can logically believe in nothing else. But since I believe in such a God, a God who has conditioned you as well as me, I know that you can to your own satisfaction, by the help of the biologists, the psychologists, the logicians, and the Bible critics reduce everything I have said this afternoon and evening to the circular meanderings of a hopeless authoritarian. Well, my meanderings have, to be sure, been circular; they have made everything turn on God. So now I shall leave you with Him, and with His mercy.

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