

ANSWERS TO A COLLEGE STUDENT

by Most Reverend Donald J. Sanborn

PART I

Earlier this spring I received a letter from a college student who told me that he had been raised in a "very liberal Catholic Church" and at present he was an agnostic. He felt, however, a certain urge within himself to seek some answers concerning the Christian faith, as he put it. Below are his questions and my answers to them.

Question 1. Perhaps the biggest problem I have with Christianity and all religions is something I call "the size of the universe problem." This problem is the fact that the universe is so infinitely large and expansive, it is very hard for me to believe that one earthly religion out of thousands is the correct one. Plus, how can one religion that sprang up on a four billion year old rock floating in a thirteen billion year old universe be correct? How do you recognize the earth's insignificance in the universe, and how can one faith manage to stand out?

Answer. There is only one God, and there can be only one God. It is impossible that there be two or more gods. Consequently, if He has revealed a religion, there can only be one true religion, since all men would be obliged to worship Him in the manner that He has established. The size of the universe and the smallness of the earth have absolutely nothing to do with anything, since God is infinite, and even the entire created universe is a tiny thing to Him. To create one human soul is a far greater act for God than to create the entire universe and maintain it in existence.

Question 2. What are your views on evolution? Evolution is a proven fact. How do you reconcile it with Christianity?

Answer. Evolution is an absurd system which is based on an absurd principle: *that something comes from nothing, that the greater comes from the lesser, that the*

more perfect comes from the less perfect, that order and constancy come from chance. Evolution is a modern mythology which makes the systems of the Greek and Roman gods and goddesses look rational. It is to say that there is design without a designer. It is a creed that is too unbelievable to recite. Indeed, I think that one would have to be psychotic to really believe that it is true. It would be psychotic, for example, to say that the music of Mozart was composed by his cat's walking on a piano. Yet evolution asserts this very principle.

What is possible is something commonly called *microevolution*, which is not evolution according to the Darwinian sense. It is to say that species, by means of a natural ability built into them by the Creator, can adapt over time to certain environments, producing variants that are not new species, but simply subspecies which do not differ substantially from other animals or plants within the same species. There is a lot of evidence for this. Darwinian evolution has no evidence to support itself, and there is indeed much evidence against it.

Question 3. Humans, by their nature, are considered animals in the grand scheme of things. We have certain instincts that mirror other animals, and we have been classified as a "great ape." In our intelligence, of course we see ourselves as "special" and "made in God's image." But in reality we are simply well-developed creatures that belong to the biosphere. With this in mind, what makes us to be "special" in the eyes of the Divine?

Answer. Humans are not brute animals, although animality is part of their nature. They are essentially distinct from brute animals inasmuch as they have an intellect and free will. This is proven by the fact that human beings can abstract from material reality and know immaterial objects (e.g., possibility and impossibility, existence and non-existence, causality, justice, charity, moral guilt, to

mention only a few). This knowledge of immaterial things proves that there must be an immaterial faculty which is capable of such knowledge. This we call the intellect. Because man has an intellect, he also has a will, which is the faculty which pursues the good, and not merely the good of the sensible order (e.g., food and sex) but also of the immaterial order such as justice, mercy, thoughtfulness, an ordered society, law, marriage, etc. It is intellect and will which make man special in God's eyes, since by these faculties man is constituted in God's image.

Question 4. Science has come to explain many of the ways that life and the universe work. We know the mechanisms behind every human function. We know what makes the sun shine bright. We know how mountains formed. We know how the earth formed, and have a pretty good idea of how the universe formed. Because all of these processes have been explained by science, where is there room for a designer?

Answer. I think you greatly exaggerate how much science knows about the universe, and especially about the human body. There are many, many mysteries which have not yet been solved.

There is evidence of an awe-inspiring order in the universe, as well as an unrelenting constancy (e.g., the absolutely predictable movements and/or stability of the sun, moon, stars, and earth). There is this same order and constancy in the activity of minerals, plants, and animals. There is so much order and constancy, in fact, that physical "laws" have been established. But order and constancy cannot come from chance. Chance may produce a fleeting moment of order, strictly speaking, but cannot produce a constant order. For example, if you were to win the lottery repeatedly, people would accuse you of fraud, and of having fixed the lottery somehow, because they know that chance, by its very nature, cannot produce constancy. Indeed, the very word *chance* presupposes an order which chance does not follow. The word *chance* is incomprehensible without order.

Order and constancy demand an intelligent designer. Even many atheists admit this. But once you admit an intelligent designer, you are logically committed to admit an infinite God. But I would have to prove it to you if you are interested.

To say that there is design without a designer is psychotic.

Even your statement in No. 4 speaks of design and of causes: "We know the mechanisms..." "We know what makes the sun shine bright." "We know how mountains formed." Even in the atheistic scientific world, these explanations require the recognition of cause and effect, and of constant scientific laws, which are in turn based on the unchanging nature of minerals, plants and animals. But cause and effect necessarily leads one to posit an infinite God. Scientific laws necessarily demand fixed natures which always act in the same way. And everything demands a cause for existence itself, something that causes existence, but which did not itself receive existence from anyone or any thing.

Question 5. Many so-called "miracles" have essentially been proven as false. Surely there are reports of hundreds of miracles in the "old times," but that was because we didn't understand anything about the way the world works! How can miracles exist today when there is a logical explanation behind nearly every one?

Answer. First, we need to establish the possibility of a miracle. Rationalists and materialists deny this possibility. A miracle is simply the suspension by God of some effect which a cause naturally produces, e.g., that fire burn someone. Since God is the Author of nature, it is entirely within His power to suspend these effects. Essentially those who deny the possibility of miracles are denying the existence of God.

The ascertainment of miracles is another thing. It is based on the historical evidence for them. The Catholic Church presumes that extraordinary occurrences are natural unless there is evidence of a true miracle. Have there been false reports of miracles in the past? Of course. Miracles must rely on the testimony of reliable witnesses. If this testimony is lacking, the miracle should be regarded as false or at best doubtful.

There *is* a logical explanation behind every miracle: God suspended the laws of nature.

Question 6. How can the concept of the "soul" exist when we have proved that all consciousness exists in the synapse of the brain? If the brain stops

working, you stop working, plain and simple. Every aspect of our biological person (organs, bodily functions, etc.) works to support this consciousness; we can clearly see there is not some magic spirit keeping everything going. How do you explain the concept of the Christian “soul?”

Answer. You are confusing consciousness and the soul. The soul is the life principle of the body. The human soul operates the vegetative functions (e.g., heartbeat, digestion), sensitive functions (pain, pleasure, eyesight, hearing, etc.) and intellectual functions (intellect and will). For all of these things, the soul relies very heavily on the brain. If the brain malfunctions or dies, the soul is incapable of carrying on the life functions. This fact, however, does not equate the soul and the brain. A carpenter, for example, has many skills, but he can do nothing without tools. This does not mean that his tools are the equivalent of his skills. So the brain is the tool of the soul, but it is not the same thing as the soul.

Life is defined as self-movement. Self-movement, however, requires a principle, and this principle is the soul. The brain is dependent on the soul for its movements. For this reason we say that “the brain is dead,” that is, no longer has the principle of life in it.

The brain, being a completely material thing, cannot be the source of the intellectual activity of the soul, which understands immaterial things, which I stated above. The brain feeds to the intellect sense data from the outside world, from which the intellect abstracts essences, that is, the immaterial principles which make things to be what they are, and which even determine chemical structure, properties, and behavior.

Consciousness is merely the brain’s record of its own activities. Hence, if our brain should be injured, we lose consciousness, but we do not thereby lose our principle of life.

Question 7. If an extraordinary piece of evidence came up that proved, beyond any reasonable doubt, that Christianity was a fabrication, how would you react?

Answer. By faith I would deny the possibility of some disproving evidence of Catholicism. If one were to be presented, I would consider it false.

Indeed many such “proofs” have been presented for many centuries now. But even if one were to approach the question from a purely natural point of view, the evidence in favor of Catholicism is so overpowering that contrary evidence would have no merit.

Question 8. There is a hypothesis that Jesus did not actually die on the Cross, but rather fell into a deep state of bodily shock that He did not emerge from for several days, and when He rose, it was considered miraculous. It is certainly noteworthy that Jesus “died” on the Cross after only three hours, where typically it would take days, even weeks for this to happen. How would you refute this concept?

Answer. The hypothesis lacks evidence, and should therefore be ignored. The marvel is not that Christ died after three hours, but that He made it to the top of the hill at all. No ordinary human being could have survived the tortures which He endured. Christ gave up His life when He wanted to. This is evident from the fact that he cried out with a loud voice when He died, which would be impossible for any ordinary human being in such a weakened condition.

Question 9. What is the best piece of extra-biblical proof(s) for the existence of Jesus/the Disciples/Apostles that exists?

Answer. The most well-known is that of Josephus, the Jewish general of the first century A.D., who speaks about Christ in his *Jewish War*. The Roman historian Tacitus also speaks about “Chrestus,” referring to Christ. However, their existence was never contested by anyone, even the most avid enemies of the Church. Furthermore, the authenticity of the gospels and their veracity is beyond question. The proof of this, however, would require some reading on your part.

Question 10. How do you explain or reconcile all aspects of sexuality with Christianity? Science has proven that sex is not a bad thing, and all of its mechanisms, including what makes it pleasurable, have been explained. It is very hard for me to listen to “before marriage sex is a great sin,” but then

once the knot is tied, it suddenly becomes “one of God’s great gifts.” How can a natural, biologically-driven bodily function be considered sinful?

Answer. Christianity – and by that I mean Catholicism exclusively, for you cannot separate Christ from the Church He founded – has never taught that sex is an evil thing. It does teach, however, that the unique purpose of sexual intercourse is the procreation of children, and consequently can only be practiced licitly within a valid marriage. This teaching is confirmed by all that science has discovered concerning sex, namely that it is ordered biologically toward the conception of a child. Children may be conceived licitly only within the marriage bond, since the offspring of human beings need upbringing, far more than the animals do, since humans are intellectual and moral creatures. The pleasure is attached to sex by God the Creator in order that human beings procreate frequently. If there were no pleasure attached to it, human beings would not engage in it at all. The same is true of eating. Eating is pleasurable because it pertains essentially to the maintenance of the life of the individual. When people lose their appetites, they do not eat. It is clear to see, therefore, that any use of sex outside of marriage is mortally sinful. It is also mortally sinful to artificially impede the conception of a child, and mortally sinful to terminate the life of a conceived child, for the same reason.

Question 11. How do you explain homosexuality? It is clear beyond all reasonable doubt that people are homosexual from birth, for whatever reason. If God creates us all, why would he create certain people to be sinful?

Answer. The appetite for the same sex is clearly a disorder of the sexual appetite, from what has been said in no. 10. It is impossible that two males or two females procreate. Consequently their use of sex is intrinsically evil, since it is against nature. Since the sexual act is evil, the attraction to it is disordered. No one knows for sure what is the source of the disorder, whether it is from conception and birth, or whether it is acquired. If it is from conception and birth, it must be attributed to one of many congenital defects which can affect

any of the organs, in this case probably the brain. If it is an acquired disorder, it must be assigned to some disorder in the upbringing of the child. It tends to have high occurrence, for example, in “soft” culture, e.g. in cities and particularly among the wealthy. It could also spring from domineering women and weak fathers, or vice versa. The Church does not teach that the appetite is sinful, but that homosexual acts are sinful. The appetite, as I said, is a disorder, and in most cases I doubt that the person afflicted with it desires to have it. If he refrains from homosexual acts, he may go to heaven like anyone else. Everything that God has made is perfect; defects in nature must be assigned to a lower cause, usually something that goes wrong in the procreative process.