

HOMILY Trinity XVII Sept. 22, 2013 MP  
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*While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.*

II Corinthians iv:18

Our faith does not limit itself to the physical world—the world that scientists delight to explain to us in ever-increasing detail. In fact, our faith principally concerns itself with that invisible, timeless area beyond our human life. God is completely beyond the limitations imposed by time and space. And once beyond the observable—and repeatable—experiments, human science is completely out of its depth. How can science prove—or disprove—the existence of God? Any honest attempt to do so immediately runs up against the ground rules of the scientific method involving experiment, observation, controls, and so on.

Convinced Christians who argue that the “intelligent design” of the Universe “proves” the existence of its Creator, are equally at fault. While they comfort themselves—and perhaps us as well—with a vision of the Creator reflected in his works, they assume wrongly that one can somehow prove something about the eternal using the very things that St. Paul tells us are “temporal”—i.e. temporary.

However, our modern society in many subtle ways presses us to believe that only those temporal things that human reason can handle are “real”—and worth considering. Any other claim to truth is to be suspected, for human science is assumed to be capable of answering any question worth asking. But wait a minute! Why should we believe such a wild claim? Great technological advances have quite consistently produced even greater problems to be solved by science in future. Indeed, the myth of human progress is being debunked daily through the activities of its staunchest supporters.

It is in this light that we should consider the Malcolm Muggeridge quotation on the third page of your copy of today’s bulletin:

“One of the peculiar sins of the twentieth century which we've developed to a very high level is the sin of credulity. It has been said that when human beings stop believing in God they believe in nothing. The truth is much worse: they believe in anything.”

If it's “scientific,” we are inclined to believe, and if not....well?

The myth of moral progress has even infiltrated our hymnal, for how else are we to understand these words from the third verse of hymn #519?:

“New occasions teach new duties,  
Time makes ancient good uncouth;  
They must upward still and onward  
Who would keep abreast of truth.”

That hymn-tune is glorious, but how do those words resonate in the insanity of today's world?

You may recall my speaking to you recently about the insights to be had by viewing our faith without reference to time. The Bible speaks so clearly and sharply to all times, that it defies recent attempts to “up-date” its teachings or subvert its commands. We know that the word “sin” is a religious term signifying any activity which separates us from God and his love. In a civilization which is losing its awareness of God, the concept of sin becomes meaningless and simply evaporates. However, wickedness does not disappear, just because it now goes under secular labels --or even perhaps becomes politically-correct.

In Genesis we read that Adam and Eve's disobedience is the origin of human sin, and that the forbidden fruit was a species of knowledge. Interestingly enough, the serpent told Eve that eating this fruit would make them to “be as gods, knowing good and evil.” Now given the timelessness of the Bible, this story out of the remote past might just as well be read as a prophecy of recent times or even of our future, as our quest for knowledge and naive belief in progress degrades and destroys both our society and our environment. With all our knowledge it appears that we haven't really learned very much!

In St. Paul's words we need to *look not at the things which are seen, but at the things that are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.*

“Keep, we beseech thee, O Lord, thy Church with thy perpetual mercy; and because the frailty of man without thee cannot but fall, keep us ever by thy help from all things hurtful, and lead us to all things profitable to our salvation; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”

[Collect for Trinity XV, BCP p. 210]