

http://onfaith.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/panelists/willis_e_elliott/2007/11/the_atheist_and_the_archangel.html

The Atheist and the Archangel

Two men sprang to mind when I read “Happy Holidays? Why are many holiday family gatherings marked by tension and unhappiness?”

ANTONY FLEW—formerly Britain’s most prominent atheist—in late age concluded that the existence of purpose cannot be explained without assuming the existence of a purposeful Mind behind and within the universe. Late last year, with eleven other academicians, he urged the British government to teach ID (yes, “intelligent design”) in the public schools! But—given the “On Faith” description of “many holiday family gatherings”—we cannot believe that *they* are intelligently designed, can we?

Well, yes, if we hear from the other man who sprang to my mind. He wasn’t an archangel, but he used “the Archangel” as a way of referring playfully to a life-assumption that has educational and therapeutic value. (Though himself a devout Christian, he avoided using “God,” a turn-off word for many of his patients.) A Berlin psychotherapist and Jungian analyst who emigrated to the U.S. at the beginning of World War II, he was missing a shoulder—blown off when he was a German soldier in World War I.

Four years before his death in 1956, I introduced FRITZ KUNKEL to an American audience of some 500 clergy with the question, “Did you have to go through all that you’ve suffered in life in order to become who you are?” With only a slight pause he replied, “No, but it all helped.” And I can still hear the first words of what I call his Archangel lecture (which I recorded):

“Things occur in human life that would seem to be unfavorable to wholeness. Sometimes the wind changes, and we must re-set our sail.” He did not say we must change our course, though we may have reason to do so. He was referring to the permanent possibility that human life can be lived purposefully in transcendence of circumstance.

Flew moved from evolutionism’s teaching that life is only random to DEISM’s conviction that there is a *directive* dimension to reality: the existence of a conscious, intelligent First Cause God is scientifically verifiable (in line with the traditional teleological argument for the existence of God). Kunkel also rejected materialism’s claim that life is only random, but for him the *directive* dimension was THEISTIC: God is not a far-away indifferent injector of purpose into life’s processes and structures but is personally involved in his creation with his creatures—and the story of this involvement, Dr. Kunkel believed, is best told in the Bible.

Flew, purpose: Kunkel, good-will purposing—God’s and ours.

Back to the Archangel lecture: “When a couple decides to have a baby, the Archangel studies each of them and asks ‘What do they need? They both hate politics. I will give them a senator.’ The Archangel gives you just the children you need.” After you stopped laughing, Fritz would gently ask you if you can come up with a better way of looking at your children and “how life is trying to help you grow up, mature, as your children grow.”

No, I didn’t forget the question. Fritz is asking participants in tense and unhappy holiday family gatherings to ask “What is the Archangel up to, doing this to us?” Whispers the Archangel, “I have some *unfinished business* with you, and you have some unfinished business with one another.”

BY WILLIS E. ELLIOTT | NOVEMBER 22, 2007; 9:36 AM ET SAVE & SHARE:        

PREVIOUS: [WORKING AT BEING FAMILY](#) | NEXT: [BE GRATEFUL FOR GIFTS THAT MATTER](#)

Comments

Please report offensive comments below.

ANONYMOUS:

Thanks for the clarification. It's remarkable how consistently any willingly the religious community distorts reality and misrepresents people's ideas and opinions in the service of their otherwise indefensible beliefs.

Talk about bad faith!

POSTED BY: CHRIS EVERETT | NOVEMBER 23, 2007 12:26 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

This is one of those moments, you know, Tom, when I look back on some experiences and ask, 'How in the Holy Holly Hel did I end up being someone who talks like that?'

It just is, and that's how it is, and it's not about clinging to 'life' or fearing 'death' or any of that nonsense.

It's just about *being there.*

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | NOVEMBER 23, 2007 3:22 AM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

" Tom Munro :

This is milk sop logic. What family needs a kid with a child hood disease like Cystic fibrosis who will have a short life filled with pain towards the end of those few years."

One thing I'll say is that sometimes that's all it takes to fulfill certain needs.

I've seen families live more of a life with children who barely lived, or were never 'born,' as Christians say, than some get out of entire lifespans with kids they never did get to know.

Heck, I've seen *pregnancy scares* that had more soul-connection than some people apply to the kids that have to live for decades with someone's idea of 'the sanctity of life.'

It's not about longevity.

It's about being there.

Speaking of expectations.

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | NOVEMBER 23, 2007 3:12 AM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

This is milk sop logic. What family needs a kid with a child hood disease like Cystic fibrosis who will have a short life filled with pain towards the end of those few years. What family needs a kid who has leukemia or some other disease that will have them crying themselves to sleep for night after night.

A better explanation is simply stuff happens.

POSTED BY: TOM MUNRO | NOVEMBER 22, 2007 11:17 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

from <http://www.humaniststudies.org/enews/index.html?id=172&art>

This Thursday HNN spoke to Prof. Flew by telephone. Now, here's the story straight from the philosopher's mouth:

Flew, 81, told HNN that he has indeed abandoned his atheism for a type of deism. When asked if he still stands by his landmark argument for atheism, The Presumption of Atheism, Flew said: "Oh yes. Yes I think so. That's how you should deal with any question which is seriously controversial. You don't wonder whether the evidence is something that other people know much more (about) than you do. But in a serious controversy this is the proper way to proceed."

"We must follow the argument wherever it leads," he said. "I've never thought I knew that there was no God. I merely thought there is no sufficient reason that there is."

Scientific evidence now leads him to believe in an disinterested god like that which Aristotle or Thomas Jefferson spoke of, he said. Yet, when asked whether or not he has kept up with the most recent science and theology, Flew responded: "Certainly not."

There are too many works of science for him to be fully up-to-date, he said. Gerald Schroeder, an MIT-trained scientist who has worked in both physics and biology, was instrumental in Flew's new belief in a god. Schroeder is the author of The Hidden Face Of God: How Science Reveals The Ultimate Truth.

Flew doesn't feel that any significant works of theology have been published in many years -- just new interpretations of the gospel, and works that try to develop a powerful case for the Resurrection. There is no intellectually serious case for Christianity, he noted. "I'm quite happy to believe in an inoffensive inactive god," he said.

Flew denied that there was ever any truth to the Internet rumors of 2001 and 2003 that claimed he had abandoned his atheism or converted to Christianity.

He said he will be publishing a formal account of his newfound beliefs in a revised introduction to his book God and Philosophy. The text is scheduled to be republished next year by Prometheus Books of Amherst, N.Y, an independent publishing company that specializes in works of skeptical thought. As of publication time, Prometheus was not able to provide a formal response to HNN's questions about Flew's upcoming book.

Flew continues to hold his disbelief in an afterlife. "Good-bye," he said at the end of the interview. "We shall never meet again!"

--Duncan Crary is the communications director of the Institute for Humanist Studies.

POSTED BY: DREW | NOVEMBER 22, 2007 7:14 PM

[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Not too surprised to hear about that story, ...the Reverend's arguments that these things support his idea of Christianity were thin to begin with, but someone taking advantage of someone's mental decline to try and undo their life's work, but not surprising, either.

It's like how some churches and organizations (and the media) like to publish these 'Pagan Witch Finds Jesus' stories,

...only problem is that the 'Convert' usually demonstrates at *best* total misunderstanding of what Wicca is about, and just happen to support the repeatedly-investigated and debunked Satanic Panic accusations promoted by certain fundamentalist and other churches.

We do get some people who come through with serious mental health issues who never really understand what it's all about, ...often they end up getting false memories and ideas of demonic possession *implanted* under the stress and duress of 'exorcisms' or 'intensive prayer circles,' which can be extremely damaging, especially when a church group encourages the behavior by giving them lots of attention and even financial support for trumpeting the narrative of what *they* want people to believe 'Witches' are about.

It's a modern form of witch-hunt, there, but it's also taking advantage of people's infirmity to push an agenda.

And that's contemptible.

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | NOVEMBER 22, 2007 1:43 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

from Wikipedia;

In 2007, Flew published a book titled *There is a God: How the World's Most Notorious Atheist Changed His Mind*, with Roy Abraham Varghese as co-author.[11] Shortly after the book was released, the New York Times reported that Varghese had been almost entirely responsible for writing the book, and that Flew was in a serious state of mental decline, having great difficulty remembering key figures, ideas, and events relating to the debate covered in the book.[12] In the ensuing outcry, PZ Myers called Varghese "a contemptible manipulator." [13] Varghese, responded in detail to these accusations, observing that Tony corrected and approved at least ten versions of the manuscript. [14] (Flew had contributed to Varghese's, 1992 book *Cosmos, Bios, Theos*, 1992). [15] On November 21, 2007, Flew's book reached Amazon

POSTED BY: ANONYMOUS | NOVEMBER 22, 2007 12:47 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

You might have mentioned that Flew is somewhat senile, and confused, and has denied joining the religious camp. I wish I'd saved the articles that had said that. It's a big deal when an atheist changes his mind and becomes religious, rather like 'man bites dog', because it's always the other way round. That's why the Flew 'story' made news, and was seized on by religious supernaturalists, who need all the help they can get to provide credibility to an idea that looks more and more like a silly childish fantasy, created through the ignorance of our ancestors who had no idea what existence was all about, and like children, explained everything by saying 'A god must have done it'.

POSTED BY: E.PONSONBY-SMALLPIECE | NOVEMBER 22, 2007 12:33 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Dr. Willis E Elliot,

I love that Archangel story. Would go down really well as a sermon by an imam in a mosque too on unfinished business and forgiveness with one another:)

American Thanksgiving reminds me of Eid El Fitr. Like Thanksgiving, people are tired from sprucing up the house, preparing food and making up rooms (if necessary) for incoming family members and other relatives.

People travelled even thousands of miles for the family gathering at the "core" family home. Everyone is tired and do get brittle and frazzled. Festering wounds and harboured grievances against other family members, relatives and friends are sometimes also brought along.

Eid El Fitr is also a time where all are to seek forgiveness from one another for slights, to make amends, and move on. Until next year.

Eid El Fitr, like Thanksgiving gatherings, whatever real and perceived inconveniences it is for one (taking leave, distance to travel, seeing people one would rather not for this and that personal reason) is worth it, to sort out "unfinished business" for the healing process and renewal of bonds among family and friends.

Happy Thanksgiving.

Thank you and best regards

"J"

Gee, Reverend, sounds like you're talking about some very Pagan ideas about reincarnation and karma and family spirits. :) Well, a lot of what these folks observe fits in just fine with other religious views, apart from maybe the nonsense about ID being 'science,' or deism needing to refer specifically to the Christian God or other assumptions commonly put in deistic mouths.

We really have a lot of ideas on the matter, from karma drawing one to certain families and kinds of experiences, to spirits or the Gods or the ancestors taking an active hand of some kind, actively choosing, ourselves, or some combination of these.

Personally, I think 'so many family gatherings are marked by tension and unhappiness' because a lot of people in families come face to face with their expectations of both each other and what these days are 'supposed' to be, not to mention the stress of planning, travel, and the tendency of people to use these days to stop and evaluate.

And, no, the regular holidays aren't the time the Pagans in the family choose for religious debates, just, maybe try and be in some kind of perspective about what these turkey dinners are supposed to be about. :)

Nice little holiday song for you:

"The Christians And The Pagans"

Amber called her uncle, said "We're up here for the holiday
Jane and I were having Solstice, now we need a place to stay"
And her Christ-loving uncle watched his wife hang Mary on a tree
He watched his son hang candy canes all made with red dye number three
He told his niece, "It's Christmas eve, I know our life is not your style"
She said, "Christmas is like Solstice, and we miss you and it's been awhile"

So the Christians and the Pagans sat together at the table
Finding faith and common ground the best that they were able
And just before the meal was served, hands were held and prayers were said
Sending hope for peace on earth to all their gods and goddesses

The food was great, the tree plugged in, the meal had gone without a hitch
Till Timmy turned to Amber and said, "Is it true that you're a witch?"
His mom jumped up and said, "The pies are burning," and she hit the kitchen
And it was Jane who spoke, she said, "It's true, your cousin's not a Christian"
"But we love trees, we love the snow, the friends we have, the world we share
And you find magic from your God, and we find magic everywhere"

So the Christians and the Pagans sat together at the table
Finding faith and common ground the best that they were able
And where does magic come from, I think magic's in the learning
Cause now when Christians sit with Pagans only pumpkin pies are burning

When Amber tried to do the dishes, her aunt said, "Really, no, don't bother"
Amber's uncle saw how Amber looked like Tim and like her father
He thought about his brother, how they hadn't spoken in a year
He thought he'd call him up and say, "It's Christmas and your daughter's here"
He thought of fathers, sons and brothers, saw his own son tug his sleeve saying
"Can I be a Pagan?" Dad said, "We'll discuss it when they leave"

So the Christians and the Pagans sat together at the table
Finding faith and common ground the best that they were able

Lighting trees in darkness, learning new ways from the old, and
Making sense of history and drawing warmth out of the cold."

-Dar Williams

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | NOVEMBER 21, 2007 4:12 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

ANTONY FLEW 'was' and atheists? Actually, everyone is an atheists until they faith God so there's nothing unusual about him.

Did he, ANTONY FLEW become religious too? There is a significant difference between expectations there is one or more Gods/gods and religion - religion is the deciding by men what one or more Gods/gods demands of people. I think that's correctly said as men who attempt to run the kingdom of God here on earth, put words in God's mouth.

That hoax buster fellow says he believes there's a God. He only challenges religion's patent on God and not the existence of God at all. And he even offers religion their real God, Lucifer complete with patent. He suggests the separation of church and God as a very positive step in the right direction. And, generously he offers religion the patent on Devil noticing how compatible they are.

<http://www.hoax-buster.org/sellyoursoul> the true reading of the Bible says the being Moses made the deal with is not God but rather the fallen angel Lucifer. Lucifer is the one who challenged God for control of heaven and lost. The Bible is His story, the story of losing. Looks like ANTONY FLEW lost something important, his mind.

BTW, did God create the all through evolution? Is that ruled out? How so? Only the Bible is contradicted by "God used evolution" and "evolution never ends." Thank God the Bible is a proved hoax. Thank Native Americans Thanksgiving day, and the rest of the year too.

Happy thanksgiving. Remember, the thanks were to Native Americans who helped the illegal aliens from Europe. They did not send the Pilgrims back to where they came from like the moralists insist on doing to identical type people as the Pilgrims from Latin America. I suppose we can expect no better from bigoted Devil worshipers.

POSTED BY: BGONE | NOVEMBER 21, 2007 3:15 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

The comments to this entry are closed.