

## Is There a Supreme Being?

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

For eight years, we have been meeting together on Sunday mornings to study the Christian explanation of reality. All our studies are based on certain presuppositions and we have always felt that it's very important to regularly reexamine those presuppositions so that we are not involved in some kind of deception or illusion. That's really what we try to do every year at the beginning of each academic quarter.

We try to examine the basic presuppositions on which all our studies and all our activities together are based. And so, during the next three or four Sundays, I'd like to take each of the presuppositions and simply share with you, why we feel they are justified. The first one we will deal with today, is the answer to the question -- Is there a God? Will you think about that a little yourself? Is there a God? One of my problems was that I continually answered another question even though I kept saying that I was answering the question -- Is there a God?

I kept trying to answer other questions. You might like to know some of those other questions that even our professors at school and our teachers answer and they claim to be answering the question -- Is there a God?

The first one I had trouble with was when the liberal theologians said, "What does it matter? What does it matter, whether there is or there is not? If it gives old ladies and poor psychological cripples some comfort, what does it matter whether there is a God or not?" Well, I think there are many old ladies who feel the same as I do, who do not want to live an illusion. We don't. We are not such cripples that we need an illusion or a lie of which we are willing to be the deceived victims. So, we don't want a God that is just an illusion. When I heard people asking the question -- "Is there a God?" -- I often thought, are they asking, "Is there some great 'other' that will give poor souls some encouragement in their life"? That's not the question. That's not the question at all. The question is -- Is there a God? Is there a supreme being?

Some of us don't have trouble with that misconception but we have trouble with another one. We say, "Is there a miserable, gloomy, old gentleman living in heaven somewhere who tells us not to go to the theater, not to dance, and not to smoke? And when He looks down and sees any of us enjoying ourselves at all, he yells, "Cut it out!" I found that was the question I was trying to answer. I was giving the name "God" to all the distorted, depressing misconceptions of him that I had accumulated during the past years. I was saying, does such a morbid old being exist? That's not the question we are asking. That is an emotional question but the intellectual question we are asking is, is there a supreme being, who is greater than all of us here, and who is responsible for putting us all here?

You may wonder, why do some of the greatest minds in our world NOT believe in God? It's because of this third misconception. A lot of us think we are asking, not the question -- Is there a God? - but -- Is there a being that I must obey? Of course, we don't want to have anybody that we have to obey, so we answer "No". That's what causes many of the most intelligent men and women in our world to deny the existence of God. It's amazing, but they do.

They deny the existence of God not on intellectual reasons at all, but because they know the consequences that would follow once they admit that there is a God. And the consequences are, that

they would have to obey that God.

Now, you may say, "No, no -- I have biology professors that are absolutely clear of that kind of foolish, childish, emotional prejudice." Well let me read to you from one of the coldest intellectuals in our generation. That was Aldous Huxley, of the famous Huxley family. Here is his own statement, which is really an unbelievable admission, for an intellect of his stature. "I had motives for not wanting the world to have a meaning, consequently assumed that it had none, and was able without any difficulty to find satisfying reasons for this assumption." Once you assume that the world has no meaning or assume that there is no God because you don't want there to be a God, anybody can find reasons to back that up.

"The philosopher who finds no meaning in the world is not concerned exclusively with a problem in pure metaphysics." That's amazing for Huxley to say. "The philosopher who finds no meaning in the world is not concerned exclusively with a problem in pure metaphysics, he is also concerned to prove that there is no valid reason why he personally should not do as he wants to do, or why his friends should not seize political power and govern in the way that they find most advantageous to themselves. For myself ... the philosophy of meaninglessness was essentially an instrument of liberation ..., sexual... [and] and political."

So, be very wise and alert when you find some intellectuals denying the existence of God. Don't be naïve and think, if they've tackled the question honestly and answer no, then why shouldn't I? They have not tackled the question honestly. If a man like Huxley with his stature admits that he denies meaning in the world and denies the existence of God because he wants to be free to do what he wants in his life, then any intellectual is capable of the same mistake and the same wrong approach to the question.

What do some of the "giants" say in answer to the question? What do intellectual giants like Darwin and Einstein say in answer to the question "Is there a God"? We have our thoughts, but are we in line with those who have brilliant minds? Here is Einstein's own statement, "My religion consists of a humble admiration of the illimitable superior Spirit who reveals Himself in the slight details we are able to perceive with our frail and feeble minds, that deeply emotional conviction of the presence of a superior reasoning power, which is revealed in the incomprehensible universe, forms my idea of God." (Einstein's quote is one quoted by Paul Little in his book, "Know Why You Believe").

Probably no man has understood the complexity or the beauty and the order of our world, as Einstein has. And yet he says himself, "Of one thing I am absolutely certain. This carefully designed universe is the result of the activity of a mind that is far superior to any of ours and it's that mind that I regard as God."

What about Darwin? A lot of us think of his "Origin of the Species" for what it is -- an incredible book and an incredible breakthrough in thinking. Yet, we automatically say, "Well, of course Darwin destroyed any idea of God that we ever had." Darwin ends his book "The Origin of the Species" like this.

"There is a grandeur in this view of life, with its several powers having been originally breathed by the Creator into a few forms or into one." (Creator is a capital "C". It's no idea of an élan vital or an impersonal force. It's a capital "C".) "...having being originally breathed by the Creator into a few forms or into one. And whilst this planet has gone cycling on according to the fixed law of gravity, from some simpler beginning, endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful

have been and are being evolved." Of course Darwin saw the theory of evolution just as that, a theory; a hypothesis of the way the thing might have developed after the Creator created. And whether you and I are arguing for evolution or not, we ought to see that Darwin, who is regarded as the father of evolution, wrote that sentence, "There is a grandeur in this view of life, with its several powers having been originally breathed by the Creator into a few forms or into one."

In fact it doesn't matter how far back you go. If you go to 400 B.C. and go with Plato and Socrates, you'll find them absolutely certain that there is a God, with no doubt in their minds at all. You go further back to 4000 B.C. in Mesopotamia, and you will find that people are talking in the same terms. They are talking of a God who is real and personal. Here's one of the most ancient engravings we have, "A man must truly proclaim the greatness of his God, and a young man must wholeheartedly obey the command of his God." That's from 4000 B.C.

So, throughout the world's history, in whatever place you go, among whatever people you travel, there has always been this unquestioned assumption that there is a God, there is a supreme being. And not only an unquestioned assumption that there is such a being but there has gone along with it a worship and respect of that being. Among every tribe and every nation, among all peoples there has been a general unquestioned assumption that there is a God who created the universe.

We here tend to ask the question, "Why is there such a general unquestioned assumption that there is a God"? Well, honestly it takes dumb, stupid, sophisticates like us to ever question it. It really does. It takes you to be educated to reject the idea that there is a God. If you just let your mind run in the way it normally does in everyday life, and follow through the normal cause and effect thinking that the mind operates on in daily life, you are bound to come to the conclusion that there is a God.

Let's say you go outside your room door or outside your house and there at the sidewalk is a solid gold Cadillac or for those of us who don't like that, a 650 Honda motorbike. You go outside in the morning and you see those there. Now, you know what your mind asks. It asks, "What explosion put this here?" Well, it doesn't ask, what big bang theory is responsible for this? It doesn't. It immediately asks, "Who put this here?" Because all of us know that explosions destroy. They don't create and they certainly don't create machinery like a Cadillac or like a Honda.

Or do you go out and look at them and say, "A-ha! Obviously it came about through spontaneous generation...from some decomposing substance." Then you look for the decomposing substance. Well, you know you don't. Your mind does not ask those questions. It has to be taught to ask those questions. It actually has to be perverted to ask those questions.

Your mind automatically says, "Who left the Honda here, who left the Cadillac?" Or as Inspector Clouseau would say, "The Cadillac evolved from a Volkswagen and the Honda evolved from a ten-speed Schwinn bicycle." Well, you don't, because you are still left with the problem, who put the bicycle there or who put the Volkswagen there? The mind knows that even if there is some evolution (and there is obviously some kind of evolution within the species at least), even if there is some evolution, even if there was ever an explosion, even if there was ever spontaneous generation, somebody had to originally create the thing from which these things evolved. If there was an explosion, who made what exploded? Somebody must have created something originally, if there was a decomposing substance. Who created the substance that decomposed? Who created the stuff that exploded? Who created the original single cell amoeba that eventually evolved?

In other words, those so-called answers are not an explanation of creation at all. Normally when one sees a world like this or one sees a mountain -- one responds the same way as Einstein does or the same way as the most primitive person in the whole universe would respond. One says, "Who put the mountain there, who put the world here?" Maybe you will say, why do you ask "who"? Why do you ask, who put the world here? I can see that something must have started it all somewhere, but why do we say it's a "him" and not an "it"?

Well, loved ones the same way as we draw other conclusions from everyday life. We look at what is here and we work back to the kind of force or being that would have had to create it. Let's say you go out of your room door into the dormitory corridor and you see a bone lying on the floor. You just do not say, "That cannibal girl down the corridor or that savage counselor has been chewing up freshmen again." You don't. If you see a bone that looks gnawed, you know what normally produces gnawed bones. There's a dog somewhere and that dog is out again. Or if you work it the other way, you go outside your door and find a piece of paper with a simultaneous equation on one side and part of "Paradise Lost" written on the other. You just do not say, "That stupid dog has lost his assignment again!" However, clever the dog is you know that a dog cannot produce "Paradise Lost". A dog cannot produce simultaneous equations. And that's why we say, who?

Can you imagine a chair making you? Can you imagine even an animate object like a dog making you? We can't. We automatically say no. Whatever made us, whether he made us in one moment, or whether he made us over a period of time, he must have been capable of putting these powers of development within us. So, he must be as personable at least, as we are. That's why we ask "who"? The being that created us must be at least as personal as we ourselves are.

If you look at this incredible world and look at three and a half billion of us different people, not two of us are the same. Not even twins are absolutely the same. Look at three and a half billion of us with different faces, with different ways of loving and being kind, with different ways of being understanding, and with different abilities to communicate with each other's personalities.

Then look at the universe itself. Its seasons are absolutely reliable, with planets that orbit so precisely, we can depend on them to be in that spot when we shoot our man to the moon. Our bodies seal themselves when they are cut, often without much care on our part. Our blood contains more than 64 different substances and travels miles and miles around our body every day and never becomes sludge, but continues to maintain itself in its present state. Consider the air pressure that is exactly right for us. All you have to do is go up in a plane to begin to experience the difference of pressure on your body and our air pressure is exactly right.

Water itself is a miraculous substance that is exactly right in its boiling point and its freezing point for us to maintain our lives. When you look at a world like this, you have to conclude, some person who is at least as personable as us and as intelligent as us has designed this thing. You just do not think of it as something that happened by chance.

It's like the old illustration that the philosophers have used for generations. You are walking along the beach -- you find a watch. Your mind immediately says, "There must be a watch maker." There must be someone who is able to calculate the infinitely small distances that are connected with the manufacturer of a watch. You just don't think of taking the watch apart, throwing it into a dishwasher, letting it turn for 15 minutes and expecting that time plus chance will produce a perfect watch again. It won't. Time plus chance could not have produced this carefully, ordered, designed world that we have.

There is another reason, which I think is strong for believing that there is a God and it is something a little different from our personableness. Have you ever thought of this? There are three and a half billion of us here in this world, who spend most of our time being self assertive, self defensive, trying to get our own way and insist on our own rights. That's what comes naturally to us, isn't it? The more of us that are born, the more of us that lie, the more of us that steal, the more of us that fornicate, the more of us that swear, and the more of us that fight. We spend a lot of our time fighting -- personally, internationally, nationally, and socially. The bigger a city becomes, the more of a jungle it becomes. We find it far easier in our personal lives to lose our temper than to keep our temper. We find it far easier to be critical of other people than to be kind to other people. Yet we keep on saying these things are wrong. Now why? From where do we get that sense of moral obligation?

You all agree it's a nuisance to us. It brings guilt to us. It doesn't make life easy and it isn't easy to obey these things that we say we should do. We all say we should love each other, and yet we find it more natural to hate each other. We all say we should be unselfish towards each other and yet we find it more natural to be selfish. We all say we should build each other up and yet we find it more natural to criticize each other and tear each other down. Yet we keep on saying that those things are wrong.

Now, it can't be herd instinct because you know often you do what you believe is right against the pressures of your peers. It certainly isn't what is convenient because often you do things that you feel you ought to do that are very inconvenient. It can't be what pays you to do, because often it is a real disadvantage to you, to do what is right. It can't be what you were educated to do because wherever you go in the world, unselfishness is lauded as something that a person should be. Wherever you go in the world, everyone condemns cowardice in the face of enemies. Everybody condemns anyone who lets their friends down. Wherever you go in the world, even where there is no education, you'll find the standards are more or less the same. How could that be when none of us take to goodness naturally, and when it is a nuisance to us? Is it not because there is a being that has created us, who has standards that are higher than our natural ones and has wishes for our lives and plans for us that He is continually trying to communicate to us through our consciences?

Is there a God? The circumstantial evidence points to that as the most rational and the most plausible reason for the existence of our world, for our own existence as persons, for the order and design that is evident in our universe and for the sense of moral obligation that our conscience continually communicates to us. Yes, I would say it's the most rational explanation for all that we see around us. And it's the one that your mind is driven to most naturally and most logically, if you simply let your mind work in an unprejudiced common sense way.

Yet, all that is just circumstantial evidence, compared with the empirical evidence that is provided in this history book (the Bible). Next time I would like to try to talk about the evidence for the existence of God that is in this book and about its reliability. If you believe this moment that there is a God, you have obvious obligations and you can see them yourselves. That's the real test. What are you going to do now if you believe there is a God who put you here? What are you going to do?

Let us pray.

Lord God, we see that it is difficult to avoid the calls and claims of logic and of the evidence that

we see around us. Lord God, we would ask your forgiveness if we have been avoiding this issue for too long, so that we would be as free as Huxley is, to do whatever he wants. Lord, we see that is not using our minds and that we are obligated before you to use these minds and to follow them out to logical conclusions, and then to arrange our lives accordingly. So, Lord God, this coming week we intend to begin to look for you and for your voice in our consciences and to begin to respond to you and to find out why you put us here. We will do this in honesty and truth, for your sake and for our own. Amen!