

# Concerning the Intellectual Foundation of Faith

## ---An Exchange of Views

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(Editor's introductory note: The following exchange concerns Henry Nelson Wieman's book, *The Intellectual Foundation of Faith*. (New York: Philosophical Library, Inc., 1961. \$3.75.) Dr. Wieman, author of many well known books in the fields of philosophy and religion, is presently Professor of Philosophy at Southern Illinois University. The August 17, 1961 issue of *The Christian Advocate* carried my review of the book. Professor Wieman has put forth some corrections and contentions in the form of a letter. The purpose of this exchange is to share with a larger audience an effort to sharpen some of the issues.)

DEAR Professor Milligan:

I have just received in the **CHRISTIAN ADVOCATE** your review of my book **The Intellectual Foundation of Faith**. I appreciate very much your good will and your endeavor to speak well of my work; but I am sorry to see how you misunderstand its central purpose. Your misunderstanding appears in the following sentences:

Granted that creativity is one of the basic modes of divine action . . . there is also . . . the enduring structure of reality . . . which is presupposed for creativity to operate, and which requires explication. We may readily agree that apathy and resistance to creative opportunity are among the blockages which thwart salvation, but insist that there are others also.

The misunderstanding appears in thinking that I do not recognize the importance of the enduring structure which must be present for creativity to operate and that I do not recognize other obstructions to the divine creativity beyond those of apathy and personal resistance. The whole purpose of my book is to insist on the urgency of seeking to find out (1) what is the enduring

structure of the divine creativity and (2) what are the obstructions beyond personal apathy and resistance. Strangely you go on to add that "creative interchange is so broadly set forth that it becomes by definition synonymous with all redemptive processes." You are saying that "creative interchange" with the meaning you attach to that expression is unfit to include all the redemptive processes but with the meaning I give to it "creative interchange" does include all redemptive processes. Surely when a writer uses an expression the meaning he gives to his own words should be accepted rather than some other meaning that some other person may attach to those words!

I make plain that divine creativity, described as creative interchange, is different from human creativity. This difference you fail to note and when, in the above quotation, you identify this divine creativity with "creative opportunity", the difference is concealed. Yet this is one of the major points in my book. Human creativity is what man does to bring into existence what he is first able to imagine. Divine creativity is what expands the reach of human imagination by integrating the perspective of the other person with my own, thus deepening the bonds by which we are united in community and expanding the range of what each can appreciate as good and distinguish as evil. No man can intentionally bring into existence what he is unable to imagine. Therefore he cannot expand the reach of his imagination. This further creation of what is accessible to the individual's imagination in terms of good and evil and in community with others, is the work of the divine creativity. To confuse it with "creative opportunity," meaning opportunity for the individual

to exercise his own creative powers, is to misunderstand the ruling purpose of the book.

The divine creativity is a creative transformation occurring in the existence of the individual in community with others. Therefore it is a kind of event occurring in time and space but at various levels of dominance over other events that run counter to it and often block it. The problem of religious living is to meet the conditions required for this divine creativity to dominate over other events. In order that this may occur we need to know the structure of it when "structure" refers to (1) the conditions which must be present for its effective operation and (2) the essential characteristics distinguishing it from other kinds of events.

This divine creativity is not merely one event but a series of events having distinctive character, namely, that of deepening appreciative understanding of individuals for one another and expanding the range of what each can appreciate as good and distinguish as evil by integrating into his own individuality the needs and interests of the other. Since this divine creativity operates in the form of events occurring in the lives of individuals, the conditions required for its occurrence can be discovered by the methods used in discovering the conditions for the occurrence of other events, except that this event is very complex. It involves all those levels entering into human existence—physical, chemical, biological, psychological, interpersonal, institutional, historical. Such being the case, all the sciences might be applied to seeking out the conditions most favorable for the occurrence of this kind of event. Knowledge of these conditions is the intellectual foundation of faith.

In your review you seem to say that this knowledge of the "enduring structure of reality . . . for creativity to operate" must be found by examining the presuppositions of a philosophical sys-

tem like that of Whitehead's. I hold that the contrary is the truth of the matter. In so far as Whitehead's philosophy is relevant to this problem, the presuppositions of his philosophy arise from first discovering by the relevant sciences what is the "enduring structure of reality . . . presupposed for this creativity to operate." I think a study of Whitehead's life and work will show that this is the way he developed his philosophy. If so, you put the cart before the horse.

Heretofore when religious leaders have appealed to science for guidance in religious commitment they have sought it in the form of scientific understanding of the universe. This, I am convinced, is an error of serious magnitude. It arises from a fatal misunderstanding of the nature of scientific knowledge. Scientific and empirical inquiry cannot give us knowledge of the infinite depth and expanse of existence and possibility. Rather all such inquiry, when competent, is designed to exclude everything that is beyond the control of the methods and techniques available at the time. But what this kind of inquiry can do is to search out and provide the conditions under which events occur that have a knowable structure such as the kind of event that expands and deepens community among men by integrating in each individual the diverse perspectives of many other individuals.

The mightiest powers under human control today are modern science and modern technology. We cannot be saved if these are left to run wild without moral purpose and religious meaning. It is the fault of the religious leaders today that our religion has not been interpreted in such a way as to show the indispensable moral purpose and religious meaning of these terrific instruments of power. This purpose and this meaning is to search out and provide the conditions under which the divine creativity can operate most effectively in widening and deepening

the bonds of community among men and the range of what each can appreciate as good and distinguish as evil.

I value your review because you raise issues of utmost importance, calling urgently for discussion. All too frequently discussion of these religious issues degenerates into controversy in defense of opposing religious doctrines. But no doctrine can ever save or create because doctrine means teaching. Teaching can only be **about** what creates and

saves. What saves must be actual events that transform us. All doctrine (teaching) must be subject to correction and development by discussion so that we can better understand the actual events that transform in the way that saves and brings the greater good.

The depth and power of your thinking help to expose these fateful issues.

Gratefully,

H. N. WIEMAN.

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