

self-assertion. Fragmentation, that is, the idolatry of the individual will, is detrimental to a free people. Essentially it is a refusal to recognize truth. What is truth, a fragmented society asks. Who guarantees that anything is certain? Do I decide truth? Am I my own god?

The conservative finds in Catholic Christianity the answers to the primary questions that concern him regarding freedom and order: What is freedom *for*? Why are we free? What is the truth of the human person? How can we be certain of truth? How can we have authentic community?

Catholic Christianity boldly answers that freedom is living in Christ. The freedom God gives us is true freedom, bestowed in love. With his grace, we are free to grow in virtue, so that we can gradually put aside our enslaving selfish and distorted passions, thus seeing more clearly the beauty of Christ.

Catholic Christianity offers the conservative a real guarantee of truth, a relief from the modernist idolatry of individualism and the impossible, crushing

burden of myself as my own god. Christ has given us his Church, which is one, holy, catholic, and apostolic—the Body of Christ, containing perfect truth and unity. Authority comes from no human source but from Christ himself.

As Christ promised us, he has not left us orphans but has given us his Holy Spirit, who guides us in every moment. Each day, if we choose, we can participate in the sacrament of the eucharist, when Christ gives us, fully and completely, under the appearance of bread and wine, his very body, blood, soul, and divinity. In the eucharist God himself breaks the radical barrier between divine and human and comes to live in us. He offers us not a symbol of himself but himself in stunning reality.

In partaking of his body in communion, we are joined in the universal community of the Church, by which Father, Son, and Spirit link us with all those baptized, living and dead. The conservative who seeks the final answer to freedom and order in community will find it here.

Beyond the Frozen Void

Bryce Christensen

THOUGH SHREWD ENOUGH to hide a dark perspective from public view, Marx's gifted collaborator, Friedrich Engels, anticipated a grim ending for the proletarian paradise he promised his followers. Hence, despite his political optimism for the coming century, he confessed a cos-

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mic hopelessness for the coming eons:

Millions of years may come and go, hundreds of thousands of generations may be born and die; but inexorably the time comes when the sun exhausts itself and its warmth is no longer sufficient to melt the ice coming from the poles...and finally there is not enough warmth for life itself. Gradually, the last traces of life disappear and the earth becomes a dead, frozen globe, like the moon.¹

Of course, writers with political views quite different from Engels's could succumb to the same ultimate despair: a libertarian crusader for free markets will find that his economic theory affords him no advantages over that of the Marxist when confronting the gloom implicit in the final predictions of modern scientists. Neither the profit motive nor the dictatorship of the proletariat offer hope for those contemplating a distant future in which "the very processes that created the matter that makes up the universe of our experience will one day slowly return our dust to nothing" and in which eventually "all memory of the star that sheltered the planet that housed it for a brief 10 billion years will have long disappeared. The memory of the galaxy that housed that sun will have long disappeared. Even the light from all of the stars may have long disappeared."²

Fortunately, neither economic theory nor scientific formulae have defined the noumenal horizons of the writers who have stirred mankind most deeply. Neither Einstein's physics nor Ricardo's economics inspired Isaiah to promise that when this "earth shall wax old like a garment," God will create "new heavens and a new earth" (Isa. 51:6; 65:17; cf. 2 Pet. 3:13). Similarly, the Apostle Paul was responding to no new insight in investment theory nor any breakthrough in scientific cosmology when he wrote of the unspeakable joys of being "caught up to the third heaven" (2 Cor. 12:2). Such supernal teachings inspire human aspirations otherwise impossible to maintain. For if the most heroic human striving ends finally with the death of our frozen planet floating in blank emptiness, why attempt such strivings? Why not satisfy the cravings of the moment, heedless of the consequences? If the sadist and the saint, the glutton and the genius, are doomed, finally, to share the same icy void, why not take the easier path in getting there?

The growing prevalence of aimless hedonism amply testifies to the hopelessness of modern men who know nothing of Isaiah's conviction or Paul's inspiration. Still, as we see in Engels's own life, at least a few of the godless seek other, non-hedonistic consolations. A few proud souls defy the absurd cosmos with a frenetic utopianism. The certainty that the galaxy will finally sweep the entire planet and its inhabitants into oblivion—a certainty that quenches ambition in many who hold it—spurs a few into a feverish quest to create heaven here and now, even if only for a day. They espouse a creed that looks suspiciously like what T. E. Hulme called "spilt religion." Barren of hope in God and of a world to come, those who embark on the utopian quest burn with a displaced and ardent love for the creatures in this one. As the keenest critic of the terrestrial consequences of atheism, Fyodor Dostoevsky perceived that those who have lost God as the proper object of their deepest love grow desperate in bestowing that love on surrogates. "With the great concept of immortality gone," wrote Dostoevsky, "they have to replace it with something, and the immense reserves of love that before were lavished on Him who *was* immortality are now directed toward nature, the world, fellow men, every blade of grass Oh, they're in a hurry to stifle the great sadness in their hearts."³

From such impatient and desperate love spring the impulses of coercive utopians whose ideological rigor betrays a desire to suppress their own consciousness of ontological rootlessness. The godless guardians of political correctness cannot allow themselves any reflection upon the final futility of their enterprise. The secular linguistic police excoriating freshmen for using sexist pronouns cannot admit their powerlessness to prevent all gender sensitivities from disappearing in intergalactic ice. Nor can godless crusaders for multiculturalism,

busy decrying every sign of ethnocentrism, ever allow themselves to ponder a final gloom reducing all cultures to meaningless dust. Meanwhile, the environmental zealots must chant their slogans loudly so as not to hear the arguments of the tough-minded critic who would remind them that regardless of what they do to save this planet, "it has been uninhabitable before and it certainly will be again, whether or not we hasten the process."⁴

But through all the frenzied shouting of the godless moralists we still hear "the murmurs of the dying sun" (Tennyson). And with those murmurs comes the unwelcome exposure of the amorality implicit in every political or environmental movement which acknowledges no God beyond nature. For moral accountability cannot long survive in any philosophy which denies man his identity as the offspring of God, uniquely bearing his image (cf. Acts 17: 28-29; Gen. 1: 27-28), and which classifies man as merely one more terrestrial species, the product of the very same natural forces which created beetles and moths. Nature has nowhere inscribed a line separating good from evil: only a divine finger on Sinai could do that. An entirely natural being, knowing nothing of transcendent imperatives, can only do what nature dictates, so why allocate praise or blame for what nature has made inescapable? Any distinction between Mother Teresa and Adolf Hitler amounts to no more than genetics and biochemistry.

Once reliant upon godless naturalism, society may still execute or imprison violent men, but only as a matter of self-protection. Such a society has lost any coherent vocabulary of justice or moral condemnation. Within a consistent naturalism, all acts—treating a neighbor's disease, polluting a neighbor's air, slitting a neighbor's throat—must proceed from the same set of inexorable natural laws, and we look in vain for a soul we can hold accountable for violating these laws.

Violations are, indeed, impossible for creatures that these laws have themselves brought into being. Wandering in the mazes of naturalism, we will not escape Dostoevsky's frightening dictum: "If there is no God, all things are lawful."

The amorality of a godless naturalism lends a piquant irony to the rhetoric of secular crusaders growing ever more shrill in denouncing the environmental depredations of their fellow humans. For if humans are, like dragon flies, entirely the product of Nature, how could it be even theoretically possible for us to act in *unnatural* ways? Without some recognition of man as a transcendent species with responsibilities to a divine Creator, moral reasoning grows incoherent, and finally simply disappears. As the philosopher Leszek Kolakowski has forcefully declared: "The absence of God, when consistently upheld and thoroughly examined, spells the ruin of man in the sense that it demolishes or robs of meaning everything we have been used to thinking of as the essence of being human: the quest for truth, the distinction between good and evil, the claim to dignity, the claim to creating something that withstands the indifferent destructiveness of time."⁵

Of course, humans often live lives of stubborn inconsistency. Some who have professed faith in God have practiced deceit and undermined moral order (Charles Coughlin and Newell Hillis may serve as ignoble exemplars of this type). And on the other hand, some who acknowledge no belief in Deity make valuable contributions to our cultural and political lives (George Orwell and Winston Churchill come to mind). Some avowed atheists stand resolute in defending traditional moral precepts. "I now believe in nothing," remarked the Victorian critic Leslie Stephen, "but I do not the less believe in morality.... I mean to live and die like a gentleman."⁶ A prudent conservative will recognize that agnostics and atheists do often act with admi-

rable decency and that the art, literature, and philosophy they create often possess considerable merit. Yet prudent conservatives will also recognize that the merits of such works usually reflect an unacknowledged indebtedness to religious traditions in which they were produced.

Even as they credit the achievements of individual atheists, prudent conservatives will remember that the emergence of atheism as a respectable perspective has “dis-integrated our common intellectual life.”⁷ And when conservatives acknowledge the rectitude of particular atheists, they will do so conscious that such individuals are what Coleridge labeled as “men who are better than their principles.” The deficiencies of such men’s principles will always leave them powerless to respond to critics who challenge the incoherence of their morality. Even if the deficiencies of a godless morality do not always vitiate the lives of its exponents, they make it nearly impossible for them to inculcate their morality in the next generation. No wonder that the rigid secular moralism of the late Victorians for which Stephen was spokesman dissolved in a riot of promiscuity among their Bloomsbury offspring.

A secularized culture may enjoy its moments of political harmony and may thrill to exhibitions of artistic brilliance; it may even occasionally witness instances of noble self-sacrifice. But in a culture which has lost its religious moorings, the moments of redeeming light must grow ever more fugitive and aberrant. The hope and moral commitment essential to a cultural health which endures across generations, defying the shadow of mortality, must finally depend upon faith and worship. Without God, a Thomas Hardy or a Wallace Stevens may now and then provide a brief instant of clarity and illumination. But then the night returns, leaving us in deeper despair than before. In the end, we must either surrender ourselves to the dark and frigid abyss or bow in reverent worship before the Father of lights: “Our peace in his will.”

1. *Werke*, XX, 324. 2. Lawrence M. Krauss, *Atom: An Odyssey from the Big Bang to Life on Earth and Beyond* (Boston, 2001) 281-282. 3. *The Adolescent*, Part 3, Chapter 7, III (1874; New York, 1971) 472. 4. Krauss, *Atom*, 227. 5. *Religion* (Oxford, 1982) 214-215. 6. Gertrude Himmelfarb, *Marriage and Morals Among the Victorians* (New York, 1986) 27. 7. James Turner, *Without God, Without Creed: The Origins of Unbelief in America* (Baltimore, 1985) 263.

Thesis: Antithesis

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WHATEVER THE PRESUPPOSITIONS of the conservative mind, those of the liberal mind

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with which it is rightly contrasted are clearly identifiable. The remote antecedents of the liberal mind are to be found in the Enlightenment, Anglo-French and German, and in its manifest antipathy