

SUGGESTIONS

FOR

THOUGHT

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Florence Nightingale

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THE ANNOTATED EDITION

**in commemoration of the 200th anniversary of
Florence Nightingale's birthday (12 May 1820)**

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Dedication

to the Artizans of England

FELLOW-SEARCHERS,

I COME to you not to declare the truth; I come to ask you (if subjects of moral truth have an interest with you) to join in seeking it with those capabilities which God has given to us. I offer the result of my own endeavours, and what I am able to gather from the endeavours of others.

But what are the many to do, who have no inclination to study such subjects? What are the “poor and ignorant”¹ to do for a religion?

Is the object of our desire in religion to be a religion suited to the “poor and ignorant?” The object of our desire is to be Truth. All should have their faculties exercised and educated, for the purpose of forming a judgment of what is God’s truth.

It is thought desirable for all to learn what is necessary to gain a livelihood. Arithmetic and other matters of instruction are taught for this purpose. But education is not pursued altogether with a right spirit and purpose. Man’s education should be given for the purpose of *re*-generation; of putting him in possession of the capability of exercising his powers, so that those powers may reveal to him what, among the labours of mankind after truth, is really truth; may enable him to judge of the nature of God, the nature and (2)² destination of man, and how practically to pursue that destination.

But how forlorn, many say, thus to be left without an authority on the awful subject of religion!

We are not left without “authority.” The Spirit of Truth will be our authority, if we will faithfully seek Him. Can there really have been an “authority,” when such different Gods have been believed in; such different modes of serving God pursued? Truth is, indeed, ONE; but the only way to “unity of faith,” is a true cultivation of the nature, and a true life in which to exercise it. If this can be discovered, *unity* of faith will exist.

1 Jer. 5:4: ⁴ Therefore I said, Surely *these are poor; they are foolish*: for they know not the way of the Lord, nor the judgment of their God.

2 Pagenumber in the printed, but unpublished text of 1860. (*Suggestions for Thought to Searchers after Truth among the Artizans of England*. London, George E. Eyre & William Spottiswoode. 1860.)

Moses and Paul came forth from their desert, saying, “this and this is miraculously revealed truth, which the world is to believe.” Should it not rather be said, “*this is truth*, viz., that man is to discover from the means within and without his nature, all the truth to find which that nature is competent?”

We offer you what we believe to be truth. We offer our reasons to your reason, our feelings to your feeling. *Judge ye if it is truth.*

Do we speak of what is important? Then consider it. *Is it important?* If not, hear us no further in this matter. (3)

1

Belief in God

1.1 Belief in God

You ask if we believe in God? If those who disregard authority believe in a God at all, and why they believe Him perfect?

The two questions have one and the same answer. I believe in a perfect being, whom you call God.

But why do you believe in Him?

If you ask that question, we come immediately to the definition of the two words “believe” and “God.” What does “I believe” mean?

What does “belief” mean?

It means, in common language, sometimes doubt and sometimes affirmation.

“Is A. B. in London?”

“I believe so.”

Here it means, “I do not know, but I think it probable.”

“Why do you think he has been there?”

“I believe his word.”

Here it means firm persuasion. But even here the belief is qualified by the modest “I,” which means, “It is I who believe, I don’t know whether others do.” What is therefore to be understood by “belief?” Sometimes a sense of certainty, sometimes of uncertainty.

What will Johnson³ tell us? The sense in which the word has been used by certain writers, called classic. Johnson says that “belief” is credit given on account

3 Reference to *A Dictionary of the English Language, in which the words are deduced from their origins and illustrated in their different significations by examples from the best writers* (1755-1775), written by Samuel Johnson (1709-1784).

of authority.⁴ But have we really no other sources of belief than authority? There are means of belief in the capabilities of human nature, and human nature makes progress.

Ideas make progress.

At least in some things. Ideas make progress. And the meanings attached to words which express ideas cannot, therefore, remain the same. (4)

Words gain new meanings.

A house may mean a house in all ages, though even in the case of words which express things, the house which we build now signifies a very different thing from the house built by the painted Briton⁵. How much greater must be the difference in the sense of a word used to express a religious or a political idea! Either we must have new words or new meanings.

The same words express different ideas.

Johnson will define religion as “virtue founded upon reverence of God and expectation of future rewards and punishments,”⁶ and will quote Milton,⁷ South,⁸ Watts,⁹ and Law¹⁰ for this sense of the word. Another theologian (belonging to an African tribe) thinks religion means jumping over a stick. If either of these be really

4 *“Credit given to something, which we do not know of ourselves, on account of the authority by which it is delivered.”* [1] (johnsonsdictionaryonline.com)

[1] All phrases cited or paraphrased by Miss Nightingale are printed in italics.

5 The Britons, also known as Celtic Britons or Ancient Britons, were Celtic people who inhabited Great Britain from at least the British Iron Age into the Middle Ages, at which point their culture and language diverged into the modern Welsh, Cornish and Bretons (among others). They spoke the Common Brittonic language, the ancestor to the modern Brittonic languages. (Wikipedia)

6 *“Virtue, as founded upon reverence of God, and expectation of future rewards and punishments.”* (johnsonsdictionaryonline.com)

7 *“One spake much of right and wrong, of justice, of religion, truth, and peace, and judgment from above.”* (John Milton, 1800-1884)

8 *“If we consider it as directed against God, it is a breach of religion; if as to men, it is an offence against morality.”* (Robert South, 1634-1716)

9 *“Religion or virtue, in a large sense, includes duty to God and our neighbour; but in a proper sense, virtue signifies duty towards men, and religion duty to God.”* (Isaac Watts, 1674-1748)

10 *“I never once in my life considered, whether I was living as the laws of religion direct, or whether my way of life was such, as would procure me the mercy of God at this hour.”* (William Law, 1686-1761)

religion, we want a new word to express so different an idea as the sense we have of our *tie* to God.

Meaning of “believe” in God.

With what meaning, then, do we “believe” in God?

Man advances to a consciousness and conviction that there does exist a perfect being (whom we may call God), exactly in proportion as his nature is well constituted, well educated, well exercised. Human nature, when thus *well-born* and *well-bred*, will *admit* of his sense of this truth, and of others inferred from it, being as strong and complete as the sense of truth with which he asserts that the tree before his eyes is a tree, and not a house.

But we must be careful to know that the God whom we believe in *is* a perfect being. Men often think that they believe in a perfect God when, in fact, they do not, – when they are really wholly incapable of even conceiving of a perfect being. For instance, in the earlier nations, where revenge (5) was considered a virtue in man, it would naturally be thought so in God. Many imperfections, as we now think them, were once deemed virtues, and consequently attributed to a God who was *called* perfect. The religious history of the Hebrews is especially curious on this account.

Again, the God “of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob,”¹¹ was certainly *not* the God “of the whole earth.”¹² It is true that the Hebrews *served* but Him alone; they *believed*, however, in the existence of many Gods. Their own God they revered, and despised the other Gods. But it was not till long afterwards that they rose with increasing knowledge to the belief that there was but one supreme. Yet He cannot be perfect if there be more than one. Is it, perhaps, that a knowledge of natural philosophy, such as cannot be attained by an infant nation,¹³ is necessary for the

11 Exod. 3:6: ⁶ Moreover he said, I am the God of thy father, *the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob*. And Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God.

12 Isa. 54:5: ⁵ For thy Maker is thine husband; the Lord of hosts is his name; and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel; *The God of the whole earth* shall he be called.

13 Reference to the law of three stages, an idea developed by Auguste Comte (1798-1857) in his work *Cours de Philosophie Positive* (The Course of Positive Philosophy), in which he unveiled the epistemological perspective of positivism. The texts were translated into English by Harriet Martineau and condensed to form *The Positive Philosophy of Auguste Comte* (1853). The law of the three stages states that society as a whole, and each particular science, develops through three stages:

1. the theological stage refers to explanation by personified deities. During this stage people believed that all the phenomena of nature are the creation of the divine or supernatural. Comte broke this stage into 3 sub-stages: fetishism, polytheism, and

conception of one supreme being? The more we learn the more cause we find to think that the whole system of the universe is one scheme. Astronomy leaves no room, so to speak, for more than one throne. The same legislation prevails everywhere. All becomes one whole, with one ruler.

Advanced state of knowledge and virtue necessary for a nation
to conceive of a God as perfect.

Take those very Hebrews. Moses had learnt in Egypt, had matured in the desert, his noble conception of a Divine Spirit.¹⁴ But his savage Hebrew tribe was incapable

monotheism,

2. the metaphysical stage is the extension of the theological stage. The metaphysical stage refers to explanation by impersonal abstract concepts. People often tried to believe that God is an abstract being. They believed that an abstract power or force guides and determines events in the world. Metaphysical thinking discards belief in a concrete God. The nature of inquiry was legal and rational in nature,
3. the positivity stage, also known as the scientific stage, refers to scientific explanation based on observation, experiment, and comparison. Positive explanations rely upon a distinct method, the scientific method, for their justification. Positivism is a purely intellectual way of looking at the world. Also, it emphasizes observation and classification of data and facts. (Wikipedia)

14 Miss Nightingale in a letter (21 January 1850) to her sister Parthenope (1819-1890): "Yesterday I spent in the temple of Hermes Trismegistus, my dear Pop, (Dakka), an ugly little temple and, if it were not for the ungovernable romance I have always had about that gentleman, uninteresting, the sculptures all of the time of the *décadence*, about 300 BCE and everything shabby, stiff and rigid. Still the spirit of Hermes Trismegistus (the Author of the Trinity) animated to me every thing.

"Thrice greatest" he was indeed; he was the first who imagined three powers, forms or virtues under one name and who gave *that* name, The Name which has stood unapproached ever since his time, a monument of his imagination, "I am all that was and is and is to be," as the inscription stood upon the Temple of Neith at Sais. Oh, how great is the Spirit of God in man. How joyously I could have lifted up my voice and sung "Glory to God the Father, God the Son and the Holy Ghost" in that place. God and Man and the Spirit of God in man, how gladly I could have kissed the soil which bore such a manifestation of the Deity as that "thrice greatest Interpreter" Hermes Trismegistus. There is an inscription over king Ergamenes' head, who built this temple, calling him "the hand of God." Yes, man is the hand of God and even those hooting naked jackals, who trooped round me without one idea but that of baksheesh, as I sat, weary and dusty and giddy with the noise on a stone at the mouth of Hermes' temple, shall be one day the fingers of God. "For it is not the will of my Father which is in the heaven", as the greatest Interpreter of all has said, "the *one* of these little ones should perish." If it were not for this belief in Egypt, these countries would be insupportable.

of it; and he himself was obliged to allow it to deteriorate to their level. Whenever one man has endeavoured to impose the more perfect idea of a supreme being, which has had its origin in his own more advanced mind, upon a nation less developed than himself, we see it degenerate. (6)

If the stage of civilization be very low indeed, the race is incapable of conceiving of a God at all. One of the French “Sisters of Charity”¹⁵ (the only real “women of the world”) who see all nations and all conditions, told me that the single race within their knowledge, who did not possess the idea of *any* supernatural being, was a tribe in Australia, not far from Perth. They were in the lowest conceivable state of animal existence. She had with her one of their children, which she had bought for a shilling, when about to be eaten by its tribe, and which appeared little above an animal, except that it stood on two legs and had no wings. It imitated like an ape, and stole like a magpie.¹⁶

I related this to an operative engineer, and he said slowly and thoughtfully, “That is just the condition in which most of my fellow workmen are, and they do not know whether they believe in a God or not. Sometimes they do and sometimes they don’t.”¹⁷

From my stone I could see the symbol of the Trinity, invented by Trismegistus, covering his Temple, the globe, asp and wings which I described at Abu Simbel: the circle signifying the unity, eternity and conjunction of God, i.e. the undivided divine essence, without beginning and without end (which was only *afterwards* made to represent the Sun). As the globe the unity of the essence, so the wings signify its *omnipresence*, vivifying and pervading the material world, i.e. the spirit of God, like our dove; the Asp signifies the subtle efficacy and all-wise energy of the Deity (the serpent having always meant wisdom) or the divine Word (its only member being a mouth). So that in that symbol we have the Holy Trinity complete: the eternity, the Word, the Spirit; and the name, the great name, as given by Plato (which Eusebius says he took from Hermes’s stela), “I am that I am” is the same as Moses says he found in Egypt. The very soil seems to me sacred; I put my shoes from off my feet, where man first found these things.” (Lynn McDonald (ed.) *Florence Nightingale on Mysticism and Eastern Religions*. Collected Works of Florence Nightingale. Volume 4. Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2003, pp. 284-286)

15 The Daughters of Charity, or Sisters of Charity of Saint Vincent De Paul (1581-1660), is a Society of Apostolic Life for women within the Catholic Church. They were founded in 1633 and state that they are devoted to serving the poor through the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. (Wikipedia)

16 **FN:** This child is now at a school in England, where it has advanced by the most rapid strides from an animal into a human being. It now believes in a God. [1]

[1] All footnotes of Miss Nightingale herself are preceded with **FN**.

17 Professor Lynn McDonald states that meetings with artisans were definitely part of

Meaning to be attached to the word “belief.”

I am trying to arrive at the meaning which we shall attach to the word “belief,” to prove that the highest state of belief, (viz., in the signification of the strongest conviction,) must be the result of the highest stage of development; that, therefore, we cannot be said to “believe” in this sense, except when we have reached that state; and that at an earlier stage of development in man, “belief” will mean a sense of uncertainty; at a later, a sense of certainty.¹⁸ Is it not possible that this sense of

the preparations for writing *Suggestions for Thought*. (Lynn McDonald (ed.) *Florence Nightingale's Suggestions for Thought*. Collected Works of Florence Nightingale. Volume 11. Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2008, p. 11. Referred to in this edition as CW 11). Other sources confirm this.

Sir Edward Cook (1857-1919) wrote that Miss Nightingale was a regular visitor of *The Literary and Scientific Institution* in John Street, Fitzroy Square, a hotbed of Owenites and freethinkers. (E.T. Cook. *The Life of Florence Nightingale*. London 1913. I: 119-120)

In a letter (16 January 1853) to Richard Monckton Milnes (1809-1895) Miss Nightingale wrote: “I am going abroad soon – before I go I am thinking of asking you whether you would look over certain things, which I have written for the workingmen on the subject of belief in a God. All the moral and intellectual among them seem going over to atheism, or at least to a vague kind of theism. I have read these to one or two and they have liked them. I should have liked to have asked you if you think them likely to be read by more.” (CW 11, p. 25)

In a letter (5 September 1860) to John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) Miss Nightingale wrote: “Many years ago, I had a large and very curious acquaintance among the artisans of the North of England and of London. I learned that they were without any religion whatever – though diligently seeking after one, principally in Comte and his school. Any return to what is called Christianity appeared impossible. It is for them this book was written.” (Lynn McDonald (ed.) *Florence Nightingale on Society and Politics, Philosophy, Science, Education and Literature*. Collected Works of Florence Nightingale. Volume 5. Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2003. p. 373. Referred to in this edition as CW 5)

In *Suggestions for Thought* itself, however, the artisans themselves don't play a significant role at all. Maybe this explains why the titles of the three volumes gradually changed:

- from *Suggestions for Thought to Searchers after Truth among the Artizans of England* (volume 1),
- via *Suggestions for Thought for Searchers after Religious Truth* (volume 2),
- to *Suggestions for Thought* (volume 3).

18 Reference to the three stages in the development of theology, which Miss Nightingale distinguished: “There are three phases of theology; the miraculous, the supernatural, and the “positive” theology. At first it is quite natural (in an infant state) that infants

uncertainty it is which has led so (7) many lately into the Roman Catholic Church, and some the most learned, the most earnest?¹⁹ Scepticism, not belief, has brought

should think God works by miracles, and should see Him in miracles and not in law; then that they should see Him in special providences, which is really almost the same as the first; that is the supernatural theology; — lastly, we see Him in law. But law is still a theology, and the finest.” (*Suggestions for Thought for Searchers after Religious Truth*, Volume 2, pp. 155-156 [pagenumbers from the 1860 text])

19 Reference to the so-called *verts* (converts) of which Henry Edward Manning (1808-1892) and John Henry Newman (1801-1890) were the most famous. Miss Nightingale knew Manning from her stay in Rome (1847-1848), where she was introduced to him by Sydney Herbert (1810-1861) and his wife Elizabeth who was a *vert* herself.

A letter (30 June 1852) to Manning shows that becoming a *vert* herself has been a real option for her, in theory at least: “I will answer what you have written because I know it was written in the spirit of the purest kindness, and of love to Him, whom we both serve, and not in the spirit of proselytism. But I think you mistake my state of feeling. You think the defect is in the will. All Catholics do. You think it would be a sacrifice to me to join the Catholic Church, a temptation to remain where I am.

If you knew what a home the Catholic Church would be to me — all that I want I should find in her — all my difficulties would be removed. I have laboriously to pick up here and there crumbs by which to live; she would give me ‘daily bread’. The daughters of St Vincent would open their arms to me — they already have done so. And what should I find there? My work, already laid out for me, instead of seeking it to and fro and finding none: my home, sympathy, human and divine. No one asked last night, Is it well with the child?

I dislike and I despise the Church of England. She received me into her bosom, but what has she ever done for me? She never gave me work to do for her nor training to do it, if I found it for myself.

I say, if you knew, but you do know now, with all its faults, what a home the Catholic Church is. And yet what is she to you compared with what she would be to me? No one can tell, no man can tell what she is to women: their training, their discipline, their hope, their home, to women, because they are left wholly uneducated by the Church of England, almost wholly uncared for, while men are not. For what training is there compared to that of the Catholic nun? I could see that yesterday at the House of St Joseph at Kensington. Those ladies, who are not Sisters, have not the chastened temper, the Christian grace, the accomplished loveliness and energy of the regular nun. I have seen something of different kinds of men, am no longer young and do not speak from enthusiasm but from experience. There is nothing like the training (in these days) which the Sacred Heart or the order of St Vincent gives to women. And do you think I do not love her, my mother, though she will not acknowledge me as her child? I have never had any other love.

“O Lord, my heart is” not “ready,” it longs to find its home. All ‘will’ for me is on the other side from what you think. Conviction alone hangs back. The wound is too

them there. They required their sense of a truth to be stronger and more complete than it was. The more they urged themselves to believe, the less real was their feeling of belief, till, at last, they took refuge in the belief of others to supply that which they had not in themselves.

Tendency of this age.

In this age, however, by far the greater proportion of mankind, have gone the other way; in England, most of the educated among the operatives, especially in the northern manufacturing towns, have turned their faces to atheism or at least to theism²⁰ – not three in a hundred go to *any* place of worship;²¹ the moral and intellectual among them being, almost without an exception, “infidels”²².

deep for the Church of England to heal. I belong as little to the Church of England as to that of Rome, or rather my heart belongs as much to the Catholic Church as to that of England, oh how much more. The only difference is that the former insists peremptorily upon my believing what I cannot believe, while the latter is too careless and indifferent to know whether I believe it or not. She proclaims out of the Prayer book what we are to believe, but she does not care whether we do (and we don't), while the Catholic Church examines into the fact. If it were not for that, I might have a home where now I have none. What I have said now I have never said to human being, and to you I say it as to a Catholic priest.” (Lynn McDonald (ed.) *Florence Nightingale's Theology: Essays, Letters and Journal Notes*. Collected Works of Florence Nightingale. Volume 3. Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2002, pp. 247-249. Referred to in this edition as CW 3).

20 John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) suggested to use the word ‘deism’ and to reserve the word ‘theism’ for the opposite of atheism. (CW 11, p. 63).

21 This fact was brought to light by the census of 1851. (ukcensusonline.com)

22 In a letter (20 June 1852) to the Samuel Gridley Howe (1801-1876) Miss Nightingale explained: “Slowly and unknown to our church or aristocracy, theism and atheism are creeping through our manufacturing towns and the best and most moral of our operatives are invariably the theists. About 3 percent attend any place of worship, whether Church of England, Wesleyan or other. I have heard this average given by so many operatives of the most different opinions, Roman Catholic, Methodist, atheist, that I can hardly disbelieve it. Science is increasing so rapidly among the workmen that all scientific lectures in London are thronged by them. The best botanists and entomologists in England are among the Manchester operatives, and there is a perfect rush to chemistry. (...) As long as our operative classes were uneducated, and even now they are far, far from being educated in the way yours are, Wesleyans and Methodists could make them believe what they chose (the Church of England never had any hold upon them) but now when these men have all the arguments of Locke, Mirabeau, Tom Paine and Voltaire at their fingers’ ends, a ‘home missionary’ can make no head against them.” (CW 11, pp. 23-24)

These poor fellows, thinking so hard and so conscientiously, leave out the best element in the food which they so earnestly seek; the most divine element, that which makes confusion into order, that which makes the lowest into the highest; for the highest discoverable principle in existence, perhaps, is the feeling residing in the perfect One, which wills happiness; the thought of the perfect One, that happiness is, by its essence, worked out for the happy by exercise of their own natures and of other natures like theirs. *Time* is all that intervenes between man as he is, and man made one with God. Time intervenes only because that would not be the spirit of wisdom to which it was possible to will man to be one with God otherwise than through the exercise of man's faculties. (8)

How it begins.

Whenever man rejects revelation, however, he is too apt to say immediately, "God is incomprehensible, we will not seek for Him, because we shall not find Him." And he is left without a God, even where he does not deny the existence of one.

To find the existence of God in law.

Such a one will think it fanciful to look upon the "Holy Ghost" as a real existence.²³ Hitherto we have rather looked for it, because it exists in the belief of so many, than felt it to be essential; but the love, the wisdom, the goodness, the righteousness, the power which we can, with our thought and feeling, recognize in law and its expression in the universe: these we may perhaps better call the "Holy Ghost" than God, whom (as so much of the intellect of the present day says) we cannot understand. A distinction is necessary between what we can understand and feel, and what we cannot. Very much mischief has arisen from what has been said and written about the latter. That a Father of the universe exists, but incomprehensible to us, may be shown, not by mathematical proof, but by such strong presumptive evidence (by evidence, too, increasing with our knowledge and the improvements of our being) that man may live and feel in accordance with the fact, as with much else not mathematically proveable. But, with truth, it is said that we cannot comprehend Him, and, disgusted by the dogmatizing of theologians and churches, many are refusing to believe His existence. Instead of saying, "I cannot understand the Holy Ghost," as we with many have said – instead of His appearing in the

23 John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) gave Miss Nightingale the following advice: "If these paragraphs be retained at all, would it not be better to convert them into a note? In the text, they interrupt the tenor of the argument and send the reader's mind wandering among the mysteries of Christianity." (CW 11, p. 64)

Trinity²⁴ one knows not why – perhaps it is a Holy Ghost *only* that we *can* understand; perhaps we may find in these (9) words the expression we want for that which each man can feel and comprehend of the Father.

Perhaps Paul unwisely said what we have beforetimes so often admired, “Whom ye ignorantly worship, Him reveal I unto you.”²⁵ He could only reveal that which he had himself felt and understood of God’s truth,²⁶ and only to natures capable of receiving that revelation.

Let us distinguish God the Father as the spirit of perfection, incomprehensible to us; God the Holy Ghost, as what is comprehensible to each man of the perfect spirit.

To “receive the Holy Ghost,” what a remarkable expression that was! No wonder that those to whom it was addressed said they did not “so much as know that there was a Holy Ghost.”²⁷ This is just the state of those among the men called atheists in the present day, who are thinking and conscientious.

To “receive the Holy Ghost” is to exercise the capabilities of man, in as far as each is able, in apprehending the spirit of perfection. Truly do these atheists say, “We cannot understand God,” so they leave the subject entirely as irrelevant. This true consciousness of not being able to understand, to feel God, has led, on the one hand, to being “without” the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, “in the world,”²⁸ on the

24 The Christian doctrine of the Trinity holds that God is one God, but three co-eternal consubstantial persons or hypostases – the Father, the Son (Jesus Christ), and the Holy Spirit – as “one God in three Divine persons”. While the developed doctrine of the Trinity is not explicit in the books that constitute the New Testament, the New Testament possesses a “triadic” understanding of God and contains a number of Trinitarian formulas. The doctrine of the Trinity was first formulated among the fathers of the Church as early Christians attempted to understand the relationship between Jesus and God in their scriptural documents and prior traditions. (Wikipedia)

25 Acts 17:23: 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.*

26 **FN:** This is the “treasure which we have in earthly vessels” – “that the excellency of the power may be” not “of God,” but of *man*. [1]

[1] 2 Cor. 4:7: ⁷ But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.

In her copy of Spinoza’s *Ethica* Miss Nightingale wrote about 2 Cor. 4:7: “Is it not rather that Gods purpose is that the excellency of the power may be of us and not of God?” (CW 5, p. 632)

27 Acts 19:2: ² He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not *so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost.*

28 John 14:16-17: ¹⁶ And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter,

other, to the making Christ an anomalous being, called God, called not God. We cannot be too careful to admit our present ignorance, and any essential incapability in our nature. Neither can we be **(10)** too careful to admit *no* incapability of attainment in human nature, while the individual human being, or successive generations of man, can advance towards attainment.

Immense schemes built upon a few words.

People have dogmatized about religion, building upon a few words in a book (and a book the evidence of whose authenticity it is necessary to master) immense schemes.

Upon the words, “Lo! I am with you always, even unto the end of the world,”²⁹ (partly at least, if not entirely,) rests the fabric of the Church, with its high pretensions, its splendid temporalities. If we were to ask the bishops why they are there, will they not say, mainly because of those words?

If we ask the Roman Catholic church why *they* are there, they will say to hear confessions and absolve sinners. *They* have founded *their* scheme upon “Whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”³⁰

We must admit that people have founded vast schemes upon a very few words. Feeling the folly of this, others say that we are incapable of knowing anything about God. We cannot be too careful to draw a line of distinction between what we can know positively and what we can only conjecture empirically (*i.e.*, see reason to guess is true), and leave to be confirmed by the exercise of the faculties of ages to come; at the same time acknowledging our ignorance where it exists on those subjects on which it has been asserted that mankind has certain knowledge.

Is all our knowledge of the existence of God an empirical conjecture?

It is impossible to observe and reflect on what does exist and has existed, as cognizable by our **(11)** various faculties, without tracing a vein of benevolent will, a

that he may abide with you for ever; ¹⁷Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.

29 Matt. 28:20: ¹⁹Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: ²⁰teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, *lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.* Amen.

30 Matt. 16:19: ¹⁹And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and *whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.*

wise will, and a powerful will. Can it be denied that the signs, which make us assert that human will has been or is at work when we see machinery in action (even though no possessor of human will is manifest to the senses) – can it be denied that the same signs exist to manifest a will, differing from the human in possessing more wisdom and power to effect those same purposes which human will tries for?

But let us not go on to dogmatize, to *assert* that this will is perfect and eternal. Supposing the thought and purpose of God to be perfect, its perfect realization is the work of eternity. Therefore no perfect realization can have been recognized by man. Man can only recognize, in what he can learn of present, past, and future, *tendencies* from which he implies the perfect purpose.

Let us be most careful to keep to accuracy in what we say we know, especially with reflective and conscientious men, who disbelieve what may be known, because required to believe what cannot be known.

What may be known about the eternal?

Evidence may be brought of a will for long time past active, in which we trace *some* benevolence, wisdom, power. But we are seldom called upon to act and feel only by that of which we have certainty; we often have to act empirically.

What is acting and feeling empirically?

The empirical must lead the way to the certain. Empirical laws are “those uniformities which observation or experiment has shown to exist, but upon which we hesitate to rely, for want of seeing *why* such a law should exist. The periodical return of eclipses, as originally ascertained by the persevering observation of the early (12) eastern astronomers, was an empirical law, until the general laws of the celestial motions had accounted for it. An empirical law, then, is an observed uniformity, presumed to be resolvable into ultimate laws, but not yet resolved into them.”³¹

31 See John Stuart Mill (1806-1873): “Scientific inquirers give the name of Empirical Laws to *those uniformities which observation or experiment has shown to exist but on which they hesitate to rely* in cases varying much from those which have been actually observed, *for want of seeing any reason why such a law should exist*. It is implied, therefore, in the notion of an empirical law, that it is not an ultimate law; that if true at all, its truth is capable of being, and requires to be, accounted for. It is a derivative law, the derivation of which is not yet known. To state the explanation, the *why*, of the empirical law, would be to state the laws from which it is derived; the ultimate causes on which it is contingent. And if we knew these, we should also know what are its limits; under what conditions it would cease to be fulfilled. *The periodical return of eclipses,*

Empirically the existence of an imperfect God might be suspected.

We find signs of benevolence, wisdom, and power, which appear to indicate that the will, in consequence of which that which exists does exist, desires the well-being of that existence at some time present or future. But there is and has been much suffering in every present with which we are acquainted, and we often cannot discern how it can be leading to a happy future *in detail*. Evidence may be brought to show, however, that it is leading, *in principle*, to a happy future – that, to the best happiness, the present is essential.

One and another cause of suffering disappears from time to time by the exercise of man's capabilities. We can see glimpses of how others might disappear, if he used these capabilities differently from what he has done. Great increase of enjoyment has been opened in certain directions by exercise of man's capabilities, and here too we have glimpses into immeasurable enjoyment attainable by man.

Is man the artizan of his own happiness, not God?

Do not such observations lead to the conjecture that the higher will intends man to work the way from suffering into happiness by exercise of capability?

The capability of each individual when born, the development and improvement of this capability, are obviously left in large measure to mankind. In no other race is there this dependence (13) on the race itself. Do not these considerations point

as originally ascertained by the persevering observation of the early eastern astronomers, was an empirical law, until the general laws of the celestial motions had accounted for it. The following are empirical laws still waiting to be resolved into the simpler laws from which they are derived. The local laws of the flux and reflux of the tides in different places: the succession of certain kinds of weather to certain appearances of sky: the apparent exceptions to the almost universal truth that bodies expand by increase of temperature: the law that breeds, both animal and vegetable, are improved by crossing: that gases have a strong tendency to permeate animal membranes: that substances containing a very high proportion of nitrogen (such as hydrocyanic acid and morphia) are powerful poisons: that when different metals are fused together, the alloy is harder than the various elements: that the number of atoms of acid required to neutralize one atom of any base, is equal to the number of atoms of oxygen in the base: that the solubility of substances in one another, depends (at least in some degree) on the similarity of their elements. An empirical law, then, is an observed uniformity, presumed to be resolvable into simpler laws, but not yet resolved into them. The ascertainment of the empirical laws of phenomena often precedes by a long interval the explanation of those laws by the Deductive Method; and the verification of a deduction usually consists in the comparison of its results with empirical laws previously ascertained." (J.S. Mill. A System of Logic: Ratiocinative and Inductive. London, 1843. Book III, Chapter 16, Paragraph 1)

(shall we say empirically?) to the suggestion that man shall perfectionize man?

And since experience is evidence that exercise of capability is enjoyment, that without it there is none, does not this experience point to the belief that the Great Will made the happiness of mankind to depend on the exercise of the capability of mankind, thus calling forth the greatest degree of exercise, and with it the greatest happiness, in truth, possible?

Summary of the meaning of the words "belief" and "God."

I have tried to show that the highest state of "belief" founded on conviction could not exist in some stages of national or individual development, but must belong to more advanced stages.

Undoubting belief, indeed, can easily exist in an early stage of development, which is ignorant of the sources of doubt presented by the advance of knowledge in the exact sciences. To this state of doubt, prevailing widely, as it does, in our present stage of progress, will succeed a more comprehensive, more impressive belief, as moral philosophy becomes fathomed by the understanding and raises the feelings.³²

I then tried to consider "empirically" what a perfect being would do, if there be one; and to prove that he would appoint man to work out his own happiness. I now try to deduce from this the "belief" that there *is* a perfect being, a God.

What is the word "God" used to express?

Here we come to consider the meaning or rather the meanings with which the word "God" is used. It has been used to signify the most different ideas in different ages and nations. Can you attach any similarity of idea to the God whom (14) his people whipped to make him do what they liked, and to the God who sate enthroned in the mystic phrase of Zoroaster³³? Nothing is more common than to say, there never has

32 Moral philosophy which Miss Nightingale in 1873 described as ". . . the science of the social and political improvement of man, the science of educating or administering the world by discovering the laws which govern man's motives, his moral nature," was in her view identical to "the study of the character of God, because the laws of the moral world are the expressions and the sole expressions of the character of God." (F. Nightingale, *A 'Note' of Interrogation*. *Fraser's Magazine*, May 1873, p. 77)

33 Zoroaster, also known as Zarathustra, Zarathushtra Spitama or Ashu Zarathushtra, was an ancient Iranian spiritual leader who founded what is now known as Zoroastrianism. His teachings challenged the existing traditions of the Indo-Iranian religion and inaugurated a movement that eventually became the dominant religion in Ancient Persia. He was a native speaker of Old Avestan and lived in the eastern part of the Iranian Plateau, but his exact birthplace is uncertain. There is no scholarly consensus

been a race nor an age which did not believe in a God. A God certainly. But *what* God? What does the word mean? A cat? – a lamb? – a spirit? – a statue? These words are as synonymous as the different Gods in which different races and different ages of the same race have believed. When you ask, Why do you believe in God? I must ask, Which of the ideas of God do you mean? whether the God of the Old Testament, who commanded the extirpation of the Canaanites?³⁴ or the God of the New Testament, who commanded submission to the yoke³⁵ in many things in which, as we worship Him now, we believe that He commands the struggle for freedom?³⁶ We could not believe Him a perfect God, if He did not.

on when he lived. However, approximating using linguistic and socio-cultural evidence allows for dating to somewhere in the second millennium BCE. (Wikipedia)

34 Deut. 7:2: ¹ When the Lord thy God shall bring thee into the land whither thou goest to possess it, and hath cast out many nations before thee, the Hittites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than thou; ² And when the Lord thy God shall deliver them before thee; thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them: ³ Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son.

35 Matt. 11:29: ²⁹ *Take my yoke upon you*, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

36 This question is answered in the manuscript of *Suggestions for Thought*: “In the God whom we worship now, who commands the expulsion of the Austrians, liberation of Hungary from the yoke. How do you know that He does this? I do not think I should be able to believe Him a perfect God, if He did not.” (CW 11, p. 69)

The Hungarian Revolution of 1848 was one of the many European Revolutions of 1848 and closely linked to other revolutions of 1848 in the Habsburg areas. The revolution in the Kingdom of Hungary grew into a war for total independence from the Habsburg dynasty. After a series of serious Austrian defeats in 1849, the Austrian Empire came close to the brink of collapse. The young emperor Franz Joseph I had to call for Russian help in the name of the Holy Alliance. Tsar Nicholas I answered, and sent a 200,000 strong army with 80,000 auxiliary forces. Finally, the joint army of Russian and Austrian forces defeated the Hungarian forces. After the restoration of Habsburg power, Hungary was placed under brutal martial law. (Wikipedia)

In a letter (27 April 27 1894), almost half a century later, to Margaret Verney Miss Nightingale once again referred to the Hungarian Revolution: “The marching of Russia into subdue Hungary (in 1848, was it?) brought about the reform of nursing. The people of England were so furious with Russia for that scandalous act that in 1854 nothing would satisfy them but war with Russia. It was not the ‘holy places’, it was our rage with Russia that brought about the Crimean War. And it was the Crimean War that brought about the reform of nursing.” (CW 11, p. 54)

Authority does not teach of a perfect God.

Authority does not teach belief in a perfect God. It is evident that very few have believed that their God was perfect. Some nations have not professed to do so; others have attributed to him qualities essentially imperfect, while giving him the title of perfect. For instance, the Greeks did not suppose their Zeus, Athene, &c. perfect. They attributed to them merely human qualities with superhuman power. In these earlier nations, *power* seems to have been the principal characteristic of a God. He or she was merely an engine to account for creation. Take all the thousand different meanings, which have been attached to the word "God" by different nations and individuals in different ages, (15) and some kind and degree of power above human seems to be all that is common to them. In these days we profess that we believe our God to be perfect, but we attribute to him all kinds of qualities that are not – love of His own glory, anger, indecision, change of mind – and we try to believe, if we think at all, that a God with these qualities is perfect.

If you would, therefore, let me leave the question, why do you believe in God? – as not knowing which of these ideas of God you mean – I would say instead, I believe that there is a Perfect Being, of whose thought the universe in eternity is the incarnation.

Universal consent³⁷ does not teach of a perfect God.

It is evident that every nation, every age, *could* not believe in a Perfect Being – that it required cultivation, development to conceive the idea of perfection, and that the higher all the faculties of an individual, as also of a nation, have been, the higher has been his conception of God, the nearer perfection.

The role of Russia added much to already existing russophobia in Great Britain. Miss Nightingale helped to reinforce these negative public sentiments towards Russia as illustrated by the following story. During her stay in Rome (1847-1848) Nightingale had met Makrena Mirazyslawski, the abbess of the nuns of Minsk. The abbess told her how the nuns had been imprisoned and tortured by the Russians in order to persuade them to leave the Roman-Catholic Church and to return to the Russian-orthodox Church. In the end they succeeded to escape from prison and to reach Rome. Miss Nightingale passed on the notes of her conversation with Makrena Mirazyslawski to Charles Dickens who adapted them to an article with the title: *The true Story of the Nuns of Minsk*. (*Household Words*, May 13, 1854, No. 216, pp. 290-295; www.djo.org.uk/household-words/volume-ix/page-290.html)

37 Numerous philosophers and theologians have appealed to the 'common consent' of humankind (the consensus gentium) as support for certain doctrines, most frequently in support of the assertion of the existence of God and the immortality of the human soul. (encyclopedia.com)

Intellectual cultivation does not teach of a perfect God.

It is true, some of those called the most highly cultivated of the human race, Descartes,³⁸ Laplace,³⁹ Hume,⁴⁰ have not been able to conceive of a God at all.⁴¹

But, have they been the most highly cultivated? Only intellectually so. And it seems evident that the *intellectual* idea of Him is *not* the highest. That is merely reducing Him to a master engineer, a mechanician-in-chief. Is not goodness for this purpose higher than intellect? Has not the innocent child probably an idea of God nearer the truth than that of Voltaire⁴² or Gibbon⁴³? “Unless ye become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of Heaven.”⁴⁴ We believe (16) the carpenter’s son, who humanly did not know that the earth moved round the sun, to have had a truer conception of deity than the philosopher, who had fathomed the laws of creation.

Intellectual cultivation contributes to a truer conception of Him.

But he would have had a still truer, if he had known all that Laplace could have told him.

The more highly man’s moral, intellectual, and spiritual faculties are cultivated, the more nearly will he approach a true conception of God. But of reason,

38 René Descartes (1596-1650), French philosopher who is widely regarded as one of the founders of modern philosophy. (Wikipedia)

39 Pierre-Simon, marquis de Laplace (1749-1827), French scholar whose work was a major contribution to the development of physics, engineering, mathematics, statistics, astronomy, and philosophy. (Wikipedia)

40 David Hume (1711-1776), Scottish Enlightenment philosopher who is best known for his highly influential system of philosophical empiricism, scepticism, and naturalism. (Wikipedia)

41 Here John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) felt compelled to correct Miss Nightingale: “There must, I think, be some mistake here about Descartes. He not only believed but thought that he had proved the existence of a God *a priori*.” (CW 11, p. 70)

42 Voltaire (1694-1778) was a writer, historian, and philosopher, famous for his wit, his criticism of Christianity, especially the Roman Catholic Church, as well as his advocacy of freedom of speech, freedom of religion, and separation of church and state. (Wikipedia)

43 Edward Gibbon (1737-1794) was an English historian. His most important work, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, was published in six volumes between 1776 and 1788 and is known for the quality and irony of its prose, its use of primary sources, and its polemical criticism of organised religion. (Wikipedia)

44 Matt. 18:3: ²And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, ³And said, Verily I say unto you, *Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.*

feeling, and conscience, feeling, truly cultivated, is that which gives us the truest conception of God; though, of course, a harmonious development of *all* these faculties would give us a truer still.

Thus the goodness of God is a higher attribute than His wisdom or power.

Experience only teaches of a perfect God.

The question, Why we believe that there exists at all an Eternal Spirit of perfect goodness, wisdom, and power, I can only answer, By experience, and experience only. What mankind can learn of the past, the present, and the future is in harmony with the existence of such a spirit; without it, is unaccounted for. In earlier ages it was thought that what we see about us could not be accounted for, except by supposing imperfect qualities in the Eternal Spirit. But if, – as we make progress, we find a great many marks that He is perfect, – if by degrees we should find that that very evil, which had made us *doubt* His perfection, is one of the truest proofs of it, shall we not come at last to think that He has done in the universe what we should have done, had we been perfect?

Thus increased knowledge, knowledge of the laws of God, is essential to our forming this idea (17) of His perfection. Although a man in a dark room may often form a truer idea of Him than a philosopher observing the rotation of the sun, still, besides a man's *feeling* of what is *right*, his power of comprehending providence⁴⁵ depends on his knowledge of the past, the present, and the future.

Instead, therefore, of directly answering the question, Why do you believe in a God? I would endeavour to set forth, –

I. Whatever exists, exists because there is one will and one power, which determines such existence to be.

II. The nature whence springs this will, in which resides this power, is eternal, is perfect, is goodness, wisdom, omnipotence, &c.

Not the experience of one, but of mankind.

If it be said that this is reducing the wise and good God to the measure of my own understanding and heart, I answer, Not to mine, but to the accumulated and accumulating experience of all mankind. Sometimes the ancients may have been

45 In theology, divine providence, or just providence, is God's intervention in the Universe. The term 'Divine Providence' (usually capitalized) is also used as a title of God. A distinction is usually made between general providence, which refers to God's continuous upholding of the existence and natural order of the Universe, and special providence, which refers to God's extraordinary interventions in the life of people. Miracles generally fall in the latter category. (Wikipedia)