

## Practical Atheists?

Anthony Flew was considered by many as the most notorious atheist of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. He became like the Christopher Hitchens or the Richard Dawkins of his day, and he was even debated with CS Lewis. His mantra was to 'follow the evidence wherever it leads', and the evidence led him to become an atheist—initially. Yet when Anthony peered deeper into the mystery of creation and began to see as the first reading stated so beautifully that “from the greatness and beauty of created things comes a corresponding perception of their Creator.” But the greatness of the Christian faith does not consist in just a belief that God exists, but that God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son so that we might have eternal life.

Sometimes there are intellectual roadblocks that prevent people from believing in God and it is a good thing to convince some people of this truth before we move onto other truths. New studies into the complexity of human DNA rattled Anthony's atheistic convictions and led him to see that

“intelligence must have been involved in getting these extraordinarily diverse elements to work together...”

So in 2004, Anthony Flew shocked the world by claiming that God exists.

However, it is not enough for a Christian to acknowledge that God exists. Anthony Flew believed that God existed but he believed that God was more of an Intelligent Designer who was detached from the world. This idea is known as Deism in which 'god' is not a personal God but just a Creator.

We are not deists, we are Christians who believe that our God is one who could not stand being separated from his beloved children that his Son crossed the boundary between heaven and earth to take on human flesh .so that he could lead humanity back to their true homeland.

Although we may not profess to be deists or atheists and although we believe in a personal God, we may also fall into the same trap as Anthony Flew where we essentially become practical atheists who acknowledge that God exists but live as though he does not.

Jesus is challenging us today in the Gospel to engage in a continual conversion which is essentially the practice of completely abandoning every aspect of our lives to God. Jesus desires not 50, not 75 and not even 99.99% of us. He wants 100% of who we are because we cannot enter the kingdom of God in heaven until the reign of God is completely present in our hearts.

The Psalmist writes:

Who shall climb the mountain of the Lord?  
Who shall stand in his holy place?  
The man with clean hands and pure heart,  
who desires not worthless things (Ps 24)

If we want to go up to the Heavenly Jerusalem, we need to purify our hearts of worthless desires and abandon everything to God. The early Christians truly distinguished themselves from others by their complete abandonment to God which was manifested in their way of life. Listen to this outside observer describing to a Roman official how Christians lived in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century:

Christians...do not inhabit separate cities of their own, or speak a strange dialect, or follow some outlandish way of life...

And yet there is something extraordinary about their lives. They live in their own countries as though they were only passing through. Any country can be their homeland, but for them their homeland, wherever it may be, is a foreign country...

They live in the flesh, but they are not governed by the desires of the flesh...Obedient to the laws, they yet live on a level that transcends the law. Christians love all men, but all men persecute them. They live in poverty, but enrich many; they are totally destitute, but possess an abundance of everything...

These Christians modelled what Jesus was saying in the Gospel: "Those who keep their life will lose it, those who lose their life for my sake will find it" i.e., if you seek to maintain and strive for your earthly life by your own powers, you will lose it, but if you lose yourself through a gift of self to me through complete abandonment, you will find the fullness of life that you had been seeking for all along."

So the question that remains for us is: if the Federal Government had sent a spy to observe my life, would they know just by observation that I am a Catholic to the bone, that I live like a citizen of heaven having completely abandoned myself to God in every aspect of my life? Or do I live like a practical atheist, like the rest of the world eating, drinking, buying and selling as in Noah's and Lot's days?

The greatness of the Christian faith does not just consist in the belief that God exists. It consists in the fundamental truth that Jesus wants us to unite every aspect of our lives with him now on earth because that is what heaven will be like. But this is a union in love, and the choice is up to us.