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My personal history is somewhat unusual: I am a returned Christian. I was one of the many (a majority, I suspect) of my generation who drifted away in the 1960s into vague modernism. But then after a quarter-century I was jolted into realizing that the Church needs only to be the least bad organization for it to command my loyalty.

I was baptized as a baby, and began school in church [I was not allowed by the editor to mention Rome] institutions where guilt-racketeering and brutality gave a sensitive child many nightmares. My mother got locked up when I was 5, but this disruption was compensated by the blessing that my father soon married again so that a devout Christian stepmother taught me to love hymnody & prayer; and I was moved into a State school which was far better.

When a student I contemplated for some years a career in the ministry, but my faith was not then strong enough. Instead I made a career in academic biochemistry while trying to become the Linus Pauling of the S. Pacific in public campaigning against nuclear weapons, nuclear reactors, some poisons such as 2,4,5-T and leaded petrol, gene-tampering, and other technological evils. In the mid-1970s I moved full-time into Environmental Studies, in the recent tradition of Rachel Carson, Paul & Anne Ehrlich, John Holdren, Edward Goldsmith, and others who had been warning that the biosphere is in unprecedented trouble. Amid all this moralizing I remained away from regular worship, on the ill-examined assumption that constructive social engineering can be achieved on no declared moral basis.

Today I interpret the downward slide of civilization over the past few decades as evidence that the attempt to maintain a system of ethics & law based historically & logically in Christianity is doomed if the religion which gave rise to it is not suitably active in its continuance.

What jolted me into this realization was the funeral of my stepmother. She was 94 so most of her contemporaries had passed on; but scores of people showed up, several clergy jostled for position in helping to conduct the funeral, and I was much moved to find strangers telling me she had saved their marriage by simple counseling *e.g.* "she told me 'if you want to save your marriage you will have to forgive - we are commanded to do so' ". Her star Sunday-school pupil from six decades before, now a bishop, was openly weeping as we left the service which he had led.

This funeral moved me to realize that the embarrassing feebleness & decadence of the church which had repelled me in 1965 was actually all the more reason to pitch in and work.

I must add that the 7 years since that moving funeral have brought me enormous frustrations as I find myself surrounded by politically-correct ideologues using the church for their political purposes, notably a novel racism misrepresenting the relatively honorable history of New Zealand to induce an astonishing scale of guilt & confusion. [I was of course not allowed to mention WimminsLib, which I consider an even more harmful ideology.] But I have also found an ineffable calm, and stronger faith than I ever imagined.

The general practical lesson from these experiences of mine is that Christianity should reassert itself as the only known basis for a decent society. In so doing, it will have to confront that impostor scientism.

### **Science and Christianity**

It has been widely agreed during almost all human history (and, we can confidently presume, all prehistory) that the human mind can never grasp more than a tiny fraction of all the compositions & transformations of matter & energy, the physical workings of life. It is easy to be impressed with the surge of scientific knowledge, especially in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but in biochemistry let alone ecology we have discovered at an even faster rate unsolved scientific puzzles.

Even more evident is that the non-physical aspects of reality are, to a yet greater extent, beyond our ken - inaccessible in principle to science, and difficult of apprehension to even refined scholars and sages.

Severe incompleteness of knowledge is, we thus humbly remind ourselves, the normal situation. Not until a few centuries ago did the trend arise of pretending that human comprehension & reasoning can, unaided, discern how things are and judge how they ought to be. Since the period now termed "the Enlightenment" it has even become a dominant fashion to say, or at any rate to assume, that non-physical reality does not exist at all: scientism - the assumption that scientific knowledge is the only kind - has become an increasingly influential axiom.

Anti-religion attitudes had several causes, including revulsion at decadence & corruption in religion. The resultant over-swing of fashion's pendulum carried away surprisingly intelligent people who became over-impressed with science and with their own autonomy. A prominent proponent of these ideas was Bertrand Russell "the most influential philosopher of the 20<sup>th</sup> century" (according to his biographer Ray Monk)<sup>1</sup>, who most admired a faith that the human species would, without religion, become progressively more humane, more tolerant, and more enlightened; in this beneficent process rational knowledge was to be the chief agent, and mathematics, as the most completely rational kind of knowledge, was to be in the van. I contend this 'enlightenment' assumption has proven disastrous.

The model of the universe as a clock, a mechanism which has been mechanically evolving in accordance with deterministic laws of nature, is sometimes lately attributed to Newton, but that is incorrect. Descartes & Laplace were the main advocates. Newton's God certainly transcended the laws of nature. Indeed, Newton came in for some

(misconceived) criticism for invoking in his scheme of things too much intervention by God in the running (not merely the original making) of the universe.

Systematic, objective but also respectful study of nature became possible only when the Judaic and then Christian religions placed God firmly outside nature. It is not widely enough known that science has never thrived except in Christian societies - with the minor exception of a couple of centuries in some Islamic centers and the millennium of early science in China which did not lead on to modern science. To dismiss this fact as a coincidence, without looking into the main characteristics of Christianity and of science, would be ignorant and specifically unscientific<sup>2</sup>.

The 'enlightenment' assumption that science can, and soon will, give an essentially complete description of the physical & biological world had become widely influential, though little discussed, when I was a science student. More politically influential was the notion that science-based technology would indefinitely improve housing, health, education etc. The State was studiously secular. The mainstream New Zealand culture, though then composed of churchgoers to a considerable extent, had very largely lost confidence in the church, which was no longer viewed as a main source of wisdom. Science as savior had been popularized by not only Marxists (a minor influence in NZ) but more importantly the dazzling successes of Rutherford and many lesser scientific & engineering lights. It was probably among scientists, mathematicians & engineers that atheism had made its most important inroads. A professor of applied maths said on national radio, upon the award of the Nobel prize in 1962 to the originators of "the" double-helix structure for DNA, that it obviated God; and I do not recall any expressions of outrage at his nonsense. The anthem 'God Defend New Zealand' seemed unpopular as if embarrassing. The feebleness of the church was in effect (though not very logically) a reason for my generation's drift away from religion. Ideas which had been cherished above all others for the vast majority of the Christian era seemed somehow *passé*. Indeed, the whole category in which belong the main ideas of Christianity was ignored by not only vigorous proponents of scientism but even many typical Christians of the period; metaphysics was in drastic retreat.

In the "enlightenment" attempt to implement Christian ethics in a secular state, it has been widely assumed that secular educated leaders would apply wiser ethics than had ever prevailed, in order that secular social engineering would build a better society utilizing science for investigation & implementation of policy. The value system on which all this would be done was very little discussed - just vaguely assumed. Huge organizations, capitalist as well as socialist, would be managed in a religious vacuum. Politics, and life generally, was to proceed as if no organizational care, let alone enforcement, were needed to safeguard & refine ethics.

That vague vision has, to put it mildly, not worked out. The "Enlightenment" having failed by very wide margins to deliver on its grandiose promises, its adherents have few options. They can go on as if nothing is wrong, perhaps cooing "all is one"; or they can revise their axioms and reconsider religion; or they can say, subconsciously, "if rationality can't suffice, nothing can", and adopt existentialism, post-modernism, post-structuralism, hermeneutics, constructivism, deconstructionism, or other nihilistic cynical defeatism, as if all reliable beliefs are inaccessible or unidentifiable. These track-covering smokescreens of relativism grandly - "oh, that may be *your* reality" - waive arguments

