

God's Camera

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*E*ditor's note:

I consider A.J. Mattill, Jr. one of the top experts on the Bible in the world. Since I took over editorship of the American Rationalist in 1996, Mr. Mattill has submitted close to a hundred original, perceptive, meticulously researched and documented commentaries on both the Old and New Testament. He has also published several books, among them Polluted Texts and Traditional Beliefs (published by the Flatwoods Free Press, Route 2, Box 49, Gordo, Alabama 35466-9517) and Luke and the Last Things (published by Western North Carolina Press, P.O. Box 29 Dillsboro, NC 28 725).

There is no doubt in my mind that in a public debate with any theist-whether a highly credentialed professor of theology, the Pope, or any other „god expert“-A.J. Mattill, Jr. would put them all to shame with his impressive, detailed knowledge of a collection of old Hebrew stories, myths and fairy tales, known as the Bible.

Now, thanks to Mr. Mariusz Agnosiewicz, Editor of Racjonalista, Mattill's excellent commentaries will at last reach a wider audience. I will try to republish many of them under the general title „Searchlight on the Scriptures“ as part of the English service of Racjonalista. Perhaps these commentaries will help some to understand the immense hypocrisy and scam called Christianity and to face up to the fact that if we don't solve our problems, then nobody-no god or gods-will.

Kaz Dziamka, Editor of the *American Rationalist* and the English service of *Racjonalista*

Kevin, age 4, was standing at the patio window during a thunderstorm. Each time there was a flash of lightning, he would look up at the sky and smile. Finally, his mother asked, „Kevin, what are you smiling about?“ Kevin replied, „God is taking my picture with his camera.“

Kevin knows nothing about the positive and negative charges which make lightning, but he does know that persons take pictures with cameras and flash bulbs. Therefore when he sees flashes of lightning he naturally assumes there must be a Superphotographer out there snapping pictures. At the same time, Kevin, observing how his own little world revolves about him, also assumes that he is so important in the universe that the celestial camera is focused on him. And seeing his own parents' interest in him manifested by their repeated photographing of him for the family album, Kevin infers that the Cosmic Cameraman wants a whole series of snapshots of him for the divine photo album. Kevin thus makes three assumptions: the forces of the universe are personal, Kevin is important in the universe, and the personal forces of the universe are interested in Kevin as an individual.

The Catholic Digest (November 1995, p. 74) tells of a mother who was busy in the kitchen when five-year-old Kelly came in. „What have you been doing?“ the mother asked. „I've been playing ball with God.“ „Just exactly what do you mean by that, Kelly?“ „Well,“ Kelly answered, „I throw the ball up to God, and God throws it back.“ Kelly, not knowing about the impersonal force of gravity, makes the same three assumptions as did Kevin. Since the ball always comes back, there must be a supernatural ballplayer who catches it and throws it back. She is so important in the scheme of things that the Superballplayer takes time out from operating the universe to play catch with her. And the Superplayer focuses his interest on Kelly alone, singling her out from all the children of the world to play ball with her.

The three assumptions made by Kevin and Kelly are much more than the fantasies of unsophisticated children. They are the central affirmations of the scriptures: A personal God (not impersonal natural forces) created and sustains us and the universe (Genesis 1: 1-31). The God who created us loves us individually, and addresses each of us by name (Isaiah 43-1). The heavenly Father takes notice whenever even one of the world's billions of sparrows falls to the ground, and he has numbered all the hairs on every person's head (Matthew 10:29-31 Luke 12:6-7). „God cares for you, so turn all your worries over to him“ (1 Peter 5-7, Contemporary English Version). I am important in the eyes of the personal Supreme Being. He is interested in me and in my welfare as an individual. „His eye is on the sparrow. I know he

watches me," says a popular gospel song. And hear this Catholic prayer: "Thank you, Father in heaven, for singling me out by name and claiming me as you own" (*God's Word Today*, April 1998, p. 21).

We may smile at children like Kevin and Kelly who naively personify the forces of the universe as cameramen and ballplayers. We can even understand how the „inspired" writers of ancient scriptures could base their writings on these simple, childlike inferences, for these writers were living during the childhood of the human race when their knowledge, like that of children, was limited and often erroneous. But at the close of the second millennium, the fact that so many otherwise informed people still avow their faith in these immature ideas boggles the imagination.

We now know that we live in a violent universe with crashing meteorites and asteroids, with exploding stars, killer stars, cannibal stars, cannibalistic black holes, and with colliding galaxies and erupting galaxies-all occurring without respect for life of man or beast on this or any planet. We also know that the fossil record suggests that some 99% of life forms that ever existed on earth are now extinct, indicating that no divine eye is on the sparrow or on the kangaroo, Kevin or Kelly. Mass extinctions care nothing about whole species, let alone about individuals. It's a fierce world. We know, too, that our century has witnessed millions of people perish like flies and sparrows in famines, natural disasters, persecutions, plagues, and wars.

Yet in spite of the fact that this modern knowledge about the nature of the world is readily available to people today, only a comparatively few persons have questioned, investigated, and then rejected the quaint notion that the individual is of importance and interest to a personal, superhuman power. It is high time for all thinking people everywhere to put away childish thoughts (1 Corinthians 13:1 1) and recognize that the personification of natural forces is a childlike process of primitive peoples who understandably thought that thunder was the voice of deity (Psalm 29) or caused by the flapping of the wings of a great black thunderbird. And then there were the peasants who were terrified by the sight of a railway train. Their pastor sought to relieve their fears by explaining how a steam engine works. The peasants nevertheless insisted a horse must be inside the train. When careful search into every nook and cranny of the train failed to reveal a horse, the peasants insisted a horse was there anyhow-an invisible ghosthorse.

Since we are not omniscient, we cannot prove a universal negative, that is, we cannot prove with absolute certainty that there is no thunderbird or ghosthorse somewhere in the universe, or that there is no supernatural photographer or otherworldly ballplayer out there in the wild blue yonder. Neither can we prove that there is no god of any kind hiding in some far-off corner of the cosmos. But on the basis of what we know about the cruel world in which we live we can affirm with as much certainty as we can affirm anything in theology: the universe is brutally impersonal and has not the slightest interest in us as individuals. In the final analysis, we are no more important in the cosmic scheme of things than are ants, aphids, and armadillos.

Ah, love, let us be true
To one another! for the world, which seems
To lie before us like a land of dreams,
So various, so beautiful, so new,
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;
And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night.

- Matthew Arnold (1822-1888), „Dover Beach."

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