

ATHEISM

THE DEVIL'S WELL WEDGED BATTLE

By H.H. Pope Shenouda III

A believer once asked His Holiness, "The idea of atheism contends with me, and I struggle against it, but it returns with doubts in the existence of God. Please help me to confirm my faith: I am afraid that these doubts will prevail against my faith." His Holiness replied...

This is a well-known battle waged by the devil. These tempting thoughts do not emanate out of you or else you would not have been struggling against it. The devil is persistent and stubborn, and does not rest or despair. The more humans react against any of his temptations, the more he keeps trying. St. Peter says,

"Resist him firm in your faith ..."
(1 Peter 5:9).

Nevertheless, there are many proofs of the existence of God in this universe. Without God, there is no explanation as to how the universe came to being. Along the same line, there is no explanation as to the existence of life, matter, humans, or nature, except that God existed

and created them. We start with the main point, and that is the existence of life.

The Existence of Life

The question is: how was life found on the earth? According to scientists, there was a time when the earth was part of the solar system, at a burning temperature degree, that does not allow human, animal or plant life. So where did life come from? Who created it? And how? Atheists and other scientists have been confounded at the existence of life. Here is not only meant the life of advanced mammals such as man, but even the life of a creature as small as an ant, or any insect that sets foot on the face of the earth. The existence of any one of those insects proves the existence of God. The existence of one living cell, of plasma, proves the existence of God, because there is no other interpretation. Life is a fairly new concept on earth. Before, the earth was a burning mass, where life was not possible.

Then, life came about with the cooling of the earth's crust. The burning center of the earth, from where volcanoes and hot eruptions come, is not fit for life. So how did life start on earth after the crust of the earth cooled down?

Normally, rigid lifeless matter could not have created life. Therefore, the puzzle remains in front of scientists! The only solution is that God, in His supreme power, was the One who created life.

A living being has to come forth from another being. And however the scientists try to bring any of their imaginary hypotheses, they remain hypotheses, never achieving scientific status. Next on our list is the existence of matter.

The Existence of Matter

By this we mean rigid nature and whatever matter it contains. Matter did not create itself. The expression, itself, does not make sense, for how can it create itself, when it is non-existent? How can it have the power

to create, before it is created? The hypothesis is impossible. Therefore, the only possibility is that someone must have created it. Who is that, but God? It did not exist by chance, as is alleged by some! Chance does not create things. The word "chance" is a non-scientific and illogical word. It needs a definition. So what is chance? What are its powers? And does chance have characteristics such as the capability to create?

We also cannot say that matter or nature is eternal. It is impossible for matter to be eternal, because being eternal proves power, whereas matter is weak. It changes from one state

to another: water changes to water vapor, and it could freeze, and turn to ice; wood can burn and turn into coal, or change into smoke and disappear in the atmosphere. Many forms of matter are compounded: and a compound is the combination of two or more elements, and it may dissolve, and return to its former constituents. Nature, then, is changeable, and inconsistency shows weakness, and therefore it cannot be a source of creating new matter. Therefore rigid nature, devoid of thinking, cannot be capable of creating.

A general question to pose is: what is meant by the word "nature"? Is it rigid matter? Is it the mountains, the rivers, the earth, and the atmosphere? If so, then it cannot create humans because the non-living cannot create something living, and the non-thinking cannot create the thinking being. So has human nature created man? This is not logical, because man did not have any nature capable of creating him before he came to existence. Or does the word "nature" tell of a huge power that is inconceivable? If so, then maybe this inconceivable power is God, and has been called "nature" by some. Then the difference would only be an utter of name calling, and not of essence. All the atheists, who

said that nature created the universe, did not provide a clear meaning to the kind of nature they meant. The next point to prove the existence of God is Man.

The Existence of Man

Man is this marvelous being that possesses a mind, a soul, a conscience, and a will. There must have been another being who has a much elevated power to create man, another being who possesses ultimate wisdom, power and will to enable Him to create man. This is God. This is especially amazing when we

consider the complex features of man. It is enough to mention man's fingerprints, or pitch of voice. There may be tens of millions of humans coexisting in one country, and each of them has an individual fingerprint that differentiates him/her from another's. Who is this who can draw fingerprints that are individualized for each person? These lines change from one person to another, amongst thousands of millions on one continent like Asia, or Africa. This is marvelous! The Creator of all this must be someone with limitless power. God's unlimited power is demonstrated in the formation of man with the variety and complexity of parts, each having its own unique function.

The brain, for example, has centers for sight, hearing, movement, memory, and understanding, etc., so that if one of these centers is destroyed, a person loses his ability to work this center forever! How many scientists around the world can create a brain, or even one

center in the brain? This can only be accomplished by God. This brings us to the next item to prove the existence of God.

The Structure of the Universe

If you see a bunch of stones laying somewhere, you might say that they were found there by chance. However, if you see a number of those stones, arranged beside and above each other to form rooms, halls, with doors to divide them, and windows to look out of them, then you would say that was definitely the work of an engineer or builder who would have put them together. It is the same thing with the universe in its structure. God must have organized it so well that philosophers have called Him "The Greatest Engineer." Let us give as our first example the laws of the galaxy: by this we mean the marvelous system that connects the sun and the moons, the system which organizes the directions taken by the stars, and the huge numbers of their satellites and meteors. The earth itself turns around once every day, resulting in day and night. It also turns around

the sun once every year, resulting in the four seasons. This system does not change, and has been in place for thousands of years, since these heavenly orbits have been created, and laws were put to organize them. This is the reason the study of the universe is taught in the colleges that teach theology; the universe proves the existence of God. As well, medicine is taught in those colleges, for the same reason. The

law of the universe is also observed in the relationship between the moon and the earth, from which resulted the series of shapes of the moon from crescent to a full moon. This is what makes us appreciate the words of the psalmist:

It is impossible for matter to be eternal, because being eternal proves power, whereas matter is weak.

The organization created by God is not limited to heaven and its constituents only, but also includes things that pertain to the temperature, pressure, winds, and rain.

"The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims His handiwork" (Ps. 19:1).

The organization created by God is not limited to heaven and its constituents only, but also includes things that pertain to the temperature, pressure, winds, and rain. These factors are different from one country to another, yet they are harmonious and organized, so they have the best effects in the fields of agriculture and plants. What a marvelous example we get from examining bees and their production! A bee is only an insect but it works in an astonishingly organized fashion, as if it were in an organized army, whether that it is the queen bee or the workers. The product is the sweet honey to which is attributed so many nutritious benefits, especially that honey produced by the queen bees, known as "Royal Jelly," and sold in pharmacies. The bee in its extreme organization proves the existence of God, and so does its sweet nutritious product. Another way to prove the existence of God is miracles.

Miracles

Miracles are not against the mind; they transcend what the mind knows. They are called miracles because the human mind is unable to understand or interpret them. The only interpretation for them is the unlimited power of God, mentioned in the Bible: "With men it is impossible, but not with God; for all things are possible with God" (Mk. 10:27); or as Job put it, "I know that You can do all things, and that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted" (Job 42:2). Miracles are not limited to what has been related in the Holy Bible. They are found in our practical life, especially to the saints. If no miracles happened in your life, or to any of your relatives or acquaintances, then read about them in those books that have registered some of the miracles that happened in our days, or in the lives of saints that lived before us. Some of these

may be Abba Abraam, Bishop of Fayoum, or Abba Sarabamon, Abou Tarha, or any of the miracles that recur on the days commemorating these saints. These commemorations confirm faith in your hearts. The next point to prove the existence of God is common belief.

Common Belief

The belief that God exists is common among all nations, even to atheists. They have faith in the existence of godliness, but err in their knowledge of WHO is God.

They have gone as far as to believe in the existence of many gods. Some of them believe in a god for every quality by which godliness is known. They even know that they need to offer prayer, sacrifices, and oblations to God. Belief in God is

implanted even in children. If you talk to a child about God, he/she does not ask you who He is; and if you tell him/her not to do something or else God will be angry, he/she will not argue with you. A child's instincts tell him/her about the existence of God, and this faith does not waiver in the child's heart or mind, except with doubts that come to him/her from outside factors. That could be in the form of temptation from the devil or someone's thoughts, when the child grows up and is old enough to start doubting.

In fact, atheism has many reasons, not all religious. In communist countries, the reason for atheism is the faulty political upbringing, the pressure on the part of the government, as well as the fear on the part of the people. Once fear is removed, with the elimination of the political pressure, tens of millions in Russia, Romania, Poland and other countries accepted the faith; or they professed the faith that they would not allege earlier out of

fear of their governments. Another kind of atheism in Marxism. This has been described by some authors as refusing God but not denying the existence of God. Economic problems and the poverty of which many people suffer, in contrast with the life of luxury and lavishness, has convinced those atheists that God lives in an ivory tower not caring for the suffering of the poor, toiling class. Therefore, they refused God, and called religion the "opiate of the masses", in an attempt to anesthetize them, so that they do not feel the

misery in their lives.

Another kind of atheism is that of existentialists who want to wallow in the enjoyment of their sinful desires forbidden to them by God. They state that "it is better that God does not exist, so that we may exist!" By this they mean that the only way they can exist

is satisfying their sinful passions. They even made fun of Our Lord's Prayer by saying, "Our Father Who is in Heaven," yes, may He remain in heaven, and leave the earth to us. Thus it is a belief that is not built on solid grounds, but on running after their own cravings.

Finally, I would like to tell you this story. One day a believer and an atheist met. The atheist told the believer: "How would you feel if, after death, you discovered that there is no heaven or hell, no reward or punishment, after you have spend your life in prayer, fasting and abstinence in vain?" The believer answered: "I will lose nothing, because I find pleasure in spiritual life. But how would you feel if, after death, you discovered that there is a reward and punishment, heaven and hell?"

As for you, my beloved son, may God confirm your faith +

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