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Chancellor's Update

Who is God to You?

In the middle of the Twentieth Century a college student listened as her theology teacher described the ontological argument of Saint Anselm. “If you are not talking about the most powerful, most intelligent being, then you are not talking about God at all,” said the teacher. Although she grasped the meaning of the argument, she decided that it was inferior to Thomas Aquinas’ five proofs of God’s existence and quickly dismissed it from her worldview.

Some years later during a conversation with a non-Catholic friend of many years, she asked him if he had ever been invited to become a Christian. He said that he had been asked several times, but declined the invitation. Accepting his answer, she then asked him, “Who is God to you?” He responded, “I really don’t know.”

During the latter part of the Twentieth Century statistical polls continued to show that most Americans still believed in God, but the culture and practices continued to show a decline in observing God’s Laws. Suddenly the former student began to remember Saint Anselm’s argument and wondered if the argument was relevant to the contemporary situation.

Saint Anselm was a famous philosopher of the 11th Century. “The famous argument ran thus: All men, even unbelievers, have an idea of God; it is the idea of the most perfect Being thinkable; – Now, the idea of the most perfect Being thinkable is the idea of an *existing* Being (for, if it lack existence, it lacks a most notable perfection and hence is *not* the most perfect Being thinkable); Therefore, God really exists...

St. Anselm spoke only of that Being which we cannot help thinking of (and which even atheists cannot help thinking of; for they must have an idea of what they are denying when they deny God) as *absolutely perfect*, as *limitless in perfection*, as *infinite*... *The idea of the absolute is inevitable to normal and mature minds* (Glenn, An Introduction to Philosophy, B. Herder Book Co., St. Louis, Mo., 1966, pp. 101-103).”

To return to the contemporary scene, the words of the Gospel, *And the light shineth in darkness and the darkness did not comprehend it* (John i. 5), show that although today many people speak of God, they act as if they are of the darkness, even though the light is beside them. So, although people in the United States believe in God, observance of God’s Law or the natural law continues to decline, for example, by cohabitation without marriage and motherhood without marriage.

If they believe in God, but do not believe in observing His law, then what do they believe about God? Who is God to them? Yet, God did not hide himself from mankind. He spoke openly with the first man and then the first woman. Later in man’s history He spoke to patriarchs and prophets. Then He sent His Son, Jesus, the God-Man, who explained the Way for men to participate in the Kingdom of God.

Jesus Himself discussed this problem in the parable of the sower and the seed that fell by the wayside, upon a rock, among thorns and upon good ground (Luke viii. 4-15). St. John Chrysostom tells us that Jesus Himself is the Sower. “He came to till and to take care of the earth: to sow the word of compassion. He calls His teaching seed; the souls of men a ploughed field...He is teaching all men alike, without any distinction. For as the sower makes no distinction in his field, but scatters his seed broadcast, so neither does He distinguish between rich and poor, between wise or unwise,

the slothful or the diligent, the courageous or the timid, but addresses His words to all; fulfilling what was His to do...

“But why, tell me, is the greater part of the seed lost? Because of the earth that receives it, not because of the sower. It was because of the soul that heeded not. And why then does He not say: the careless received the remaining seed, and lost it; the rich, and they choked it; the self-indulgent, and they betrayed it? He did not wish to reprove them sharply, lest He throw them into despair but left the reflection to the consciences of those who would hear Him...He desired in this parable to form and to educate His disciples, so that should many of those who would receive the preaching of the Apostles be lost, they should not lose heart. For this happened also to their Teacher; Who, though knowing what was yet to be, ceased not from sowing...

“That this transformation has not taken place in all is not the fault of the Sower, but of those who were unwilling to be changed. He has done His part, and if they have wasted the seed they received from Him, He that has shown such goodness, in this also is without blame...They that are like the *way side* are the depraved, the slothful, and the indifferent. They that are compared to the *rock* are those that fall from weakness alone. They, who are not being tempted or persecuted, and resemble the *thorns* are less worthy of forgiveness.”

St Cyril tells us, “He spoke in parables; but since the multitudes were unworthy to understand the mysteries of heaven His words were obscure to them...A *way side* is almost always hard and unbroken, because it is trodden on by the feet of all who pass, and seed is never sown there...Men of this kind are a highway that is trodden by unclean spirits, and by Satan himself, and they shall never be yielders of holy fruit, because their hearts are sterile and unfruitful.

“Again there are others who carry the faith indifferently within them, a faith that is simply a matter of words. They have a religion that is without root; for entering a church...they readily take part in the sacred mysteries; but they do so from no serious purpose, and from a certain levity of will. And when they go out of the churches such people forget the holy teachings. And as long as Christians are left in peace, they keep the faith; but should persecution arise, they will be of a mind to seek safety in flight...

“Let us consider next, what do the *thorns* mean, by which the divine seed is choked?...This seed which, remaining in the ground of the souls of those that receive it, and being absorbed by them, and beginning to put forth shoots, is choked by the cares of this world.”

Eusebius, another Church Father, describes receivers of the seed who fell from grace because of sloth and neglect. “Some destroy the seed buried within themselves, lightly giving ear to those who seek to deceive them. Some, since they have not received the word of God deeply into their souls, are easily overcome when adversity arises. Some, who because of their greed and appetite for pleasure, and because of their earthly cares, which here are called *thorns*, cause the seed to be smothered.”

Perhaps Bede, a Doctor of the Church, answers the contemporary misunderstanding of God, when he writes, “Rightly are they instructed in parables, since the ears of their hearts being closed, they give no thought to learning the truth, unmindful of what the Lord had said: *He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.*” Some “do not consider the word which they hear as being worthy of any belief, any understanding, or of using to any profit.”

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