

Truth

Clara's words appeared to me quite irreverent ... but what to answer her I did not know. I almost began to dislike her; for it is often incapacity for defending the faith they love which turns men into persecutors.
--George MacDonald, *Wilfred Cumbermede*, chapter 18

I often write about the dualism of purity and truth (as explained by Saint John Henry Newman, and described similarly by C.S. Lewis as "ritual and philosophy") in Christianity. Today, however, I want to focus more on truth. While I do not have an actual study to quote, someone I trust suggested to me that 90% of the people would relate to purity. I actually thought such a percentage would be much higher, but at this time there is no reason to question the numbers. The fact remains that those who favor truth are a very small minority. This is not a problem. What *is* a problem, however, is that many people think they accept the truth. In this regard, skeptics are no worse, and perhaps even better, than Christians. At the very least, when one demonstrates to a skeptic that his beliefs are inconsistent with atheism, he can't retort by calling one a heretic.

I was recently with a group of Catholics who claimed they met to discuss Catholic teachings and to socialize. One night, Matthew Walsh's interviews with liberals that were released in the film "What is a Woman?" (2022) was discussed. For those who are not familiar with this film, Walsh simply asked this question to some people who support the various forms of queerness going on in our culture at the time, and recorded their responses. Unable to answer this question, those in the interview got verbally hostile. They were forced to confront the reality that they had no logic to support their obviously very strong beliefs. With no logic to support the belief, the only way left to defend themselves was with emotion. And since their faith was strong, so was the emotion. Much was said by my Catholic friends that night on these emotional responses, but I think that, "See how stupid they are for being atheists" is a fair summary of the general consensus.

Yet on several occasions, two of which stand out as particularly strong in my memory, someone would ask about a hypothetical situation and how to handle it as a Catholic. Of course one (and usually more) of those in the group would offer an *opinion* on it, but expressed it as a *directive*. Sometimes I would ask where this opinion came from, as I almost never heard scripture or the catechism being quoted during these meetings. The responses to my questions were quite illuminating. I would be called wrong. I would be talked over. I would have several talk to me at once, so I couldn't respond properly to any of them. I was even told by one that his wife had a Master's degree in theology. To add insult to injury, I was also asked if I believed in the Nicene Creed. Of course, voices were being raised during these "discussions." I can't help but wonder what Orthodox, Anglican, Protestant and skeptical listeners would have thought if these meetings were recorded for them to watch. Did not Jesus tell us that "For as you judge, so will you be judged, and the measure with which you measure will be measured out to you."? (Matthew 7:2) If we judge that ridicule and derision is the punishment for having strong but unsupported beliefs, then Jesus tells us that this judgment will be given to us as well for our own strong, but unsupported, beliefs. We will all get the answer as to how they will judge us come Judgment Day, "for there is nothing hidden that will not become visible, and nothing secret that will not be known and come to light," Luke 8:17.

But I am not trying to pick on atheists and Catholics here. The blind faith that one is right simply because one choose to believe in it (which is known as voluntarism) is what happens when the sanctity of one's beliefs is not challenged by reflection. This is what the purity side of Christianity

looks like without the truth side -- a contemporary version of phariseeism. And when one remembers that the overwhelming majority of people favor purity over truth, it becomes easy to understand why debates often break down into name calling, shouting, and other childish behaviors.

Don't get me wrong, truth without purity has its own traps (as freely admitted by Friedrich Nietzsche, who is most famous for promoting the naked truth of nihilism and the inherent depression that comes with it). The cancer of socialism and other Hegelian-based philosophies stem from excluding purity from the truth. Purity needs to be wedded to the truth, and truth needs to be bonded with purity. This marriage has only been successfully found in Christianity -- no other religion or ideology has been able to do it. Indeed, the Jews were the only other ones to even try. This dualism is why Christianity is the most successful belief system known to man -- it works ("By their fruits you will know them." Matthew 7:16)

And the true danger of placing purity above all else, of having blind faith and denying anything not in agreement with it, is easily observed when watching two fools try to hide the fact that neither has anything meaningful to say. I was in a Catholic school when the pedophilia scandals of the 1980s was going on. One of my classmates, who went to the same Catholic churches and schools I did for twelve years, claimed he was molested by a priest. It doesn't bother me that my brothers, my friends, and myself were in danger and never knew it. What bothers me is that, at the time, I didn't believe my classmate. The purity of my faith meant my classmate had to be a liar. Whether or not he was telling the truth was not as important to me back then as believing the church would never allow such men into the priesthood. But the church *did* let them in, and for a long time failed to do anything when these monsters were found out (Pope Francis, in contrast, has done a wonderful job in not only purging these abominations from the church, but also in ensuring more don't come in).

A Christian who does not seek truth is not a Christian, he is something much less than a Christian. An atheist *seeking the truth* is not a Christian in the proper sense of the term, but he is at least making a move to become one. All that is left for him to do is to come to accept the purity side of Christianity. How can I be so bold as to say that such an atheist is making progress to being a Christian? I'm not, Jesus did -- "I am the way and *the truth* and the life", John 14:6, italics mine. Anyone actively searching for truth is, *de facto*, searching for Jesus. And Jesus gives us no doubt as to what the result of such a search will bring -- "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you." (Matthew 7:7) All that is left for the truth-seeking atheist to do is to accept Jesus when Jesus is found. The door will eventually open, and some will go in. When it does, however, Christians who think that accepting the purity side of the faith is all that is needed ought to think carefully on the scolding Jesus gave the purity seeking pharisees -- "Tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the kingdom before you." (Matthew 21:31)

I'm sure this assertion will cause some discomfort with Christians of all denominations. I actually hope it will. If getting mad at me will bring someone closer to Jesus, then so be it. But also remember that this is not a free ticket for the atheist, either. Just because they are unwittingly seeking Jesus does not mean they will like what they find. Many simply stop the search at this point, and the inspired ideas that made them famous always seem to dry up when they do so (Carl Sagan, Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens are some contemporary examples). A few accept that their theories do indeed point to God, but instead choose to accept the absurdity that while God ought to exist, He doesn't (Nietzsche and Jean-Paul Sartre are well known examples, although eventually Sartre changed his mind and became a Messianic Jew). Again, the wellspring of inspiration for this type of skeptic quickly dries up once Jesus is found but refused. Some live in fear of the revelation they arrived at by their own logic (Drs. Jordan Peterson and Thomas Nagel have freely admitted to this), and often suffer

indecision on the matter. They, at least, continue to be inspired, although not as much as before. But some do accept their own logic, and eventually accept God (C.S. Lewis, Sartre and Peterson all did), and these conversions often lead to all new fountains of inspiration (Sartre died shortly after his conversion, so he is one notable exception to this rule).

Embracing truth is not anti-Christian, truth is the very essence of Christ by His own revelation. A Christian should never be afraid of honestly searching for truth, even if it initially leads him to atheism. If we *really* believe what Jesus says, then those who become atheists through honest inquiry are not really lost, but rather confused. Far better to help them in this difficult time than to judge them. They may very well reject Jesus when they find Him, but don't let the reason that they reject Jesus be an emotional one. Do not let the reason be that they are ashamed to come back. Do not let the reason be that they have no Christian friends. Do not let the reason be that they have learned to hate Christian attitudes, or any other similar excuse. Do not be the one who "[ties] up heavy burdens ... and lay them on people's shoulders, but ... [does] not lift a finger to move them." (Matthew 23:4) We can best help truth-seeking skeptics find Jesus by learning about truth ourselves.

Others turn from God and fall into courses of willful sin ... - They are recovered by finding disappointment and suffering from that which they had hoped would bring them good; they learn to love God and prize heaven, not by baptismal grace, but by trial of the world. They seek the world, and they are driven by the world back again to God. ... They are led to say, with St. Peter, "Lord, to whom shall we go?" (John 6:68), for they have tried the world, and it fails them. They have trusted it, and it deceives them. They have leaned upon it, and it pierces them through. They have sought it for indulgence, and it has scourged them for their penance. O blessed lot of those, whose wanderings though they wander are thus overruled, that what they lose of the free gift of God, they regain by his compulsory remedies!

-- Saint John Henry cardinal Newman, "The Church a Home for the Lonely," edited by Christopher O. Blum and collected in *Waiting for Christ: Meditations for Advent and Christmas*

Raymond Mulholland
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