

Chapter Three

Good and Evil

No one is born an atheist or a skeptic, one who doubts the possibility of ever discovering truth. These attitudes are made less by the way one thinks than by the way one lives. If we do not live as we think, we soon begin to think as we live. We suit our philosophy to our actions and that is bad.

Let me tell you the story of an atheist in London, England. I used to do considerable work in St. Patrick's Parish, in Soho Square. One Sunday morning I came into the front of the church to read Mass, and found a young lady standing in front of the communion rail haranguing the congregation. She was saying, "There is no God! There is too much evil in the world! Reason cannot transcend sense! It is impossible to conclude to His existence!" "Every night," she said, "I go out to Hyde Park. I talk against God. I circulate England, Scotland and Wales with pamphlets denouncing a belief in the existence of God."

As I reached the communion rail, I said to her, "Young lady, I am very happy to hear you say you believe in the existence of God."

She said, "You silly fool, I don't!"

I said, "I understood you to say just the contrary. Suppose I went out every night to Hyde Park and talked against twenty-footed ghosts and ten centaurs. Suppose I circulated England, Scotland and Wales, denouncing a belief in these ghosts and in these centaurs. What would happen to me?"

She said, "You would be crazy! They would lock you up!"

I said, "Do you not put God in the same category as these fantasies of the imagination? Why would I be crazy attacking them and you are not crazy attacking God?"

She said, "I don't know. Why?"

I said, "Because when I attack these phantoms of the imagination, I am attacking something unreal, but when you attack God, you are attacking something as real as the thrust of a sword. Do you think we would have any such thing in the world as prohibition unless there was something to prohibit? Could there ever be anti-cigarette laws unless there were cigarettes? How can there be atheism unless there is something to atheate?"

She said, "I hate you!"

I said, "Now you've given the answer."

Atheism is not a doctrine, it is a cry of wrath.

There are two kinds of atheists. There are simple persons who have read a smattering of science and concede, probably, there is no God; but the other type of atheist is militant, such as the communist. They really do not deny the existence of God, they challenge God. It is the reality of God that saves them from insanity. It is the reality of God that gives them a real object against which they may vent their hate.

After discussing the attitudes any soul may take in the face of proofs, we will investigate the knowledge of God. How does God know? God knows by looking at Himself just like an architect. We know by looking at things. Before an architect puts up a building he can tell you the size, location, height, and the number of elevators because he is the designer of the building.

God is the cause of the very being of the universe. An architect looks into his own mind to understand the nature of that which he has designed. A poet knows his verses in his own mind, so God knows all things by looking at Himself. He does not need to wait for you to turn a corner before He knows you are doing so. He

does not see little boys putting their fingers into the cookie jar and conclude they are stealing. Everything is naked and open to the eyes of God. There is no future in God. There is no past in God. There is only the present.

Suppose you walked through a cemetery in which you saw a succession of gravestones belonging to the same family. The first gravestone was inscribed: Ezekiel Hingenbotham, died 1938. Then you walked a little further and saw another tombstone reading: Hiram Hingenbotham, died 1903. A few steps more: Nahum Hingenbotham, died 1883; still further on: Reginald Hingenbotham, died 1861. These tombstones would indicate a succession of events that happened in space and time. Suppose you flew over the cemetery in a plane; then you would see all at once. That is how history must look to one who is outside of time.

Imagine you are looking at a motion picture reel that has the full story, or drama, unwritten on every single inch of it. Suppose the motion picture reel were conscious. If it were, it would know the whole story. But, if you and I were to know the whole story, we would have to wait until that film was unrolled upon the screen. We would only know successively what the reel knows all at once. That is the way it is with the knowledge of God.

God knows all things because He is Creator; thus, every single thing in the world was made according to a pattern existing in the Divine Mind. Look around and see a bridge, statue, painting, and a building. Before any of these things began, they existed in the mind of the one who designed or planned them. In like manner, there isn't a tree, flower, bird, or insect in the world that does not correspond to an idea existing in the Divine Mind. The pattern has been wrapped up in matter. What our knowledge and science does is to unravel and unwrap this matter to rediscover the ideas of God. Because God put His ideas or patterns in things, we are assured of the rationality and purposeness of the cosmos, which makes science possible. If there were no human or angelic minds in the universe, things would still be true because they corresponded with the idea existing in the mind of God.

We cannot bring up a subject like the knowledge of God without meeting certain difficulties. One of the most obvious ones is, "If God knows all things, He knows what is going to happen to every

single soul in the world. He knows whether I am going to be saved or I am going to be lost. Therefore, I am predetermined.” This argument was used a few centuries ago and was part of the philosophy of Eastern peoples.

To understand the knowledge of God you must make a distinction between foreknowledge and predetermination. The two are not identical. God does foreknow everything, but He does not predetermine us independently of our will and merits. Suppose you knew the stock market very well. Having superior knowledge of business conditions you said a stock would be selling ten points higher than it is now within six months. Suppose six months later it actually sold ten points higher. Would you have predetermined and caused it to be ten points higher? There were other influences, were there not, besides your superior knowledge?

To make it still more concrete: In the early colonial days of this country, a farmer set out for the town to make some purchases. He went a short distance, came back and told his wife he had forgotten his gun. His wife was a perfectly good determinist and argued this way, “Either you are predestined to be shot by the Indians or you are not predestined to be shot by the Indians. If you are predestined to be shot by the Indians, the gun will do you no good. If you are not predestined to be shot by the Indians, you will not need your gun.”

The husband said, “Suppose I am predestined to be shot by the Indians on condition I do not have my gun.”

In like manner, God knows all things but He still leaves us with freedom. How can God influence you and still leave you free? Consider various kinds of influences. First, turn a key in a door. There is the impact of something material on something material and the result is the opening of a door. There is another kind of an influence. In the springtime you plant a seed in the garden. The sun, moisture, atmosphere, and chemicals in the earth all begin to use an influence upon that seed. It’s certainly not the same kind of action that’s turning the piece of steel in a lock. There are tremendous capacities for growth in that seed and what most awakens the seed to growth is something invisible, namely, the sun.

Now go a stage higher. Consider the case of a father talking to a son, trying to influence him to become a doctor. What actually influences the son is some invisible truth as well as the deep love of

the father for the son, and of the son for the father. What love actually does is to bring out in the son a free act. The son is not obliged to do exactly what his father wants. He is free to do the contrary. But truth and love have so moved him that he regards what he does as the very perfection of his personality. Later on he may say, "I owe everything I have to that conversation I had with my father. I really began to discover my true self." In some such mysterious way as this, God works upon your soul. He does not work like a key in a lock. He works less visibly than a father does on a son, but there are the same mysterious words: you and I. God is the very embodiment of love. Love inspires you to be what you were meant to be, a free person in the highest sense of the word. The more you are led by God's love, the more you become yourself and it is all done without ever losing your freedom.

That still leaves another great problem, namely, the problem of evil. You may ask, "If God is power and love, why does He create this kind of world and why does He permit evil?" We are not going to give a complete explanation of evil. We will only give certain indications of why it is possible.

Let us begin with a question, "Why did God make this kind of world?" You must realize this is not the only kind of a world God could have made. He might have made ten thousand other kinds of worlds in which there would be no pain, struggle or sacrifice. But this is the best possible kind of world God could have made for the purpose He had in mind. Notice the distinction we are making. For example, a little boy says to his father, who is a distinguished architect, "I want you to build me a bird house for sparrows." The architect designs a birdhouse. It's not the best house he could make, but the best house the architect could design for this purpose, namely, to build a house for sparrows.

What purpose did God have in making this world? God intended to build a moral universe. He willed from all eternity to build a stage on which people with character would emerge. He might have made a world without morality, virtue or character. He might have made a world in which each one of us would have sprouted goodness with the same necessity as the sun rising in the east and setting in the west. But He chose not to make a world in which we would be good as fire is hot and ice is cold. He willed to make a moral

universe that by the right use of the gift of freedom, people with character might emerge.

What does God care for things piled into an infinity of space, even though they be diamonds? If all the orbits of heaven were so many jewels glittering as the sun, what would their external but undisturbed balance mean to Him in comparison with a single character which could take hold of the tangled stains of a seemingly wrecked and ruined life and weave out of them the beautiful tapestry of sacredness and holiness? The choice before God in creating the world, therefore, lay between creating a purely mechanical universe, people who were automatons and machines, or creating a spiritual universe in which there would be a choice between good and evil.

Granted, God chose to make a moral universe in which there would be character. What was the condition of such a universe? He had to make us free. He had to endow us with the power to say "yes" and "no" and to be captains of our own fate and destiny. Morality implies responsibility and duty, but these can exist only on condition of freedom. Stones have no morals because they are not free. We do not condemn ice because it is melted by heat. Praise and blame can be bestowed only on those who are masters of their own will. It is only because you have the possibility of saying *no* that there is so much charm in your character when you say *yes*. Take the quality of freedom away from anyone and it is no more possible for him to be virtuous than it is for the blade of grass which he treads beneath his feet. Take freedom away from life and there would be no more reason to honor the fortitude of martyrs than there would be to honor the flames, which kindle their faggots. Is it any impeachment of God that He chose not to reign over an empire of chemicals? If God has deliberately chosen a kind of empire not to be ruled by force, but by freedom, and if we find His subjects are able to act against His will as stars and atoms cannot, does this not prove He has possibly given to those human beings the chance of breaking allegiance so there might be meaning and purpose in that allegiance when freely chosen?

Here we have a suggestion as to the possibility of evil. It's bound up with the freedom of man. Man, who is free to love, is free to hate. He who is free to obey is free to rebel. Virtue in this concrete order is possible only in those spheres where it is possible to be vicious.

A man can be a saint only in a church in which it is possible to be a devil.

You say, "If I were God, I would destroy evil!" If you did that you would destroy human freedom! God will not destroy freedom. If we do not want any dictators on this earth, certainly we do not want any dictators in the Kingdom of Heaven. Those who blamed God for allowing man freedom to go on hindering and thwarting His work are like those who see smudges and errors in the student's notebook. They would condemn the teacher for not snatching away the book and doing the copy himself. Just as the object of the teacher is sound education and not the production of neat and well-written notebooks, so the object of God is the development of souls and not the production of biological entities. You ask, "If God knew I would sin, why did He make me?" God did not make any of us as sinners, we make ourselves! In that sense, we are creators. The greatest gift of God to man, short of grace, is the gift of human freedom and the power to love Him in return.