

Unum necessarium by Cornelis van Dalen

Een ding is noodig

The One Necessity = you only need one thing = the one necessary thing

Johannes Amos Comenius (1592 – 1670) published in 1668, in Amsterdam, The Netherlands,

a work by the title *Unum Necessarium*. We may take it to express the one necessity. 'The one needful thing', a saying of Christ Jesus recorded in Luke 10:42 is interpreted by Comenius "in what may be seen as an attempt to educate man and enable him to distinguish what is needful from what is not. The one needful thing is man himself, or pansophy, light, wisdom. The mysticism of the union with God or the universal wisdom is in Comenius' work forever accompanied by practical suggestions towards a better world, a world which is no longer a labyrinth." [1]



'Is it easy or difficult to strive for wisdom? It is both!'

What is needful and what is not? Universal wisdom sought by man in the modern world has come to many to result in agnosticism. The basis of science could be seen as the empty apotheosis, the highest glory in the pinnacle of material development. Materialism is the result of seeking the cause and the result from the same point of view. This is the opposite of the light which sought to shine in the time of Comenius' Europe, which saw the strife and turmoil of the 30 Years War and religious persecution. In his time the urge forward was in the Light of the Renaissance, the Rosicrucians, the alchemists, et al – all for the revival, the renewal of man into the light of his own need for wisdom and salvation.

Yet in the centuries which followed the dawn of a new era of consciousness known as the Renaissance, this gave way to the systematic removal of its achievements in the so-called Age of Reason (or "Enlightenment"!). This period of evolution saw the science of matter bring a systematic separation of the Divine from Life. Theology was no longer part of the Belles Lettres; natural philosophy became empirical and dry. This is not to say that the age was needless. On the contrary, it was a necessity for the development of human objective consciousness. However, apart from the technical and mechanical developments, the divine life was dismantled and earth and life came to be regarded as physical and finite.

'What does agnostic mean? What do you think of someone who is agnostic?' asks a dear friend

This has led to the now 21st century where all are somewhat affected to one degree or other by agnosticism. If we turn to the dictionary we find that the biologist, Professor Thomas Huxley coined the word agnostic in 1869. 'One who holds that we know nothing of things beyond material phenomena – that a First Cause and an unseen world are things unknown and apparently unknowable.' This is taken from Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary; the Concise Oxford has the same wording, but Chambers also adds that Huxley took the meaning of the word from The Acts of the Apostles, 17:23.

Here are the verses 22 - 25 to make verse 23 comprehensible:

22: Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars' hill, and said Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious.

23: For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you.

24: God made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands;

25: Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things.

If we look very carefully at the modern world and the precepts of material science, we will find that everything within this sphere of material thinking and working is agnostic. In other words, modern material science is agnostic – seeing all things as a product of material phenomena, seeking to understand the material laws behind the manifestation. The (astro) physicists and the like who toil to find the origin of the world come to the notion of a big bang theory from which all matter arose – and this is built

upon the notions of evolution by Charles Darwin. Thus all the laws of the physical world are seen as mathematical, chemical or organic/inorganic formulae. An agnostic is satisfied with the knowledge of these laws – but does not delve into what is behind those laws.

It is generally thought that god is unknowable and hence the widespread acceptance of agnosticism. The Gnostic (from the word gnosis, knowledge) was an important sect at the time of Christ Jesus. Unfortunately all their writings were systematically erased; all records destroyed. What is known of the Gnostics, the gnosis central to the teachings of the Christ, comes from the writings of those who opposed them.

Perhaps, then, anyone who claims to be an agnostic is one who lives in the material world with all the (five) senses. If he were to dream whilst he slept, these would be classified as products of fanciful imagination to be analysed by psychologists as to the states of his material consciousness.

An agnostic does not need to believe or search for the meaning of living – the reason for living beyond the meaning and gratification of the senses. If he does search then he finds no answers through his mental faculties, for things are unknowable. Herein, of course, we have very much the dilemma of our time with respect of the church. The Christian churches (Catholic and Protestant and their branches) have made the central pillar of their existence the charge that their adherents have faith. It is not about seeking answers or the inner unfolding of the spirit so that this may bring answers. Thus, even to this day, the central edifice of the church, supposedly showing the ways of heaven on earth, says to all her subjects: believe, have faith.

But it is true that the agnostic, living purely within the bounds of material consciousness, and doing this with all might and goodness, is actually living within the bounds of a moral and ethical life; providing the individual does not question the basis of social and moral laws –doing what he is told. This is how most people actually live. To quote from Herbert Spencer 'People are like fish in a shoal – mute and absurd.' Thus if an agnostic were to live his philosophy truly he can still advance in life.

This needs further consideration: why does an individual live seemingly contently and have no desire for spiritual knowledge? This also involves a consideration of karma in certain cases, but in most it is that people are simply asleep. The awakening from this slumber can often arise from

tragic circumstances, a jolt as it were, leading to eventual revelation and initiation.

We need also to consider the meaning of the word atheist and ask ourselves whether this is not confused with agnosticism. Atheism is a disbelief in the existence of god. Atheism, as the complete denial of the divine, is the agnostic in the extreme – the unknown god is suggestive of such a thing but cannot be known. This implies that he does not search either?

The Mysteries as healing

What is the great sickness of mankind? How can this sickness be healed? To heal the sick, as it is termed, has for aeons been the purpose of the Mysteries and the secret doctrines.

Below is a quotation from a lecture by Rudolf Steiner in which he is relating modern material consciousness with that of the ancient Greeks. It is hoped you will see the relevance of it in the context of our discussion. While he uses the word atheist, not knowing god as the basis of agnosticism is closely allied. Acknowledging there is a god but then establishing that IT is unknowable amount to a similarity.

“It was impossible for the ancient Greek who retained the remnants of ancient Mystery culture to be an atheist – although it happened in a few abnormal cases, but not to the degree it occurs today. Atheism has only arisen in more recent times, at least in its radical form. For the Greek who was really imbued with dialectics [logic, reasoning] felt the Divine hold sway in thinking; even in thinking void of content...If we look at this and then look upon the appearance of atheism, upon the complete denial of the Divine we shall find the reason for this atheism. ...only those human beings are atheists in whose organism something is organically disturbed.....atheism is a disease. For, if our organism is completely healthy, the harmonious functioning of its various members will bring about that we ourselves sense our origin from the Divine – ex deo nascimur Man may sense the Divine but may have no possibility to sense the Christ... Not to find God the Father is a disease; not to find the Christ a misfortune. For the human being is so connected with the Christ as to be inwardly dependent upon this connection. To be unable to take hold of one’s spirituality in order to find the connection of one’s own spirituality with the spirituality of the world signifies mental debility; not to acknowledge the Spirit is a deficiency of mind, a psychic imbecility.” [2]

This quotation has several aspects, which are important to the future discussion we shall have, and so all I can charge you with now is to think deeply on the matter herein. The person in health can sense the Divine, yet may not have the necessary preparation to have direct cognizance of the spiritual world. This need not concern them; in due time such manifestations will occur. The saying that the Master will appear when the student is ready conveys this.

The one necessity is to find a connection within oneself to that of the Spirit of the World: the mystical union of self with universal wisdom, light. The one necessary thing is to come to wisdom and light by way of one's efforts to know the Mysteries. To cure the sick comes as an effect of one's own initiation. This will come with the effort to see the material as a manifestation of the spiritual; that the material is a small aspect of the spiritual.

I hope that some illumination has been offered on the subject. Please do not hesitate to reply, argue, philosophise or other. I will delight in your views.

Love and blessings
Cornelis

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Endnotes

1. *Unum Necessarium* – introduction from the JR Ritman Library, Bibliotheca Philosophia Hermetica, Amsterdam. <<
http://www.ritmanlibrary.nl/c/p/h/bel_26.html >>
Detail of portrait of Comenius (Jan Amos Komensky), 1592 – 1670 by Rembrandt, 1665, The Uffizi Gallery of Florence, Italy.
2. Rudolf Steiner, *The Mission of The Archangel Michael*, The Anthroposophic Press, New York, USA, 1961. Pp 71-73