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What Then Must I Believe?—I

God—The Cosmos—Man

By
WILLIAM I. LONERGAN, S.J.
Associate Editor, "America"

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AMERICA

A CATHOLIC REVIEW OF THE WEEK

What Others Think About It—

Someone has sent me a copy of the issue of AMERICA for February 9, enclosing an editorial commenting on my remarks in the Senate against the secret sessions, in which the Senate indulges when it takes up the confirmation of appointees of the President, and I write to compliment you on your progressive attitude on this subject. I wish more of our editors would point out the dangers of this secrecy system. I think it is indefensible.
Washington.

C. C. DILL,
U. S. Senator.

I have your marked copy of AMERICA of January 26 issue, bearing on the editorial, "A Grave Menace."

I am glad to note that one Catholic publication comes out into the open, unafraid to condemn the idea of contraception. . . .
Brooklyn.

EDWARD P. DOYLE,
Member of Assembly.

Congratulations on the current issue of AMERICA (February 23).

We have been subscribers since the first issue and I do not recall a more interesting number. The editorials, the summary of the Quirinal-Vatican treaty, the articles by Mr. Van Hoek and Mr. Dore, The Pilgrim, and the poetry cannot be bettered, and even that list omits many that should be mentioned. From first page to cover it is splendid.

Baltimore.

MARK O. SHRIVER.

The issue of AMERICA for January 26 contained an article headed "A Defense of Headline English," by Arthur D. McAghon, which I read with the keenest of pleasure. Evidently written by one who knew what he was talking about, its style was sprightly and charming.

I am not a Catholic, but have read your publication with increasing interest for some time. Such articles as "A Defense of Headline English," written with the accomplished skill of this author, are bound to increase your circulation.

Irvington, N. J.

HERBERT J. KELLY.

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God—the Cosmos—Man

WILLIAM I. LONERGAN, S.J.

Series One

MUCH recent discussion concerning the relations of science and religion has set up a smoke screen tending to obscure the judgments of many men and women regarding the ultimate realities of life. We have become used to pronouncements, more sensational than scientific, uttered on the public platform by speakers of the Harry Elmer Barnes type, and to unwarranted generalities about the so-called "facts" of Evolution that our Sunday supplements feature. They make timely a restatement of precisely what the Catholic Church requires the Faithful to hold regarding (I) the Creator, (II) the beginning of the world, and more especially, (III) the nature and origin of man.

To what, it is often asked, does Catholicism actually bind one in these matters? What is authoritatively settled? How far is a Catholic free to link arms with contemporary schools of philosophical, particularly evolutionist, thought without incurring the stigma of heresy? The Code of Canon Law describes a heretic as one who, having been baptized, retains the name of Christian but obstinately denies or doubts a truth that must be believed by Catholic or Divine faith.

It may be said at once that, contrary to a popular impression among non-Catholics who usually visualize our religion as fixing most minutely and in detail what Catholics are or are not to believe on every conceivable subject from abiogenesis to zymosis, the Church's dogmas touch only a relatively few points. What has been settled, however, is basic. Moreover, while it leaves plenty of latitude for scientific investigation and disputation, it sufficiently covers the ground to afford the Faithful an adequate philosophy

of life and also to serve theologians as a norm and guide for the probable or even certain solution of problems not defined as "of faith."

Needless to say, these teachings of the Church do not involve a claim to supremacy in things scientific. Christ founded a religious society, not a scientific academy. Paraphrasing an ancient apologist's pithy description of the Bible, the scope of religion is to teach mankind how to go to heaven, not how the heavens go. The doctrines of the Church, then, are but an authoritative and infallible exposition of Divine truths solemnly committed to her through Christ's revelation.

Where, then, do we find the truths which are "of faith" (*de fide*)? They may be gathered from any of the following sources: the clear wording of Holy Writ; definitions of the Roman Pontiffs and of General Councils, or of particular Councils solemnly approved by the Holy See; professions of faith formulated by the Church and imposed upon the Faithful; ancient creeds and symbols; and, finally, to quote the Vatican Council, whatever is "proposed by the Church through her . . . ordinary and universal teaching as Divinely revealed."

The creeds are three: the Apostles', the Nicene and the Athanasian.

The principal professions of faith are the Tridentine, so named because it summarizes the definitions and declarations of the Council of Trent (*Tridentum*); the one prescribed for the Greeks by Pope Gregory XIII; that imposed upon the Orientals by Popes Urban VIII and Benedict XIV; and that which Pope Pius X ordered all the clergy to make in order to safeguard the Church against Modernism.

I. The Creator

IT is an article of faith (1.) that a personal God exists; more definitely, that there is one God whose one Divine Nature exists in three Divine Persons. This God is, moreover, a Spirit, eternal, omniscient and omnipotent. Any theory, therefore, how popular soever it may be, which

rules God out of the picture by denying His existence, or limits Him by denying any one of His attributes, cannot be reconciled with Catholicism.

(2.) It is a further Divinely revealed dogma, whose rejection implies shipwreck of the Faith, that God has created whatever exists outside of Himself. As Catholic theology expresses it, the Adorable Trinity is the efficient cause of all things that are. True, creation is often attributed as His distinct work to God the Father, as in the Apostles' Creed; and not improperly. But in reality it is the joint, common work of all three Divine Persons. They form one principle of creation, as the Scholastics say. This general truth is contained in our various professions of faith and in the decrees of any number of Ecumenical Councils. Thus the very first canon accompanying the Constitutions of the Vatican Council reads: "If anyone shall deny the one true God, Creator and Lord of all things visible and invisible, let him be anathema." This declaration is but a repetition of the doctrine expressed by the Council of Florence in the middle of the fifteenth century: "The Church most firmly believes, professes and teaches that the one true God, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, is the Creator of all things visible and invisible."

In the Catholic sense creation means that God produced the universe from nothing, that for the Divine activity which resulted in the general creation there was no pre-existing material with which or on which to work. Creation, St. Thomas explains, "is the production of the whole substance of a thing, with nothing presupposed." As one of his commentators notes:

The last three words [of this definition] are merely declarative. The sense of them is contained in the words that precede them. . . . The formal object of creation is being. . . . Creation makes that to be, which was not. Hence, another definition [also of the Angelic Doctor's], "creation is the production of being as being."

Against Dualism and Pantheism, to which most of the heretical systems that attempt to explain the origin of the universe are reducible, Catholicism has time and again launched her anathemas. Though their forms vary, Dual-

ism would maintain that the universe, particularly matter, is uncreated and on the same plane with God, while Pantheism would identify the creation with God as an emanation from His essence. Catholicism recognizes a duality of beings, but One is infinite and the other finite: it also recognizes that God is immanent in His creation, but He remains transcendent to it at the same time; He is not identified with it.

The Fourth Lateran Council, the Ecumenical Council of Florence, and the late Vatican Council, not to mention others, all unqualifiedly condemn the opposing errors. Modern evolutionary theories which attempt to account for natural phenomena by excluding Divine causality are substantially reducible to either of these two anathematized philosophical schools of thought. It might profitably be noted that they are no novelty under the sun but as old as Christianity, and older.

(3.) Once, to use our limited human way of phrasing a simple but sublime fact, only God Himself had being. In time or, more accurately, along with time, He produced the things that are. Faith teaches that creation is not eternal. It had a beginning. Time and the universe are coexistent. In the Fourth Lateran Council (A. D. 1215) it was solemnly defined against the Albigensian heretics that "from the very first beginning of time [God] created . . . both the spiritual and the corporal nature," a definition that was literally embodied in the decrees of the last General Council in 1870. This dogmatic definition is based on solid Scriptural grounds. Moreover, the Fathers of the Church, if Origen be excluded, are unanimous in supporting it.

(4.) As for the nature of the Divine creative act, it is *de fide*, hence to be believed as a revealed truth, that it was wholly free on God's part. He was in no sense necessitated to create, much less to make this particular type of world rather than some other possible one. The Seventeenth Ecumenical Council, held during the pontificate of Eugenius IV, explicitly defined in its "Decree for the Jacobites," that God created all things "when He willed," a dogma emphasized by the Vatican Council in view of the false teachings of George Hermes and Anthony Guenther.

God created, it tells us, "with absolute freedom of counsel." It decrees that "if anyone . . . shall say that God created, not by His will free from all necessity, but by a necessity equal to the necessity whereby He loves Himself . . . let him be anathema."

(5.) The Vatican Council explicitly teaches that God's sole motive in creating the universe, His purpose as Workman, so to say, was His own Divine benevolence. "Of His own goodness . . . not for the increase or acquirement of His own happiness, but to manifest His perfections by the blessings which He bestows on creatures" . . . He created. The world exists for God's glory. Descartes denied this on the score that it would imply unbecoming egotism and vain-glory on God's part, but there is an express conciliar condemnation of whoever "shall deny that the world was made for the glory of God."

Of the Creator, then, the following is substantially a summary of the doctrines which the Catholic's act of faith must include: belief that God—one God in three Divine Persons—exists; that He is the Creator of all things visible and invisible; that He made the universe in time from nothing, freely, and in order to manifest His Divine perfections, so that it exists for His glory.

Obviously these truths are suggestive of important corollaries and conclusions which, even though not so explicitly taught or defined, logically compel their acceptance if one would think and believe with the Church. To deny them may not constitute formal heresy but it would certainly be rash, since they have behind them the weightiest ecclesiastical and theological authority, often involving the ordinary teaching authority of the Church.

II. The Cosmos

IT is axiomatic with Catholics that once Rome has spoken all discussion in matters of Faith is at an end. In that particular field, as she is the heavenly-appointed teacher of nations, the Church can neither err nor lead others into error. But while she is well aware of the Divine guarantees that she possesses and of her magisterial commission, under

the wisdom and guidance of the Holy Spirit she speaks only when God's interests and the welfare of souls are at stake in matters of moment. Then in the fulness of her Christ-given authority she proclaims religious truth so that there can be no mistake or misunderstanding.

When the great Einstein recently gave to the world his newly propounded electro-gravitation theory it was a matter of special press comment that he should have been able to include so much profound thought in the small compass of a half-dozen pages. It is the achievement of the Church that all Revelation has been reduced to the brief formulas that make up her creeds and professions of faith, with a bit of supplementary addenda. Hence when one passes from a study of her formal dogmatic pronouncements regarding the activities of the Creator, to a consideration of His handiwork itself, few though the *de fide* obligations of Catholics were on the Creator Himself, he will find, possibly to his surprise, that, apart from questions that concern the origin of the human race, they are even more circumscribed about the Creator's handiwork.

The story about the actual beginnings of the cosmos, so far as Revelation is concerned, is substantially found in the opening chapters of Genesis. There you have the nucleus of the Christian doctrine. The fact of a creation is propounded, and its method and order, at least so far as their general headings are concerned, are described.

Obviously both the fact and its attendant circumstances are really and truly revealed, that is, communicated to mankind by God. Hence they are necessarily true, for it is intrinsically repugnant that the Deity should utter a falsehood. Theologians, however, draw a clear distinction between truths which are revealed for their own sake, *per se*, as they say, and others which are revealed only because of their intimate connection with the former, *per accidens*.

So far as the creation of the universe is concerned, the fact, as a dogma of Faith, is *per se* revealed; its subsidiary truths *per accidens*. Now Holy Scripture very often proposes revelations of the latter kind in such a way that they are susceptible of many interpretations, and these, so long as they do not affect faith or morals, the Church never for-

bids. In this category is the mode of creation described in Genesis. Even orthodox commentators are agreed that the narrative occasions more scientific problems than it solves.

Naturally man is intrigued, for curiosity is one of his native characteristics, with knowing just when and how the world was made; what its age is; over how long a period the actual creative process extended; whether primitive beings, especially those that have life, were produced simultaneously or successively; in what order things first made their appearance; how much of creation is God's direct handiwork by "special creation"; how much He left to secondary causes; and a score of similar details.

Strange to say, however, though the answer to all these conundrums is expressed or implied in the Mosaic account, there has been no direct dogmatic pronouncement by the Church about any one of them. She has never defined, for example, as some seem to think she has, that our earth is only about 6,000 years old, or that it was created in six days of twenty-four hours each, or that God immediately and directly created all the various forms and species that make up universal nature. Time and again she has repeated her *de fide* pronouncement that God created the world; that is all.

With a basis for their discussions and conclusions in Genesis, ecclesiastical writers speculate on the process and duration of creation and generally distinguish between the creation of primordial matter out of nothing (creation proper) and the formation or fashioning of all material objects, heavens and earth, oceans and continents, plants and animals, out of the primitive world stuff. Yet even here the Church has not spoken dogmatically and finally about the points involved, so that Catholic scholars, theologians and scientists alike, are left to follow their own sound judgment.

But while neither creeds nor councils nor infallible pontifical declarations have completely clarified and finally decided for the world the problems which the Genesis history of the beginnings of things creates, they have not left the Faithful without very definite guidance through dogmatic pronouncements regarding the attitude they are to have

toward Scripture itself and toward certain schools of thought which have attempted to explain the origin of the cosmos.

Thus Modernism with its contention that the Genesis narrative is but a symbol or a myth has been authoritatively condemned. So, too, Rationalism, with its exclusion of Divine Revelation. Likewise, Materialism with its denial of a spiritual as well as a material creation; Dualism and Pantheism as mentioned in dealing with God's creative activity; Pantheistic Evolution which would explain the universe as an evolution of the Divine substance; Manicheism, Agnosticism, Mechanical Monism and similar heresies. Moreover, it is not without significance that the Roman "Index" bars from the Catholic's reading list such volumes dealing with the origin of things, as Ferriere's in France, Frohschammer's in Bavaria, and, in English, Draper's "History of the Conflicts between Religion and Science."

As for Holy Writ, the Church has defined for us so that they must be believed, the truths that the sacred canonical books, of which Genesis is one, are authentic and inerrant, that in their entirety and with all their parts they have God for their author and are inspired, and that they are to be interpreted according to sound exegetical principles, guided by the general consent of the Fathers and the sense of the Church itself. The Vatican Council makes these truths clear in its Constitution and canons, and the subsequent Encyclical "Providentissimus Deus" of Leo XIII amplifies those teachings. Moreover, the Biblical Commission has supplemented the dogmatic definitions of the Church about the contents of the opening chapters of the Pentateuch with authoritative decisions, which, while they make no pretense to infallibility, are a norm of conduct that command the respectful obedience of the Faithful and indirectly indicate the mind of the Church on the points of Revelation which they touch.

So far, then, as the origin of the world is concerned, provided one admits its initial creation by God and the inspirational and inerrant value of the Biblical account, the Church holds him, under censure of heresy, to little more. Whether theologian or scientist, he can investigate and examine those scientific and historical sources of knowledge

which are at his disposal, and the Church does not say him nay. She knows that he will not find any contradiction between the correct conclusions of any of the natural sciences and the theory of creation proposed as a matter of faith for him. Whether primitive creation was simple or complex, whether it was a very brief or a protracted process, whether the world is 5,000 or 5,000,000 years old,—these and similar problems are more speculative than practical, and Catholicism has not attempted definitely to solve them.

III. Man

BARRING the angels who, in a sense, are a whole world by themselves, the truths of Faith, in so far as they relate to the beginnings of things, all center about three great realities, the Creator, the cosmos and man. Having summarized the *de fide* teachings of Catholicism on the two first topics, it remains to direct our attention to dogmatic anthropology.

Incidentally it may be remarked that the question of the origin of man is one of the most bitterly disputed of our contemporary problems. On no other do the forces of irreligion attempt so vigorously to make orthodoxy look ridiculous. Usually, however, this is done by confounding the Catholic position with extreme Fundamentalist theories, for the dogmatic definitions of the Church regarding primitive man, like those concerning the Creator Himself and the beginnings of His universe, are but a handful. Thus the rest of the science of man's origin and primitive history are left pretty much to the free investigation and discussion of those who may be interested in its enigmas.

(1.) In the first place, it is an article of the Catholic Faith whose denial would constitute one a heretic, that God created the first man, Adam. Scripture is indisputable on this point and any number of councils, especially those treating of original sin and man's redemption, assume or repeat the dogma.

The Biblical narrative is impressively simple, yet very definite:

And he [God] said: let us make man to our image and likeness: and let him have dominion . . . over the whole earth. . . .

And God created man to his own image: to the image of God he created him: male and female he created them. . . .

And the Lord God formed man of the slime of the earth: and breathed into his face the breath of life, and man became a living soul.

(2.) Whether the Divine operation that resulted in the formation of Adam was wholly mediate or immediate, direct or indirect, no Catholic dogmatic declaration has determined. So far as his *soul* was concerned, Faith teaches that that was God's own direct handiwork, and Tradition is most explicit on this fact. As for his *body*, it is Catholic teaching which one would indeed be rash to deny because of the many convincing arguments in its favor even though it be not *de fide*, that it was God's "special" creation.

The whole Scriptural account in its natural and obvious sense teaches this and science has uncovered no conclusive fact that seriously jeopardizes its truthfulness. "And the Lord God," the inspired writer records, "formed man of the slime of the earth, and breathed into his face the breath of life and man became a living soul." It would appear that a twofold direct act of the Deity is here reported, one having to do with the matter of which man's body is made, the other, with his spirit, so that both body and soul were His immediate production.

Indeed so unanimous and constant has been the teaching of the Fathers and Doctors on the point, that many of the older authorities like Suarez, Valentia, Mazzella, and others, did not hesitate to maintain that it was an article of Faith. Not all modern theologians, however, are prepared to stigmatize the opposite opinion as heretical.

(3.) As for the origin of mother Eve, Catholic belief on this matter parallels the teaching of the Church about the origin of Adam himself, for everything in Scripture would seem to indicate that like him she too was God's personal handwork. We read:

Then the Lord God cast a deep sleep upon Adam; and when he was fast asleep, he took one of his ribs, and filled up flesh for it.

And the Lord God built the rib which he took from Adam into a woman: and brought her to Adam.

And Adam said: This now is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called woman because she was taken out of man.

Here as on so many other occasions the Pontifical Biblical Commission gives Catholics the official, even if not the authoritatively infallible teaching of the Church. For it answered negatively the following query:

Whether, to take a specific case, the literal historic sense can be called into doubt where there is question of facts narrated in those same chapters [the first three of Genesis] which touch on the foundations of the Christian religion, such as, among others, . . . the peculiar creation of man, the formation of the first woman from the first man. . . .

(4.) That the entire human family had a common origin and has descended from Adam and Eve is another *de fide* Catholic doctrine, both because clearly revealed in Holy Writ and because intimately associated with the dogma of original sin. While it is not formally defined, the dogmatic commission of the incompleting Vatican Council had drawn up the following canon: "If anyone shall deny that the entire human race sprang from one single protoparent, Adam, let him be anathema." Obviously, at all events, Catholics may not accept the tribal-evolution idea so prevalent among modern writers on evolution.

The questions are often mooted whether any race of men existed on this earth and perished before Adam or remained as his contemporaries. Certainly there is no evidence of either pre-Adamism or co-Adamism. Pre-Adamism has never been condemned. It was reduced to a theological system by the French Calvinist, Isaac Peyrere, who later became a Catholic and abjured his error before Alexander VII. It has been revamped in modern times by Professor Winchell and others. It may be said that the question of the existence of a human race which disappeared before the action described in Genesis is as little connected with our revealed dogmas concerning Adam as the question whether one or more of the stars are inhabited by rational beings resembling man. As co-Adamism, which maintains that men existing before Adam continued to coexist with him and his progeny, destroys the unity of the human family and seems to involve a direct denial of the universality of original sin and the Redemption, the more authoritative theologians consider it heretical.

(5.) Besides the doctrines of the creation of Adam and Eve by God and of the common origin of the race, it is also a matter of faith that every human being has a spiritual, immortal, rational soul, endowed with free will. Theologians are practically unanimous in holding that every human soul is God's immediate creation in the fullest sense of the word, and that this takes place at the moment when it is infused into the body prepared for it. The theory of pre-existence which holds that all souls exist prior to the creation of their respective bodies in which they are enclosed as in a prison, is heretical. Attempts to explain its origin by some sort of production or transmission by the parents is well nigh universally rejected by Catholic doctors.

(6.) From what has been said the attitude of the Church regarding human evolution about which so much is superficially said and written, is readily deducible. The human soul, let alone the whole man, is not and cannot be the result of evolution. Absolutely speaking, man's body could have evolved from a lower animal form. But from possibilities to realities is quite a span and there is clearly nothing in Scripture to justify concluding to that process, nor has science so far offered any convincing arguments to show that present interpretations of the meaning of Genesis must be abandoned and a change of front on the part of theologians in their traditional teaching occasioned. Hence the Church has officially frowned upon the theory.

The distinguished convert-scientist, St. George Mivart, defended it in 1871, but twenty-five years later a French priest for upholding his view was summoned to Rome and ordered to retract the opinion, which he did. In 1899 a volume by the American scholar, Doctor J. A. Zahm, touching the same topic, was suppressed by order of the Holy Office. Without deciding on the disputed theory, ecclesiastical authority forbade its defense since, as propounded, it seemed irreconcilable with both Holy Writ and sound philosophy. These, of course, are only disciplinary measures, consequently reformable, but nevertheless they point the way for other Catholics to walk. They suggest that we always treat possibles as possibles, probabilities as probabilities, and actualities as actualities.

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Editor-in-Chief, "AMERICA"

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