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THE CHRISTIAN AGNOSTIC AND THE CHRISTIAN GNOSTIC.

THE term Agnostic has been very much used of late. The form of the word, by adding the *A* privative to *Gnostic*, shows that it is a negative term. An A-*gnostic* is one who is not a Gnostic. A *Gnostic* is one professing to have *Gnosis*. This is a Greek word meaning knowledge. The use of the terms *Gnosis* and *Gnostic* is restricted to knowledge of the deepest and highest causes of being, and to that class of persons who profess to have this knowledge.

The *Agnostic* professes ignorance of these deepest causes, namely, of First and Final Cause, of the origin and end of the universe, particularly of this world, and of the beings contained in what is called, in a wide and general sense, Nature. This is not merely an accidental ignorance, or the ignorance of some men concerning some things which can be known and are known by other men. For instance, one who is ignorant of mathematics or Greek is not thereby called an Agnostic. The ignorance must be universal and necessary, arising from the nature of that which is unknown, and from the nature of the human mind. The Agnostic professes that he cannot know, that no man can know that, in respect to which he is an Agnostic. That is to say, there is an *unknowable*, in respect to which the profession of knowledge is a mere pretence. This unknowable, in the language of agnosticism, is origin and end, or First Cause and Final Cause. The Christian philosopher is first, and before all, a Theist. That is, his funda-

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mental thesis and doctrine, underlying his entire philosophy, theology, and ethics, is: That God is the First and Final Cause, the origin and the end of all being. The Agnostic affirms that God is unknowable. To be a Christian Agnostic one must affirm the same thing, in some sense. That is, he must say that God, the First and Final Cause, is, in His essence, unknowable to the human mind, by reason of the nature of the human mind which is destitute of a faculty by which it does or can know God, as its direct and immediate object. Does this mean that he has no kind of actual or possible knowledge of God? Certainly not; for he is a Christian Theist. It means only to deny the possibility of a certain kind of *Gnosis* or knowledge.

The Agnostic pure and simple cannot deny some sort of notion of the unknowable. If he had not the notion, he could not have the word. He does not assert positively that what he calls the unknowable has no real existence. He only says that we cannot know that it exists, or, if it exists, what it is. He neither affirms nor denies. But what is the object in regard to which he professes ignorance? How does he know that it cannot be affirmed or denied? He must have the notions of First and Final Cause in order to be able to argue about them, to make any mental act in respect to them, to doubt or to deny their reality.

The Christian Agnostic, for a much stronger reason, when he affirms that there is in God the Unknowable, must say this and think it by reason of something which is knowable, and known, in respect to the origin and end of nature, of first cause and final cause, of God as the author of nature.

The unknowable is what is called in theology the *supernatural*. It is above and beyond all nature; it transcends the scope, therefore, of the human intellect, which is itself a part of nature, and cannot have any operation or any end transcending nature; unless it is raised up into a supernatural order.

Christianity is a supernatural religion. It is founded upon faith in a supernatural revelation. The Christian Agnostic, therefore, by the unknowable in God, intends the unknowable by the mere unaided light of natural intelligence and reason. He intends that ideal object which is disclosed only by revelation.

We can now explain what is the object and scope of the present article. Its object is the supernatural order, in which man is elevated from the purely human plane of being and operation to the divine. Its scope is the presentation of the true idea of the supernatural.

A sublime and difficult work, indeed, it is, to soar into such a region of thought, to ascend above the stars, above the highest heaven of rational philosophy, to that super-celestial domain which

is beyond the ken of any human intelligence, unless enlightened by the rays which come from the light inaccessible in which God dwells.

The true idea of the supernatural order is the one and only key to open the door through which we can point our telescope upon that cluster of mysteries and problems concerning the ways of God toward man, and the relations of man toward God, with which the minds and hearts of so many are busy, and by which they are so much perplexed. It cannot be found anywhere except in Catholic theology. We can remember when first we discovered it, and what a flood of light it poured upon the darkest parts of the Christian creed, such as the origin and reason of evil, the original destination of man, the fall and original sin, human probation, the two contrary final states of rational beings, and similar topics.

The only metaphysical and logical theology to be found among Christians separated from the Catholic Church is the one taught by John Calvin and Jonathan Edwards. This system is incredible. The milder and more humane form of doctrine, which is more generally prevalent, is obscure, indefinite and unsatisfactory. In consequence of the exaggerations and shortcomings of all these imperfect theologies, there is a perpetual unrest, a continual vacillation and change, an unceasing but fruitless endeavor to come to a better understanding of what the Christian religion really is. The striving is after a true conception of the supernatural and divine; a correct understanding of the relations which the natural and human bear to it; a reconciliation between the actual condition of the world and mankind, with its moral and physical evils, and the wisdom, power, goodness and benevolence of God. It is a striving after the true *Gnosis*; to become Christian *Gnostics*. What this *Gnosis* is, and how one becomes a Christian Gnostic, will be considered later on. The topic under immediate consideration is the Christian *Agnostic*. For the present, therefore, we must go back to the discussion of the sense of the proposition: that God is the *Unknowable*: as a proposition of Christian philosophy.

The sense of the proposition is, that the essence of God is invisible and unknowable to the created intellect in its natural state, endowed with only its natural faculty of intelligence, by any act of direct and immediate intuition.

It is necessary, before giving a positive explanation and proof of this statement, to make some preliminary observations on knowledge and the knowable in general.

What, then, is cognition in its most universal sense? We know what it is practically and by experience. We are conscious of having sensitive cognition. We see objects, we hear sounds, we feel by touch material, extended things. So also do irrational ani-

mals. We have also a cognition of immaterial objects, of abstract truths, of self-evident and primary principles, of conclusions drawn from premises by reasoning. We have a cognition of our own acts and of ourselves as suffering impressions from without and originating acts from within, as existing continuously and identical with ourselves in the present and the remembered past.

But how shall we define and describe our cognition and our self-consciousness? What is there plainer, clearer, better known by which we can understand and define what is so immediately evident? There is nothing except consciousness, sensation, thought and knowledge, by which we can understand and explain what these phenomena are. We can, however, by reflection and analysis, gain a more distinct notion of that which we mean by cognition, whether sensitive or intellectual, and by self-consciousness.

Let us compare a sensitive being with one which has no sensitive life. How can we express the difference? We cannot define precisely what the vital principle is. We perceive, however, that the not-living being, water, air, rock, merely exists in and by itself; is acted on and acts in a purely mechanical way. The plant does more. It germinates and grows, produces flowers and fruits, and propagates its kind. There is some mysterious principle, called the *vital* principle, at work, producing a kind of being much better than the aggregations of dead, inorganic matter. Still, there is no sign of a reflection or turning back of the plant upon itself; no sign of sensation; no sign of the feeling of the existence of other things around it, of its own existence; no manifestation of desire, pleasure, pain, or any semblance of consciousness.

The animal has all that is in the plant, and more. It has sensation, and is aware of feeling impressions from other objects. It thus returns on itself, and has a kind of consciousness. Its life is enjoyable. It is moved to act by pleasure, pain, desire, appetites and impulses which are felt. The rational human spirit returns on itself by a perfect return. It is united with an animal organism, and in conjunction with it has sensations and all the operations of animal life.

But it has more. It has a life and operation which are super-organic. It has intellect and reason, knowledge of immaterial objects, a reflex consciousness of its own spiritual operations, and of itself as the subject and principle of its acts.

If we analyze all these acts of sensitive and intellectual cognition, we find that sense and intellect receive into themselves the objects of which they take cognizance. The landscape and the starry heavens are received into our faculty of vision; the music of the band or the choir is received into our faculty of hearing. Truths and ideas are in our minds. Our soul contains the world.

They do not enter into us by their physical being. They come ideally, by certain images, as objects are reflected in a mirror.

So, then, the objects of our knowledge must be proportioned and accommodated to the nature and faculties by which they are received. We cannot see with our ears or hear with our eyes. We cannot plane boards with our memory, or feel a poetic sentiment with our fingers. No nature or faculty can go out of its limits or diverge from its own line. Inorganic bodies cannot share the phenomena of life. Plants cannot have sensation. Those beings which have the faculty of cognition have it according to their own specific nature. Sensible cognition is the apprehension of single, concrete, sensible phenomena, and through the phenomena of the sensible objects. The intellectual cognition of man is the apprehension, in the sensible object, of its immaterial and universal contents; species, genus, substance, number, quantity, truth, beauty, goodness, being, relation of cause and effect, etc. The cognition of the intellectual being who is pure spirit is of spiritual substances, and of truth in its pure essence, free from the sensible envelope.

Let us return now to the notion of cognition as the reception into the being who has the faculty of cognition, of the objects which he apprehends, not according to the mode of being in the received, but according to the mode of the receiver. It is plain that the faculty of receiving is limited by its nature. The sensitive, organic faculty, limited by the nature of bodily organs, can receive only single, sensible objects, but not those which are immaterial. The human intellect, being the faculty of a spirit substantially united to an organic, animal body, can receive only those immaterial objects which it perceives in the sensible, or through the universal ideas which it apprehends by means of the sensible images presented to it by the faculties of sense which minister to its intellectual operation. We cannot see our own souls directly as we see our bodies, or see spirits, or receive ideas into our intellect before we have received sensible images as the starting-point of intellectual operation. The purely intellectual being cannot receive that which transcends the measure of his nature and capacity. Every created being is finite. His capacity is finite. He has received his being from God, and his nature is only in proportion to other created beings which are finite, and have only a being received from the Creator.

It is plain from all this that the creature cannot have a natural capacity for receiving ideally into himself the essence of God. This reception is the same thing with cognition. The creature cannot, therefore, have the direct, immediate cognition, the intuition, the vision of the Divine essence. For the essence of God is infinite. It is not received, but self-existent; it is incompre-

hensible ; it is light inaccessible. As well might you attempt to make an adequate image of the Atlantic Ocean in a dressing-room mirror as to imagine that the largest and clearest created intellect could reflect the being of God as He is in Himself, and as He is known to Himself. The intellectual mirror can receive the image of every being equal or inferior to itself in a manner proportioned to the excellence of its own nature. Even those which are superior to it, if they are finite, are equal to it in a certain sense, since all created things have in common a being which has been received. Being, in all its latitude, is the adequate object of intelligence. Its essence is intelligible to every intellect when duly presented to it and brought within its range.

But the essence of God is beyond its range. And this is what the Christian agnostic means by saying that God is the unknowable. No man and no spirit hath seen or can see God so long as he remains within the limit of the nature which he has received by the act which has created him an intelligent being. He is a part of the universal nature which has received a participated and finite being from God. His range of vision and knowledge is within the limit of this universe. He may go on increasing in knowledge for all eternity, but he can never develop from the principles of intelligence implanted in his nature into that proportion to an infinite object which will enable him to contemplate God directly.

To return to our first proposition. In the natural order, God is the Unknowable. The natural order is that state, constitution and arrangement of the universe and all the beings contained in it, which places them in their due relation to their first and final cause and in harmony with each other. Every one has its own specific nature and endowments, its proper qualities and operations, received from the First Cause, sustained and directed by it. Each one and all together have a place, a purpose, an end, that is, a Final Cause, which are for all the reason of their being.

The intellectual and rational creation is by far the highest and noblest part of the universe. Its end is the highest possible natural end, and is attained in the best, the most elevated, the most excellent manner, *i.e.*, in an intelligent and voluntary manner, by a conscious understanding and desire of the highest object, the most perfect good, and a spontaneous movement towards it.

Beings of this order, whatever inferior elements may enter into their nature, are chiefly intellectual. They find their chief and ultimate object, their final perfection, their supreme happiness, their last end in the Knowable.

To the Unknowable they cannot attain, and therefore they do not aspire to it ; for there is no desire or aspiration which is vain

and fruitless in nature. It cannot be, therefore, that the immediate intuition or vision of God as He is in His divine essence is the natural destiny and end of intellectual creatures. They have no right to it, no capacity for it, no possibility of even initiating a movement toward a region of being and beatitude, which is altogether above the plane of their existence and activity. One might as well attempt to swim the Atlantic Ocean or to go in a balloon to Arcturus, as to soar up into the region of the immediate contemplation of God by the exercise of any natural power which he possesses.

But yet the Christian Agnostic, while denying the possibility of a natural Gnosis of this sublime sort, acknowledges that there is an inferior and properly human mode of knowing the deepest causes, the origin and the end of things, the Creator and Sovereign of the universe, the relations of creatures to their Lord. That is, there is a science of philosophy and theology, which is purely natural.

God is knowable in an indirect and mediate way through the image and representation of Himself which He has made in the creation, and especially in those intellectual and rational natures which He has created after His own likeness.

We are now prepared to state what is meant by the purely natural order in a clearer and more distinct manner.

It is the order which reduces to unity of plan the whole and all the parts of the universe as created by God in certain determinate essences, in a certain determinate extent and quantity and grade of being, with a destination to a certain fixed final end, towards which all things are directed by the harmonious actions of second causes, and by laws proportioned to the nature of the existing creatures and the end prefixed to the universe.

In this natural order, the laws which govern intellectual and rational beings are those which regulate their action and movement, toward their proper perfection on the line of intelligence and virtue; toward the attainment of their ultimate degree of excellence and felicity.

This felicity consists in the knowledge of the true and the good so far as it is knowable, and complacency of the will in this object of knowledge.

This object of knowledge is co-extensive with being, in so far as being is brought within the scope of intellect and presented to its contemplation. All nature, all the universe, and all its parts are within the scope of the power of intellect, of its capacity of knowing and understanding. This capacity can be brought into actual exercise indefinitely without any limits except the bounds of the universe. Such is the wide range of created intelligence.

It is co-extensive with nature. It has the capacity of receiv-

ing ideally whatever does not transcend its nature and measure, the universal truth, goodness and beauty which are in the creation.

The human mind, which in our present state of being on this earth is only an inchoate intelligence, is in the lowest stage of development, and is bound to a sensitive, organic, corporeal mode of being and operation, has only the beginning and the imperfect possession of this natural knowledge and felicity. It is in a state of transit and on the way to its ultimate destination. It has glimpses and glimmerings only of its connatural object of contemplation and love. By these glimpses and glimmerings we can get some faint, inadequate conception of what the human mind is destined to become in its perfect state, of what purely intellectual beings are, and of what the adequate object is, of intelligence and will, according to their nature and intrinsic potency.

We are now prepared to consider how far and in what way God, who is directly and immediately unknowable to the created intellect according to its natural capacity, is indirectly and mediately the object of natural knowledge and natural love. In so far as the apprehension and knowledge of God is contained in the knowledge of the creation, as the First Cause of all finite, contingent effects and their sufficient reason; as the source and origin of all being, truth, goodness and beauty; and as Final Cause; thus far God is knowable by the light of nature, and is known to minds duly educated and in a state of rectitude.

God has made the universe to disclose His existence and perfections as First and Final Cause, in the effects of His efficient causality. He has made it an expression of His own eternal ideas. The human mind, although it makes sensitive cognition its starting point, is not confined to it. It looks into the sensible objects of nature with an intelligent perception by the aid of an intellectual light. It perceives in them necessary and eternal truths. It perceives the principle of causality by intuition; in the effects of infinite wisdom and power, it perceives by reasoning the existence of the first cause; it perceives the true, the good and the beautiful in nature, and by reasoning ascends to the contemplation of the One who is being, truth, goodness, beauty in His essence. In the eternal and necessary truths it perceives by reasoning the infinite intelligence in whom they have their seat and origin. In the laws of the universe it perceives the Lawgiver. In conscience it recognizes the Sovereign Lord to whom the rational creature is accountable. This is the highest rational philosophy. It is natural theology, which is based on self-evident truths and constructed by the deductions of pure reason.

When we regard great works of science and art, we become acquainted through them with the great philosophers, mathema-

ticians, architects, poets, sculptors, painters and musicians, who were the authors of these wonderful works, although we have never seen them. The subject of a kingdom knows the existence and power of his sovereign, though he has never seen him, by the laws, the political order, the exercise of sovereign power, which he sees around him, and amid which he lives. In the same way we know the great architect, poet, sovereign and lawgiver of the universe in the seas and mountains, in the sun and stars, in the flowers and landscapes, in the music of nature, in the moral order of human society, in the movement of history, in the aspiration after universal truth and a supreme felicity. Through the knowledge of nature we know its author; by means of the creation we know God in the mode and degree proportioned to our capacity. The will naturally follows the intellect, and loves the object proposed by the intellect as good. Consequently, the inclination to love God supremely naturally follows upon the knowledge of God as the supreme good.

What has been said of human nature specifically, must be true of all intellectual or rational nature generically. That is, each intellectual species, according to its nature and mode, is made perfect by the knowledge and love of God as known through the creation.

The natural end and destination of intelligent beings, their supreme felicity, consists in the attainment of their due perfection, which is chiefly the perfection of their intellectual faculty and of their knowledge.

This natural destiny, in the natural order, is the contemplation of God and the love of God as made known by the natural light of intelligence and reason, mediately through the universe which He has created. This is the summit of being attainable by the complete development of intelligent creatures.

Their highest felicity, when they have reached their ultimate perfection, is in the loving contemplation of God, and in the security from all liability to sin and the loss of their supreme good. Their perfect and happy state includes also the good which can be enjoyed from all other sources, *i.e.*, from all created objects in the universe.

Even when this ultimate and perpetual state of perfection and felicity has been attained, God is still the Unknowable in the sense we have already explained. Suppose all nature to suffer an eclipse, and to become invisible to these exalted intelligences so that they see no created thing, not even themselves. All acts of intellect and will would be suspended. There would be no self-consciousness. They would not see God in this oblivion of the world and themselves. For they have no direct and immediate cognition of

God. They can see Him only as we can see the sun when it is below the horizon, reflected from the clouds of sun-rising and sun-setting, from the moon and the planets. Shut out this reflected light and they are in total darkness, in an intellectual syncope or sleep.

I have explained the sense in which a Christian Agnostic affirms that God is Unknowable. This affirmation it is which makes him an Agnostic. But he is very different from an Agnostic who is not a Christian. In the first place he is a Theist, and therefore includes natural theology within the circle of philosophical science. In the second place he is a Christian, and therefore believes in a supernatural religion. He professes that there is a supernatural Gnosis, and he is therefore a Christian Gnostic. The meaning of this proposition, and the reconciliation of the apparent opposition of what he affirms as an Agnostic, with that which he professes as a Gnostic, now becomes the topic for our consideration.

After the explanation of the natural order and the natural destiny of intellectual and rational beings in that order, follows the explanation of the supernatural order and the destiny of those intelligent natures which are elevated to that higher order of being.

The term *supernatural* is used in different senses. In general it denotes something above some kind of specific nature, and especially human nature.

In the specific sense of the present discussion it denotes that which is above all created nature, whether actual or possible. Of course, if we speak of the essence and nature of God, there can be nothing above that. In respect to created nature God, and God alone, is by His essence above all nature. In this sense He is a supernatural being. If a creature can be raised to a supernatural plane of existence and operation, it can only be by raising him above his nature to a participation in the divine nature, or by his divinisation. If this elevation can be and actually is effected by the divine power, when it is fully accomplished and the creature reaches his acme, the Unknowable in God is made knowable and known as an object of intuitive, immediate contemplation, followed by a proportionate complacency and love. This is the divine Gnosis and the essence of supernatural beatitude.

The supernatural order is one which is arranged for bringing creatures to this sublime destiny, and subordinating all created nature to the fulfilment of this supreme end and culmination of the universe.

The possibility of such an elevation of the creature could never be known or suspected by the light of nature. Intelligent beings are confined within the finite bounds of nature. To pure reason it

does not appear possible that they should transcend those bounds. They have only *esse receptum*, and its measure is incapable of ideally receiving the *esse irreceptum*, as St. Thomas teaches. The finite cannot receive the infinite. The created intellect cannot directly and immediately see God in and through its ideal mirror.

If it can see God it must be so united with God that it can see God in and through God. It must receive a divinisation by which it is brought within the sphere of the divine being, though not absorbed or losing its substantial identity with its own nature, and its own distinct individuality. Is this possible even to Omnipotence? God alone can know whether it is possible or whether He intends to effect it in any of his creatures. Created beings can only know that this supernatural destiny and order are possible, and that they are really intended and effected by the divine power, through a revelation made to them by God. Before they actually attain to the vision of God and the consciousness of possessing the supreme good, they can only know it by faith in the divine veracity. The Unknowable remains a mystery above reason, not directly intelligible, but apprehended through symbols and analogies, yet credible in a rational manner because of the evidence which God has given, that He truly reveals it.

That which makes a man a Christian is the belief in this divine revelation as made through our Lord Jesus Christ. The Christian is a believer in divine mysteries and their correlated truths on the veracity of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. He is a Gnostic, one having knowledge of divine things, according to a certain mode of knowledge; that is, he has a rational certainty of the grounds of his belief, a certain knowledge of that which is proposed to his belief, and some degree of understanding of the harmony between the truths of faith and the facts and truths of natural, rational science. His Gnosis is inchoate and imperfect so long as he is a wayfarer on the earth. He sees as through a glass, darkly. Perfect vision and knowledge are reserved for the state of future and final beatitude.

Let a person be introduced into a vast and superb hall, its ceiling adorned with brilliant frescoes, its walls covered with masterpieces of the great painters. It is night, and the room is dimly lighted. He has an obscure view of the objects of beauty contained within the hall and longs for the day and the bright sunlight to see them clearly and distinctly. The light of faith is an obscure light, dimly disclosing the revealed mysteries which are invisible to the natural intellect, before the day dawns and the day-star arises to cast a bright light upon the objects of the beatific vision.

The supernatural beatitude, together with the order which is

arranged with reference to it, is a purely gratuitous benefit conferred on creatures by the goodness of God, and not in any way due to them in justice or benevolence. Creation itself is a free and gratuitous communication of being and good to the universe. But, when God determines to create, wisdom and goodness must necessarily give to creatures a destination and an end congruous to their nature, which satisfies their natural exigency. Rational creatures receive with their nature a right to that perfection and beatitude of which they have the capacity and to which they aspire. This is due to their nature, and not gratuitous or a pure grace, in addition to the original free gift of rational nature and immortal existence.

All these rights, exigencies and aspirations are fully satisfied in the natural order. God might not only in justice, but in benevolence and wisdom, leave them eternally in this state of pure nature. They have in their nature no intrinsic capacity, exigency or aspiration for the supernatural elevation to this higher and divine plane. It is, therefore, absolutely gratuitous; it is a pure grace, and if given, may be given to as few or as many as God pleases to favor in this special manner, and on any conditions not impairing any natural right, which He may, according to his sovereign will, see fit to appoint.

It is Christian doctrine that God has actually introduced this supernatural order into the universe, and constituted all angels and the human race in that inchoate, initial state of grace, the consummation of which is celestial glory and beatitude.

The culmination of this order of being is in the Incarnation. Jesus Christ is not only the author and finisher of the Christian faith, He is also its primary and immediate object. To be a Christian is in sum, to believe in Christ. The Christian has his eye fixed in the contemplation of "Him first, Him last, Him midst, and without end." The Incarnation, as a mystery of faith, presupposes and depends from that other sublime mystery of revelation, the Trinity. God, the One in essence, subsists with all His divine perfection in Three Persons. The Second Person, the Son, has assumed a perfect human nature into a union with His divine nature, so intimate that he is one Person in two distinct natures. He is man as well as God. The Creator of the universe was conceived and born of the Virgin. Jesus, the son of Mary, of David, of Adam, is strictly and properly God. This is the divinisation of humanity in the highest sense. The uncreated nature and a created nature are joined in one personality. A finite human nature is taken into the inmost circle of the Godhead. God and man are made one. The same person is both the Son of God and the Son of Man, consubstantial with God the Father, and with the Virgin

Mary. The Incarnation is the masterpiece of divine wisdom, the ultimatum of divine power. It is divine goodness and love, carried to the utmost limit of possibility. God cannot condescend any lower, humanity and created nature cannot ascend any higher. God descended to the lowest level of his creation, the corporeal and material, by assuming a nature one of whose components is material body. Man, in body as well as in soul, ascended to the highest level of being, to the Godhead. Spirit, intellect, reason, sensation, vegetative life, organic structure, and the elements of inorganic matter, were all contained in the human nature of Jesus Christ, which is a microcosm, a complex union of all the distinct, specific essences of the universe. Thus, the universal creation, in its representative, a perfect specimen of the whole, was united to the divine nature, and the creation which proceeded from God as its first efficient cause, returned to Him again as its final cause, making His extrinsic glory to correspond as far as possible to His intrinsic glory.

It is the doctrine of Pantheism that God is everything and everything is God. The All-God is the imaginary being of Pantheistic worship. This is an absurdity and a contradiction. It destroys the nature of God, and the nature of all created beings, blending all into one confused and impossible monster, which is being and no being, infinite and finite, ever becoming and never reaching real fulness of existence. The Incarnation realizes that intimate presence of God in His creation, that union of created being with the uncreated, infinite Being, of which Pantheism is a travesty. God remains unchanged in His essence and personality. The divine nature is not altered and changed into a human nature. The person who assumes humanity does not become a human person, but remains a divine person. The human essence remains unchanged. The human nature is not changed into the divine nature or blended with it, but remains distinct in its own substance and qualities. The human self-consciousness, intellect, will, and body, all that constitutes or flows from humanity, all human attributes, qualities, and perfections, are there in their sum total, as completely as they are in any merely human person. They do not result in a distinct and human personality, because the human nature is taken up and appropriated by a divine Person, who makes it His own, and thus becomes Man without ceasing to be God. This human nature is a microcosm, containing every kind of created being, from matter to spirit, in its composite essence. In this mysterious union of the divine and human natures in the Person of the Son of God and Man, God becomes the All and the All becomes God. The most perfect union is effected between God and His creation, which is

summed up in the masterpiece of His divine wisdom, the humanity of Christ.

In the Incarnation, the supernatural order reaches its summit and apex. The rest of the created universe participates in the elevation of nature to the supernatural in various degrees, in proportion to the relation which different species and individuals in it bear to the Incarnate Son of God.

All the glory which is concentrated in His Person is derived from His character as the only-begotten Son of God the Father. This glory is communicated to His human nature as a natural right. That is to say, although the hypostatic union was a gratuitous gift of grace, which could not be due to a human nature, or merited by human acts, as soon as this human nature was united to the divine nature, the Son of God had a right to endow His human nature with the privileges of the divine Sonship, with the fulness of grace and perfection, the primacy among all created beings, and a participation in divine beatitude.

But He is not simply the *Only Begotten* of the Father; he is also the *First Begotten*, holding the primogeniture among many sons of God who are made sons by adoption, an adoption which is not merely extrinsic, but which is founded on a true *regeneration*. This regeneration gives an intrinsic and inherent mode of being to those who receive it, which elevates their nature to a real likeness with God, and a capacity for being heirs with Christ in His glory and beatitude.

Those pure spirits who are called angels, in their various degrees of intelligence and splendor, have been called to this sublime destination. Men also—the Adamic race—have been called to the same high destiny, and honored above the angels by consanguinity with the Son of God in the same specific nature. All other creatures, all orders of intelligent and rational beings, if there are such in the universe, and all organic and inorganic creatures, the universe, in fine, are subordinated to these, its highest classes, so that the incarnate Son of God rules over all as king, and all are glorified in His glory.

This is the supernatural order; which does not remove the natural order or change the nature of things, but takes it as its basis, erecting upon it the marvellous superstructure of grace, and bringing it back to God as the final cause in the most perfect manner conceivable.

The state, and the highest act of those intelligent beings who have attained their end in supernatural beatitude, is called a state and an act of Gnosis, and those who have attained it are called Gnostics, because the state is intellectual, and the act is an act of intellect. The perfection of an intelligent being is essentially in

his intellect, because intellect is his highest, most God-like endowment. In beatitude he has the immediate intuition, the vision of God as he is in His essence, without any interposing medium. He contemplates the divine being as God contemplates His own divine being, with a complacency which constitutes his supreme felicity, and gives him the fruition of the sovereign good.

We have already seen that to the rational creature, left in his pure nature, God is Unknowable according to this mode of knowledge. And, in the initial state of supernatural grace and life on the earth, this Unknowable object is not apprehended by the clear light of vision, but by faith, which is the evidence of things not seen. It is not visible to the wayfarer who is on the road to the gate of heaven but has not yet passed through it.

Our consciousness assures us that we do not see God, or even see any created spirit immediately, as we see bodies, as we see landscapes, the sun and the stars. If we did, He would appear to us continually from the first instant of conscious existence, surpassing in brightness all created objects more than brilliant sunshine surpasses the light of glow-worms and candles. It would be impossible to doubt His existence, or to err in our conceptions of His attributes, or of His subsistence in Three Persons, or of any of the truths of theology. We are conscious only of perceiving sensible objects and the universal ideas abstracted from them, by which through discursive reasoning we ascend as high in the knowledge and contemplation of spiritual and eternal realities as the limit of our powers will permit. Being, truth, goodness, beauty are knowable in so far as they are manifested in the creation; God is knowable as the first cause, origin, source and archetype, and final cause of all that is revealed in and through the universe that is open to the contemplation of the intellect.

We are perfectly well aware, also, that faith does not give direct and clear *Gnosis* or knowledge of the mysteries of religion believed in by Christians, so that they become evident to the intellect of the believer, even though he be the most enlightened philosopher and theologian. The intellect must receive the light of glory to make it capable of the vision of God and the hidden mysteries of His being. This light is given to those who have attained and are in their eternal, celestial home, but not to wayfarers on the road. Faith which is founded on His veracity gives firm assent to truths revealed by God and leaves the objects obscure.

It is plain that this is the only way in which the Unknowable can be made an object of apprehension and intellectual assent to any intelligent being who has not been raised to the state of beatitude. The angels, in the beginning of their existence, while still on the way and in the state of probation, were capable of illumination

concerning the mysteries of God and their own destination only by a divine revelation proposed to them as an object of faith. They had to gain heaven by faith, believing on the word of God that which was not evident to their natural intelligence. Men are far inferior to angels in intellectual capacity, and therefore in a much more obvious need of receiving by faith a divine revelation as the necessary means of preparing them for a destination similar and equal to that for which the pure spirits of the highest spheres were created.

We remarked at the outset that the correct idea of the supernatural opens the way to a solution of several religious problems about which many minds are perplexed.

The first of these has now come up of itself. It is, namely, the question about the reason and necessity of divine revelation for men. It is asked: Why should not the disclosure which God makes through the universe, through intelligence, through reason, and through human science and history, suffice? This is the suggestion of Theistic rationalists, who would have philosophy and natural theology as taught by sages and men of genius, instead of the Bible and the creeds of the Church, as the guide of mankind toward perfection and happiness in this and in the future world. Accordingly, they reject revelation altogether as a childish imagination, to be cast aside as humanity progresses toward its adult age.

This rationalistic conclusion is derived from premises which are mere assumptions, contradicted by history and evidence.

On the supposition which is the antecedent of all the reasoning of rationalists, viz., that man is in a purely natural order, having a merely natural destiny, the rationalistic conclusion may be allowed to follow logically from its premises. A natural order does not require supernatural means and agencies. Man, in the state of pure nature, would not need an environment and means of development and perfectibility superior to those with which nature furnishes him. Science, art, philosophy, social and political organization, the products of the earth, human industry, the exercise of the rational faculties, would furnish the elements and instruments of civilization, of natural ethics and religion, of progress toward an ideal state of virtue and felicity, and of preparation for transition to a higher state of being in another world.

But if God had actually placed the world and mankind in such an order for such an end, a much better provision for the felicity and development of humanity on this line than the existing one, would have been required by the wisdom and benevolence of God. Men would have known and understood their real condition and

destiny. They would have been satisfied with nature, and would never have dreamed of the supernatural.

History proves that purely rational and natural means for the perfection and felicity of mankind have always proved inadequate. Their failure proves the need of the supernatural even for the natural and temporal welfare and felicity of mankind. It has been the great source of all the good which has ever been in the world. There has always been, since the beginning of the historic period, the presence and explicit belief of an order above nature, or a reminiscence, an aspiration and a dream of such an order. The supernatural obtrudes itself everywhere into the natural. As Cardinal Newman has said, revelation is an universal and not a particular fact. The assertion that it was otherwise in a pre-historic time is pure conjecture and unworthy of notice. All the monuments and records of the human race testify to the universal belief in the supernatural and the aspiration for it. This can only be accounted for on the principle of causality and the sufficient reason, by referring it to the Creator. As the uniform movement of the earth from west to east proves an original impulse in that direction, intended by the Creator to give the earth its law of revolution on its axis and around the sun, so this uniform direction of humanity toward a supernatural end proves that the Creator has given it that destination.

The necessity of revelation and the sufficient reason for it are obvious as soon as the correct idea of supernatural order and destiny is gained. The actual condition of the human race makes it *morally* necessary, even for the instruction of the mass of mankind in religious and ethical truths, which are knowable by reason. For those which are naturally unknowable it is *absolutely* necessary. Once admit that the unknowable to natural intelligence and the unattainable by natural effort is the real object towards which the human mind and will are intended to take their direction, and the congruity of a supernatural revelation with the entire system of things becomes apparent.

The astronomer needs a telescope because he wishes to view objects in the heavens invisible or only dimly visible to the naked eye.

The mind and heart of man have need to be directed to the contemplation of the heavens which are his destined future home. His future beatitude consists in the vision of God in Unity and Trinity and in the Second Person of the Trinity united by the hypostatic union to the humanity of Jesus Christ. This sublime, infinite object of contemplation is the Unknowable to natural reason. But those who are destined to see God with a clear, intuitive vision ought to make acquaintance with the mysteries of

His being while they are on the way, by an initial and obscure knowledge, that they may have the desire and hope of their future beatitude, and may walk in the way which leads to it. Those who will be Gnostics hereafter in reality ought to be Gnostics here in faith and hope, in desire and aspiration. Nothing can be willed unless it is first known. Of the unknown there is no desire; much more of the unknowable. The reason why we must believe in the Trinity, the Incarnation, the supernatural order, the divine beatitude of the future life is, that we are bound to strive after the possession of the sovereign good in God in this order by living a supernatural life and by doing its acts. The root and vital principle of this life is faith. This faith cannot reasonably rest on any ground except the veracity of God, the essential truth in being, in knowing and in manifesting Himself. The intellect cannot come into contact with this Divine Truth, except by a revelation. This revelation must be made credible by sufficient and certain motives of credibility. The fact of divine revelation and the true meaning of the revelation must be made known in such a way as to exclude all error and all doubt. God is omniscient. Whatever He reveals is the Truth. When He is known to have revealed certain mysteries and other connected truths the conclusion logically follows that all which is revealed is infallibly true and certain and credible on the divine veracity. To believe on this authority is a rational act, and to doubt or disbelieve is irrational and immoral.

Who will say that it is impossible for God to reveal truths which are naturally unknowable to the human intellect? God is omnipotent. He is the Creator and the sovereign lord of the beings whom He has created. He can do everything with the human mind which does not imply a contradiction to its nature. Is it a contradiction to the nature of an intellectual creature, and especially to the rational nature of man, that God should raise it to the immediate, intuitive vision of His divine essence, or even to a hypostatic union with the divine nature, as we believe He has done in the Incarnation? How can we know that this is impossible? We cannot, indeed, naturally know that it is possible. If God knows it to be possible, and has determined to effect it, what can make it a contradiction to the nature of our intellect that God should disclose to us the possibility and reality of this divine condescension? Is it true that our intellect is not receptive of these ideas? It is, indeed, impossible that a stone, a tree, or an irrational animal should receive a revelation from God. It is a contradiction to their nature, because their nature is not intellectual and not receptive of anything which is rationally intelligible. But intellect has for its adequate object universal being and universal truth, in so far as that

is presented before it. The Unknowable is naturally Unknowable because, in the natural order, it is not presented to the intellect. But in the supernatural order it is knowable, because God presents Himself immediately before the intellect, and so enhances and intensifies the intellectual capacity that it is able to receive the intimate presence of God, in and through which it can know Him as He is.

The precise question is, whether, in our present state, we can receive an idea of these mysteries, and elicit an act of assent to their truth? That we can is manifest from the fact that we have these ideas in our minds; that we can reflect upon them, reason about them; that some doubt or deny their conformity to objective truth, and that multitudes of persons give an undoubting assent to the objects represented by these ideas. We have an idea of the Trinity, of the Incarnation, of the supernatural order, of the beatific vision. Men can present these ideas before our minds, can discuss them, can affirm their truth, and present the evidence of their credibility.

If men can talk and reason with us about these things, God can. He can speak with his creatures, if He will. He can disclose to them any truth which they are capable of apprehending. He can give them evidence that He has spoken, and certitude of what the word He has spoken truly signifies. Having done so, the fact proves the possibility. *Ab actu ad posse valet consequentia.* The fact of divine revelation, the divine origin of Christianity, are established by a numerous array of *evidences* which are irrefragable. It is certain that God has revealed the mysteries of the Trinity, the Incarnation, the supernatural order of grace, the eternal beatitude of the angels and saints in an ineffable union with God. It is irrational to go behind these evidences of divine revelation, to question the possibility of the supernatural. The only rational procedure, for one who does not already possess but is seeking to find the truth, is to look these evidences in the face; and when convinced, to give assent to the divine revelation; to inquire into its genuine and authentic sense, and to believe firmly what God has revealed. Such an one is the Christian Gnostic. He knows what and why he believes. He assents to its truth on the veracity of God, who knows all things, and has given His word for the truth of all that which the Christian believes, on divine testimony, without immediate evidence of its intrinsic truth.

This is the explanation of the sense of the proposition: That a Christian is both an A-agnostic and a Gnostic; that the unknowable in God is apprehensible and credible by Faith, and will be intuitively known in Vision.