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BY

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SCIENCE AND ATHEISM

AN address on "Science and the Supernatural" delivered by Dr. A. J. Carlson in 1931 has been reprinted in the *Scientific Monthly* for August, 1944. The present pamphlet is in the nature of a critical review of Dr. Carlson's views.

Because of his standing in the world of science Dr. Carlson's paper will be taken seriously by the layman. It is, however, not a scientific paper; for Dr. Carlson, besides being a scientist, is also a militant atheist. The two roles, that of scientist and atheist, have nothing in common; indeed they are at opposite poles. The scientist is deliberate and calmly, even coldly, intellectual; the atheist is highly emotional, sometimes fanatically and superstitiously so, and rarely states his anti-God views calmly. Dr. Carlson is no exception. As a scientist his work is constructive, admirable, and commands our respect; as the antagonist of religion his views are negative—he throws scientific caution to the wind, makes broad statements without knowing all the pertinent facts, and permits his emotions to dominate his reason. Human nature is such that "an otherwise competent scientist" to use his own phrase, may simultaneously be an atheist.

Before we cross swords with the atheist, however, it is well to remind ourselves that there is always some truth in the pronouncements of any thinking man. In general, those of us who claim religious principles can learn this from one who scoffs at religion:

it is expected of us, and rightly so, that we live and think and act on an elevated plane. We have, some of us, perhaps many of us, failed to do so. We are not united in our faith, we are selfish, superior-minded, even arrogant; some of us are hypocrites, others are guilty of dishonesty and injustice. We are these things not because of our religion, but in spite of it. However, those who dislike religion point to us as the reason for their dislike. Unless we strike our breast with a humble *mea culpa* we are not true to the spirit of our faith, and to that extent, at least, we are to blame for the presence of atheists among us.

Dr. Carlson's address is only in part argumentative; in large part it is simply an emphatic statement of opinion on the general topic of religion with little or no attempt to substantiate his assertions. In the short space at my disposal I shall imitate his method, that is, try to avoid argument as far as possible, state simply wherein I disagree with him, and only incidentally give the reasons.

I consider our differences of opinion fundamental and I am sure Dr. Carlson does, too. Both of us likewise feel that the subject matter of this discussion is important both from the viewpoint of the welfare of the individual and of society. Dr. Carlson is an intellectual leader. His followers include many intellectuals, of course, but his most profound influence will be on the hearts and minds of the common folk who do not and cannot follow his reasoning processes, though they will readily adopt many of his conclusions, which are both simple and appealing. However, the average man will never adopt Dr. Carlson's recom-

mendation that all we think and do should be according to the scientific method. That method is above and beyond the man in the street; indeed, it could not be applied to the procedures of every day life even if everybody wished to do so. Dr. Carlson himself is unable to do it. What the multitudes will understand and accept is the recommendation that they discard all religious principles.

Dr. Carlson preaches a non-moral universe in which there is no purpose, and in which, in the absence of a hereafter, there is no justice for the majority of men. How will people react when they have absorbed that outlook on life?

What happened in Germany should be a warning. Two generations ago Haeckel, the scientist and atheist, wrote for the people in Germany as Carlson is writing in America today. Only a few scientists remember Haeckel's researches on Radiolaria, sponges and Medusae, but millions are the victims of his godless philosophy. What is this Nazi mentality that sends a shudder around the world? It is the philosophy of atheism rendered superficially respectable by a veneer of pseudo-science. Let us hope that Americans will not be as credulous and gullible today as were the Germans during and after the days of Haeckel's *Riddle of the Universe*.

It seems to me that Dr. Carlson's paper is a bit of an anachronism harking back to the close of the nineteenth century when science was young and immature. Since that time two world wars have given us all, and especially the scientists, something to think about.

The Supernatural versus Superstition

Dr. Carlson begins by telling us:

On the topic before us it is preposterous for any man to speak for science as a whole and, by inference, for all scientists.

This is so true that the title of the paper "Science and the Supernatural" does not seem justified. On his own admission Carlson is merely offering his personal opinion; he is not speaking for science, nor for the scientists.

Nor does he represent religion, which deals with the supernatural. His concept of what is meant by the supernatural is hazy; he does not distinguish it from superstition. The dictionary definitions are clear enough. The *supernatural* has reference to an order beyond nature, or to an event ascribed to agencies or powers above or beyond nature. *Superstition* is an irrational, abject attitude of mind toward the supernatural, toward nature or toward God, proceeding from ignorance, from fear of the unknown or of the mysterious; it is misdirected or unenlightened religion. If Carlson were to make this distinction clear we could heartily subscribe to many of his warnings against the dangers of superstition.

The Christian thinker, independently of any revelation, accepts the existence of a Creator of nature, and all that pertains to him is, of course, supernatural. Any preternatural events ascribed to other powers than God are considered by the Christian as well as by the scientist to be superstitions or worse. Prayer

to God, the Father of us all, is a supernatural procedure in the sense that it has reference to that which is beyond nature; it is at the same time a rational act with sound arguments in its favor. Many of the practices listed by Carlson, such as the use of water, oil, an amulet, the killing of a goat, the laying on of hands, may be pure superstition; they are that if the person using them supposes that they can produce an effect of themselves. If, however, they are simply an emphatic way of saying a prayer to God by action rather than by spoken words—if the water is a symbol of the cleansing we pray for, if the oil is a symbol of the strength and health we ask for, and if they are understood in that way—then they become a form of prayer, and from the Christian point of view are legitimate. The Catholic doctrine of sacramental efficacy need not concern us here.

We may admit at once that such devices, though rational, are subject to abuse, that too often they are abused by the ignorant. But since it is quite natural for most people to give expression to their thoughts and feelings in some such symbolic manner, it becomes desirable, for psychological reasons if no other, to turn this type of activity into a form of prayer to Almighty God; if this outlet is not provided, men will turn to astrology, fortune telling, the use of meaningless charms, and the like, which have no rational justification whatever. These latter superstitions are not only unscientific; they are also contrary to the very first commandment of the God of the Jews and Christians.

Throughout his address Dr. Carlson puts Christian and pagan religious rites in the same bag because he

considers all religions equally vicious. Others group all religions together because they hold the opposite opinion, namely, that all religions are equally good. As it seems to me, every religion has something good in it, and it is this good that people cling to even when it is surrounded by a framework of superstitions. Most pagan religions incline more or less toward an "irrational, abject attitude of mind toward the supernatural because of ignorance or fear of the mysterious." Christianity has from the beginning labored to eradicate every superstitious practice, but it has been uphill work. Even among Christians today there are deluded fanatics; one may well question Brigham Young's sanity or veracity as the United States Government did.

Dr. Carlson disregards all such considerations. He makes, for instance, the very naïve statement:

. . . all I intend to do is to discuss the supernatural in the light that years of service in the science of physiology have given me.

To most of us it is obvious that the science of physiology cannot throw any light on the nature of the supernatural. What it can do is prove that certain phenomena, certain "miracles" are not supernatural. Science has done just that time and again and deserves credit for it; it is this success that lends superficial plausibility to the argument that science is the enemy of the supernatural. Science may and should demonstrate that this thing or that thing which glitters is not gold; to assert that there is no gold is another matter.

Dr. Carlson declares that there is no gold when he says that our universe is obviously non-moral and when he ridicules the idea of personal immortality. In the short space at my disposal I can do little more than make the counter assertion, this is a moral universe and man can look forward to personal immortality. I do not say that the physiologist should sanction this claim; it is not in his field. But the claim is not unscientific; indeed, it may be said to be truly scientific in the broader sense of the word, because, by applying the scientific method to *all* the facts concerning man, such are the conclusions one will reach. The implication that the physiologist is not truly scientific stands whenever he presumes to judge the totality of human nature from physiological data only.

Dr. Carlson knows how to use sarcasm effectively. In one of the lists of events that he condemns as supernatural he begins rather calmly with "the production of wine from water alone"; but, somehow, as the list grows, an emotional storm blows up. God becomes an anthropomorphic god; the Jews are helped in the crime of murder; demons and hogs are introduced in a way which, outside of the scriptural context, seems ridiculous nonsense; and last is the following masterpiece of scornful phraseology:

Perpetual recurrence of a species of "immaculate conception" in that a divinity sends embryonic "souls" into every human fetus either at the moment of union of sperm and ova, or later in intra-uterine life, etc., *ad infinitum, ad absurdum, ad nauseam.*

In a word, he ridicules the idea that each human soul is specially created. He becomes eloquent here probably because he considers the topic within his own domain, that of physiology. But ridicule is not science, it is only rhetoric. Let us examine the matter calmly. The soul, by every definition, is the principle of life. Science can throw much light on the origin of any particular body which a soul animates; but the principle of life in this man or that man, in you or in me, is more than a creature of flesh. That which makes me what I am and you what you are is my soul and your soul. Read Chapter XIII of Jennings, *The Biological Basis of Human Nature*, which deals with the subject of biology and selves, and gather from that brief discussion how helpless science is when trying to determine what makes me me and you you. Men and women do have immaterial souls, and they are natural souls, not supernatural. One's body is derived from the bodies of one's parents, but the soul is not a fragment of their souls. That each individual is a new creation is common sense even before it is a doctrine of religion. One need not consider its supernatural aspects at all. The Catholic Church, at least, does not teach that something physically miraculous occurs at each conception. She does teach that there is a spiritual something in every man, something that cannot be reached by the physiologist.

The three italicized Latin phrases at the end of the above quotation constitute a highly emotional climax to the list. Such expressions remind one rather forcibly of the unreasoned outbursts of the religious fanatic. And yet, to hear a staid scientist relaxing from his

scientific tasks for the moment, throwing all caution to the wind, and giving vigorous expression to strong convictions, is rather refreshing, even if one disagrees violently. One feels that, after all, here is not a superman, but an excitable, enthusiastic and fallible mortal. The scientist is a man, not a disembodied intellect.

Dr. Carlson's statement that "intense faith seems to predispose to hallucinations" has just this much truth in it: religion may degenerate into fanaticism, and too often does. As elsewhere, Carlson is here talking of superstition, not of sane supernaturalism. His complete inability to comprehend the supernatural is evidenced by these words of his:

The moral efficacy of infant and adult baptism could also be tested experimentally. . . . A prominent physiologist told me that he had done this experiment in his own family, having two of his children baptized, and keeping the other two children as controls.

This extremely offensive mixture of pseudo-science and mock religion would make hilarious conversation in any barroom where disreputable characters congregate. When I say that, I am not being facetious; it is a sober statement, the truth of which can be verified by experiment! Strange, indeed, is the fact that an educated man can be so utterly material-minded as to think even of testing the moral efficacy of baptism. Or is there something besides material-mindedness here? Such conduct reminds one strongly of the definition of superstition given above.

One hesitates to comment on the following statement:

Neither Jesus nor his apostles appear to have claimed any supernatural authority or absolute wisdom for their sayings or writings.

This statement is completely at variance with the Gospel narrative and the only reason one can think of why Carlson makes it is this: he has some respect for the teachings and work of Christ and the apostles, and therefore tries to convince himself that these men could not have been contaminated by the supernatural as he understands it. The wish is evidently father to the thought.

After making all due allowance for a possible confusion in Dr. Carlson's mind of the supernatural and the superstitious, it is still true, as he himself boasts, that

here is the confession of a physiologist of lack of faith in the supernatural, and his reasons.

Whether or not, however, the reasons for this lack of faith are the ones that Dr. Carlson thinks they are, namely, the influence of science on his thinking, is by no means clear. The physiologist will be the first to admit that many other forces and motives besides pure reasoning enter into the formation of a man's outlook on life.

In the mind of Dr. Carlson belief in God and faith in a hereafter are the fossil remnants of outworn creeds and ancient superstitions; but, as a matter of fact, he is himself held in the grip of the modern master superstition, that is to say, the vague dread of all things supernatural. His unreasoned fear of theology and

religious dogma is a superstition that has an all-time record in the havoc it works on the spirit of man.

The Method of Science

As a scientist Dr. Carlson insists, and rightly so, on the use of the scientific method. What is this scientific method?

In essence it is this—the rejection *in toto* of all non-observational and non-experimental authority in the field of experience.

As worded here the definition is satisfactory. Note that it is limited by the phrase *in the field of experience*. Dr. Carlson forgets this limitation in the very next sentence where he replaces it by the phrase *on any subject*. Even this broad statement, however, might be acceptable if it is sanely interpreted. When I speak of God, for instance, I can produce the evidence for His existence, and the evidence is not from authority; it is from the field of experience, though not through experiment. It should be obvious that one cannot devise an experiment that will show what happens when there is no God.

Nor need the religious man object to the following statement:

When no evidence is produced other than personal dicta, past or present, “revelations” in dreams, or the “voice of God,” the scientist can pay no attention whatsoever except to ask: How do they get that way?

The presence too often among us of religious frauds or religious fanatics justifies Dr. Carlson's rhetorical question. And he is still on firm ground in this statement:

The man of science seeks for evidence in the case of all traditional beliefs and practices, and he must abstain from positive views when evidence is lacking in these fields just as he does when evidence is lacking in his own particular field of endeavor.

All that the Christian can ask of the scientist is that if evidence is produced he should proceed to examine the evidence. If, for example, I produce well-attested historical documents to show that the man Christ rose from the dead, it is not scientific to reject that evidence merely because such an event is contrary to the known laws of nature. That is, of course, what the ordinary unbeliever who is not a scientist does. He reasons thus: this thing could not have happened, therefore it did not. But the scientist may not reason in that way because, on his own fundamental principles, one cannot know beforehand what is possible and what is not; one learns only from observation of the facts. The scientist may, of course, decide that in this particular instance the evidence is not sufficient to convince him; well and good; then, on his own principles he withholds judgment in the matter and proclaims that he does not know. He will not form the definite and final judgment that Christ did not rise from the dead because he has not the evidence to convince him one way or the other.

On this point, therefore, we do not hesitate to bring an indictment against Dr. Carlson's procedure.

Throughout his address he states very positive views where, on his own admission the scientific evidence is lacking, for example, that there is no God, that personal immortality is a myth, that prayer is useless. We further declare that he is unscientific when he fails to distinguish between the emotions, which are psychic, and the mechanisms of the emotions which are physiological; or between the dissectible material brain and the human mind; or, and this is the hardest to understand, between thought and secretions such as those of the liver. How does one get that way?

We are glad to note one significant admission of his and we hasten to make the most of it:

Methods of experimentation and data leading to certain or probable conclusions are becoming increasingly so recondite and specific that laymen in general and, in fact, scientists in other fields are unable to follow. . . .

If this is true in physical science and, as he admits, far more true in psychology and sociology, then the method (of experimentation and controls) surely becomes altogether inadequate and unsatisfactory in the field of religion and the supernatural. Yet, this situation does not daunt Carlson, the scientist, from announcing a final solution of the deepest and most recondite problems that confront the human race.

And one more word on this topic of the method of science. Carlson says:

It is further characterized by a serious attempt on the part of the scientist to control his own emotions and his own wishes in the matter.

Within the legitimate confines of the domain of physiology, in which Dr. Carlson had his training, there is little if any occasion to be bothered with emotions or even wishes. In the field of religion, on the contrary, there is great danger that emotional influence will interfere with sound reason. Let the reader judge whether Dr. Carlson has in this paper made the serious attempt to control his emotions. It is my impression that he succeeded only in the very last paragraph; the bulk of the paper is highly emotional. In itself, however, this emotional element in Dr. Carlson's paper may be considered as normal in a discussion dealing with mankind's most vital problems. The fact that this distinguished scientist finds it impossible to be coldly scientific in matters pertaining to the existence of God and a hereafter should not be held against him. One is a man before one is a scientist. The very vehemence with which the atheist denies the supernatural is evidence that the subject is of extraordinary importance to him.

Science and Faith

Dr. Carlson insists that:

The scientist tries to rid himself of all faiths and beliefs.

meaning faith in the supernatural, of course. His attempt to justify this wish is worded as follows:

He (the scientist) either knows or he does not know. If he knows there is no room for faith or belief. If he does not know he has no right to faith or belief.

Now, this statement is true within the narrow limits of scientific research, but to adopt such an attitude in practical life would be suicide. It would be clearly so in everyday affairs; one has faith in the cook though one does not even know him. It is even more necessarily true of the higher things of the mind; I have faith in myself, in mankind, in the ultimate triumph of what is right. For the Christian such faith is rational because it is grounded on belief in an all-powerful God; for the atheist, on the other hand, faith on this higher level is just blind faith; he has it because he cannot live without it. Dr. Carlson has it; and it is faith, not reason; faith in something above and beyond nature.

A statement like the following:

Divine benevolence and wrath, devils and demons are not factors in health and disease, according to the data of modern medicine—

has reference, not to sane supernaturalism but to the superstitions of witch doctors and medicine men. Christianity is quite hearty in its agreement with such denunciation of superstitious healing practices. - All that Christians insist on is that back of the factors known to modern medicine is the will of Almighty God.

Or to take another of his illustrations:

According to several Italian Churchmen, the recent disastrous earthquakes in Italy were caused, not by unbalanced stresses in the crust of the earth, but by the Christian God, as punishment for the sins of men, women and little children in the devastated areas!

For Dr. Carlson the cause is one or the other; for him, a reconciliation of the two is unthinkable. The rational Christian attitude is very different, and yet it is quite simple: unbalanced stresses in the crust cause earthquakes, the stresses themselves are caused by other less well understood physical and chemical forces, these latter in their turn are the effects of still less well understood causes; it is the province of science to enlighten us about this chain of events; but back of the whole chain is the hand of the Creator, and in this sense does God cause earthquakes. Scientific knowledge of the immediate causes of earthquakes does not enlighten us on their role in the divine scheme of things. Carlson cannot agree, of course, because he does not admit that there is a divine scheme of things.

Moreover, while human suffering in general is a consequence of man's sinfulness, the sins of individuals are not ordinarily punished by such catastrophes as earthquakes. These are visitations on the just and unjust alike; they serve as a reminder to all, not merely to people "in the devastated areas," that life on this earth is short and uncertain. And, emphatically, Christianity does not teach that God punishes little children. Death is not necessarily a punishment; to children and saints it brings a reward.

A similar criticism holds for the following statement:

Between the stories in the book of Genesis, as an article of faith, and the planetesimal hypothesis of Chamberlain and Moulton (probably the greatest intellectual achievement so far at the University of Chicago) as a working theory, science must choose the latter.

But science is not asked to make a choice, much less to approve of Genesis. The story of creation in Genesis, properly understood (one must admit that it has been very much misunderstood by some), does not offer an alternative to the planetesimal or any other hypothesis; it goes beyond all of them to the Creator of the planetesimals or nebulae or what have you. It does not pretend to give a detailed description of how the present world came into existence; it does insist that it is the work of a personal God Who made all things. Some scriptural scholars, I know, will not fully agree with me in this; others do, and among them such ancient writers as St. Augustine. Incidentally note that the planetesimal hypothesis is, at the present time, a working theory, no more; even its founders do not accept it as an established fact.

Christians, of course, were not evolutionists in the modern sense before the days of Lamarck and Darwin; a few of them are still unconverted. However, nearly all educated Christians today understand that the scientific theory of organic evolution is not opposed to faith in creation. The statement: I was conceived and born of my parents, does not contradict the other statement: I am a creature of God. The same principle holds for human evolution—Dr. Carlson and some Fundamentalists to the contrary notwithstanding.

Physiology and biology can not be taught at public expense in the states of Tennessee, Arkansas and Mississippi because it conflicts with "revelation."

This statement of Dr. Carlson's is inaccurate, but we may excuse that as a sort of scientific poetic license. That teaching the theory of evolution is prohibited in these states is extremely regrettable. The condition was brought about, of course, by ignorance, prejudice and misguided religious zeal. The remedy is not to condemn religion but rather the distortions of sound religious instincts.

But there is a phase to this anachronistic phenomenon that Dr. Carlson ignores. It is this: In large part the scientists themselves are to blame for the antagonism the theory of evolution aroused. When a man of religious convictions is told by the scientist that he cannot retain his convictions and simultaneously accept the theory of evolution, what is to be expected? The God these people have been worshipping is dear to them. With Louis Agassiz, the revered founder of American biology, they say, "If I have to choose between the two, God and evolution, I shall be faithful to my God." I, for one, cannot blame them at all.

When scientists and religious people have a "conflict" it is because one or the other side makes mistakes, sometimes both sides; much too often it is the representative of religion, though frequently, as in the present instance, it is the scientist. All of which is a quite human phenomenon and need not be too disturbing.

A word about miracles. The time-worn accusation that science and miracles are incompatible is true to the extent that the two have nothing in common. Miracles are unknown to science as such; as far as

science goes they can exist only as facts that must be recognized, even though there is no explanation at hand. That miracles cannot happen is one of the several *a priori* generalizations that some otherwise good scientists thoughtlessly accept.

But a miracle is never accepted on faith as Dr. Carlson implies when he says:

The most serious aspect of the supernatural is, not the revelations, *per se*, the miracles, the myths and the guesses, but the injunction that all this must be taken on faith, that inquiry and doubt is tabu—that is, sin.

That doubt and inquiry are not permitted is simply not true for Christians. An unexplained fact is not accepted as miraculous until it is established that it is contrary to the ordinary laws of nature. It is true that religious-minded people are too often credulous but they are less so than the average run of irreligious folks who are given to all sorts of irrational superstitions. Credulity is a weakness of human nature, not the essence of enlightened religion. Even the fundamentals of religious faith have a sound rational basis. If a man cannot prove from *reason* that there is a God, a personal God; if the Christian does not know the evidence for the fact that Christ rose from the dead and so proved His divine nature—then his faith rests on a poor foundation, it is not enlightened faith. The average man, of course, has not the time, leisure, inclination, or sometimes not even the ability, to go through a formal proof; that must be left to competent specialists, just as matters pertaining to

bodily health are studied by specialists. When, for instance, Dr. Carlson reports his findings on the mechanism of hunger I accept them on faith—but it is a rational faith. I myself may not be competent to pass on the validity of his researches, but there is no reason why I should not believe him. Common sense proclaims that something similar should be done in the field of man's spiritual life. Yes, I know there is danger in that; there are quacks in religion as well as in medicine.

Throughout his address Dr. Carlson goes out of his way to ridicule prayer. Here is a sample of his opinion:

We have scientists who still pray to the gods, scientists who laugh at the gods, and some who neither pray nor laugh, because they think they understand.

This cleverly worded sentence implies that one who knows enough can no longer pray. Who, we should like to know, are these superior beings that neither pray nor laugh? And what is it that they understand, these men who can see no difference between God and the gods? Does the physiologist, perhaps, understand what it is that causes a bit of protoplasm to develop into a man? There is, indeed, a science called the physiology of development. It deals with genes and hormones, morphogenesis by cell proliferation, embryonic induction, and the like. But it is such a very new science that hardly a beginning has been made in the problems that clamor for solution even on the strictly scientific level. And these men are sure they

understand! Perhaps, however, one should not be surprised that those who scoff at prayer to God make little gods of themselves. Only he who can get down on his knees understands that the true spirit of science is one of reverent agnosticism. Thank God that most of us can still laugh and pray.

A few remarks on prayer seem appropriate here. Prayer is an attempt of the human spirit to speak to God. The purely natural psychological effects of this mental effort are of themselves good. The very spirit which prompts prayer, that is, the spirit of humility, protects men from the temptation to pride. The Christian, of course, also believes that true prayer will be heard in a supernatural sense. And this faith of his is not a blind faith; a rational proof in the form of logical conclusions from established premises can be given. Its supernatural effect, of course, cannot be demonstrated in the scientific sense; controls are out of the question. The mock prayer of the atheist is not a prayer at all.

For the rest, we may cheerfully admit that some people pray in a way that is akin to superstition. The Christian might have been grateful to Dr. Carlson for his warnings against the dangers of the wrong kind of prayer if he had limited himself to that.

Science and Society

Dr. Carlson deliberately does his utmost to rob men, all men, of every vestige of religious thought and life. He is very indignant about the "immorality" of religion, or, at least, of what he calls religion. He seems to think it is synonymous with intellectual tyranny.

Intellectual tyranny is to me as immoral as physical tyranny. Stifling freedom of inquiry and of thinking by religious tabus or legal dicta appears to me highly immoral.

We may admit that freedom of thinking may be stifled by religious dicta; when that happens, as it has on occasion happened, we have a type of tyranny which is very bad, indeed. The modern world has less of that, however, than the past, especially the pagan past. The present Christian world has less of it than the present pagan world. But we do have with us the spectacle of a man of science misusing the authority of his high position to rob unsuspecting men and women of all that is sacred and worthwhile on this war-ridden globe of ours. This may not be tyranny in the technical sense, but it is equally immoral. If he and his kind succeed what will happen to society?

And what will become of society if the following recommendations are followed?

. . . we had better join hands in tackling the unknown, not with worship, prayer or propitiation, but with the tool of science. Here is useful and joyful work for everybody.

Dr. Carlson seems to forget that perhaps less than five per cent of the population are scientifically inclined; the other ninety-five per cent are not only incapable of finding scientific work "useful and joyful," but, once deprived of the only foundation for moral behavior that they have, they will quite readily abuse the power that science has put in their hands. For

science is power, and it can control the forces of nature either for good or for evil. The men who first learned how to harness fire for heating and cooking and lighting were the constructive scientists of their day. Undoubtedly, however, even then the new invention was also used by some to destroy property, and at times, perhaps, the forests were ablaze. The atheists of today are using science to destroy the most sacred possessions of mankind, and once the conflagration is started there is no predicting the end. Will the saner scientists of the country permit this to go on? If men like Dr. Carlson go unchallenged then every scientist will bear some of the responsibility for what happens.

One of the very real achievements of Christianity is that it has elevated the status of womankind and of family life. Dr. Carlson does not approve; he condemns:

The dogma that each individual marriage, when solemnized by a priest, is a "sacrament" made in heaven by Almighty God and holds "till death do them part." . . .

He looks upon marriage only from the physiologist's point of view. He does not realize that when he ridicules the sanctity of the marriage tie he is helping to open floodgates that threaten the very existence of society. The Russians tried the experiment recently; but they soon went into reverse over there, and now it is more difficult to get a divorce in Russia than in the United States. Nor did they abandon the experiment due to any supernatural pressure; they did so because it was quickly discovered that when the brakes are off,

far too many men and women coast recklessly to their own and their neighbor's destruction.

As we have already said, Haeckel and his associates succeeded in removing religious restraints from large masses of the German people. The Nazis have now indoctrinated the German youth. And Dr. Carlson would have us all follow that example.

The Blind Atheist

In his younger days Dr. Carlson had faith in personal immortality. That faith has left its mark. One can sense between lines in the present paper a note of uncertainty; in his more cautious statements the matter is left an open question. For instance:

All the present evidence points to the fact that at death the nervous system goes to pieces with the rest of the body.

Unless this sentence is meant to be pure irony, which seems improbable, it is frankly puzzling. Why refer to *present* evidence? Surely he does not think that any evidence, past, present or future, might indicate that any portion of the mortal human body is immortal. Why does Dr. Carlson so cautiously emphasize the obvious? Does he really think that those who believe in immortality defend the incorruptibility of the human nervous system? Or has he himself become so completely material-minded that the existence of a spiritual reality is altogether inconceivable to him?

On the basis of the known and the probable, immortality of the person is, at present, untenable.

Again I find myself wondering what is going on in Dr. Carlson's mind. Why the repetition of the phrase "at present"? What more do we have to learn before immortality becomes "tenable"? If he hopes that the science of physiology may eventually throw more light on the subject he is doomed to an eternity of disappointment. Physiology deals with the material aspects of man, not with his spiritual nature in which alone lies the germ of immortality. Is it really true that preoccupation with the microscope and test tube can completely blind a man's spiritual vision? It had no such effect on Louis Pasteur.

As for other conditions of existence of the individual after death, other abodes of the "souls," the sundry infernos arouse in me, not fear, but pity and wonder how man can choose to torture his mind with such cruel absurdities; and I have not seen any heaven described where I care to go.

The rest of his description of sundry heavens makes good comedy which we need not quote at length. He concludes that all this "forever leaves me cold." Of course it does; such descriptions can never be more than figures of speech and frequently they are rather pitiable. Heaven, not being a place in our present material universe, is outside the realm of things describable. Which means, I suppose, for the extreme materialist that it cannot exist at all. A blind man has no conception of color.

When the shadow lengthens I am content to call it a day and leave the work to others. The passing of personal immortality seems to have added interest to my work today, greater interest in my

students, in my fellowmen, in other things that seem worthwhile human efforts. For when I die, I will be a long time dead.

We are not primarily worried about you, Dr. Carlson, as long as you are satisfied to call it a day. But what about your students and your fellowmen? Is their "being a long time dead" an inspiration to you? Quite the contrary sentiments have inspired me in all my work as well as in my relations with others. I look upon my students and fellowmen, not as flitting, passing shadows, but as permanent personalities and therefore deserving of my interest and worthy of my time. There are times, perhaps, when I might tolerate the thought of annihilation for myself; but not for those I call my friends.

We may illustrate how completely blind the atheist is to all spiritual values by the following quotation:

In regard to the recurring miracle of changing bread and wine into human flesh and blood by Christian rituals, biological and biochemical tests of the bread and wine after being subjected to such rituals reveal nothing but the original bread and wine.

One does not object to a non-Christian's disbelief in the words of Christ at the Last Supper. But I am genuinely surprised to find that Dr. Carlson supposes Christians to believe what the above quotation implies. One who would claim that a chemical analysis of the consecrated bread will reveal anything other than bread would be promptly contradicted by any well-informed layman, to say nothing of theologians

who would likely want him declared a heretic. No change that is perceptible to the senses, even when these are reinforced with scientific equipment, takes place in the bread. The chemist goes somewhat further than the ordinary observer when he makes an analysis of bread; but he cannot penetrate beyond what the senses reveal. The Mass is not a miracle; that is to say, it is not an event in the physical world at all. The significance of the Last Supper is apparent only to the eyes of faith, never to the scientist as such. The atheist, of course, has no eyes of faith; to him the very expression is meaningless. One can only be sorry for the blind.

Christianity and Progress

Dr. Carlson refers to divine revelation as an "ignoble doctrine." Now, everyone knows that many false prophets have appealed to revelation to substantiate their own personal claims; these are the counterfeiters. Let us keep in mind that it is the business of a counterfeiter to imitate something that has genuine value. The Christian religion has genuine value; through its revealed doctrines it has done more for humanity by destroying the superstitions of the ages than ever science did. More than that, it has freed the slave, elevated womankind, civilized the savage and the barbarian, encouraged the arts and the sciences, taught the love of one's neighbor, built hospitals and asylums all over the world; it has made this world a better place to live in. Science of itself does none of these things though it can help those who want to do them. The present generation of scientists is not so sure that it

wants to help; a man like Carlson is in favor of the destruction of Christianity and all that it stands for.

He extols the ethics of science as follows:

The ethics of science is simple; absolute honesty in recording and presenting data and curbing wishes, personal prejudices and emotions by reason in interpreting the data.

This is an excellent statement of the ethical principles that apply very specially to the scientist; but it is not a code devised by science itself. It is a vestige of the old "outworn" ethics that the scientist has not been able to cast off completely in his process of emancipation. Nor do scientists as such spontaneously follow the code. I personally know of some who deliberately violate it. And why not? They have temptations like the rest of us.

While speaking of temptations we may call attention to Dr. Carlson's attitude toward sin:

The supernatural theories of "sin," personified evil, redemption, eternal damnation, etc., when actually believed, have created and are creating much disturbance in man's emotional life, in the way of fear, worry, melancholy, if not outright insanity.

Sin is the religious term for moral failure. We all know, from personal experience and observation of others, how common it is. Dr. Carlson would have it erased from human life because it often leads to fear and worry and sometimes to insanity. Unfortunately such things can happen; but they happen more often to those who have no faith.

Why not give the other side of the picture? The supernatural outlook on life, the doctrines of a Father in heaven, of life after death, of reward of virtue, of the dignity of man, of true love of neighbor, yes, and if necessary, the doctrine of sin, have produced the most beautiful characters the world has ever seen.

The civilized world under the influence of Christianity, is slowly getting better. Carlson unconsciously testifies to this when he objects to the mores of the Old Testament. The New Testament is superior to the old. Our concepts of what is right and wrong, natural and supernatural, rational or superstitious, are constantly, if slowly, improving as the world grows older. A throwback to barbarism, such as is threatened by present-day materialists and atheists, may mean a temporary and a local setback; but human progress moves on. Science and Christianity have worked hand in hand in the past to root out superstition. Christianity has been reasonably successful with the common run of men. Science alone will not succeed because few men are satisfied with the purely natural philosophy of the scientist; men want something of the supernatural, and if that is not given to them they will turn to all sorts of superstitions. Count the number of magazines on any newsstand that deal with astrology!

That Dr. Carlson himself wants something more than just science is clear from this quotation:

If a physiologist, in 1930, may venture to re-interpret the aphorism of Paul, anent faith, hope and charity, it would read something like this: faith is of the past, hope must be chastened by experience, charity in modern garb is misdirected

benevolence. But there remains the endeavor toward understanding, the hunger for beauty, the urge for justice—these three, and the greatest of the three is justice.

After having canceled the virtues of faith, hope and charity, Carlson feels that it is decent to try to fill the void created by their absence. Yes, he has put something in their place; let the reader carefully compare the substitute with the original.

Let us end this study of Dr. Carlson's atheism with a comment on one more statement of his:

Science nurtures inquiry, the supernatural stifles it.

My own experience is quite the opposite. Science is an inquiry into the mysteries of the natural world, and this inquiry has no more potent stimulus than a consideration of the supernatural. I have been an enthusiastic student of the natural sciences ever since high school days. Perhaps it was not the supernatural that supplied the first stimulus; just plain curiosity may account for that. But as one matures mentally he tries to rationalize his curiosity about the problems of nature, something that cannot be done without crossing the border into the supernatural. In my case, at least, meditation on the supernatural background of the natural has given a meaning to my studies that I should never have had otherwise. And best of all, it has given me an outlook on life that will enable me to end my days cheerfully, with faith, hope and charity—and joy.

