

# A Thought on the Resurrection

by Ronald W. Kirk

I just glanced at Cornelius Van Til's *Why I Believe in God*. In this little pamphlet, Dr. Van Til—one of the great theologians of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century—say something extraordinary:

[I]f my unity [of worldview] is comprehensive enough to include the efforts of those who reject it, it is large enough even to include that which those who have been set upright by regeneration cannot see. My unity is that of a child who walks with its father through the woods. The child is not afraid because its father knows it all and is capable of handling every situation. So I readily grant that there are some "difficulties" with respect to belief in God and His revelation in nature and Scripture that I cannot solve. In fact, there is mystery in every relationship with respect to every fact that faces me, for the reason that all facts have their final explanation in God Whose thoughts are higher than my thoughts, and Whose ways are higher than my ways. And it is exactly that sort of God that I need. Without such a God, without the God of the Bible, the God of authority, the God who is self-contained and therefore incomprehensible to men, there would be no reason in anything. No human being can explain in the sense of seeing through all things, but only he who believes in God has the right to hold that there is an explanation at all.<sup>1</sup>

I have disputed with an atheist, someone close and dear to me, who insists that my worldview is irrational and that I am brainwashed by my faith and by those who propagate it. The Bible is nothing but myth, he says. As we converse, I am intrigued with his *rationality*. He is a man of pure fact. This is very different from the world of Dr. Van Til, where mystery is everywhere. In response to his declarations, I attempted to recite back to him a summary of his beliefs, in essence thus:

You believe in a completely material universe with no inherent meaning. In this meaningless world, you say, through the dint of unimaginable numbers of accidents, the universe has formed itself into meaningful wholes—galaxies, stars, planets, and many, many phenomena which as yet defy comprehensive explanation. Moreover, the world we inhabit is filled with meaningful individuals of any and every kind. We know the earth itself, a grand system operating under *predictable* rules, though often so complex and with so many variables that we cannot accurately predict. Take the weather, for example. It is a marvelously self-contained system with everything in perfect balance. Chaos—nothingness—with no explicable origin,

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<sup>1</sup> Cornelius Van Til, *Why I believe in God* (Philadelphia: Great Commission Publications, no date), 15.

produces exquisitely complex physical system capable of supporting an extremely fragile biological system in the midst of the ultimately severe environment of space.

People inhabit the world, though their presence is a cosmological accident (though the SETI project is sure to find other beings of similar cosmic accidents out there in space somewhere). People have separate and significant existence, though they derive from chaos. You believe in the autonomy of the individual. Autonomy implies meaning, of course. Liberty essentially means the exercise of *your* will. (I'm not sure about others. Once you admitted to being your own god.) You believe in making the world a civilized place through humanism. Humanism is a brand of universal goodness that accomplishes its good ends without God. Meaninglessness and chaos thus produce meaning, personal dignity, and liberty? Your humanism is my Christianity without God, and with many exceptions to avoid certain personal inconveniences. You have admitted that the only place where that kind of humanistic goodness has ever occurred has been in the context of a mature Christian heritage, where your ideals actually came to fruition under the tutelage and providence of God. People who love God and restrain their selfish passions upon the power of the Holy Spirit by faith produce a community of largely successful civility. You confess that only Christian societies have produced anything that approaches civil liberty and justice. Yet, you believe that somehow a powerful, humanistic civil government is inherently good and capable of wisdom. Such a government should force people also to be wise and good, who somehow are not otherwise capable of goodness—or even capable of authoritatively defining goodness.

On the other hand, God is only a myth. God doesn't show himself to you. Therefore, He cannot be. Of course, God would unduly limit your favored choice of beliefs and practice. God would deny a woman the freedom of choice to kill the fruit of her own womb, and man's dignity to engage in homosexual relationships. Moreover, it seems, God would deny the civil government the power to take care of everyone's medical needs. (God's Word indicates government is properly limited with its purpose to oversee civil justice—protecting the God-given rights of men; and re-distribution is stealing.) Medical needs are an entitled right! Though you are autonomous, you need an all-powerful government to provide security. It is wrong to kill, so murderers must not be executed. Self-defense is wrong, so it seems that while we might desire civility, we ought not actually to do anything about it when the bully and tyrant appears. Yet murdering babies in the womb is not actually killing. We will *regulate* everyone to eliminate crime.

Well, this perfectly rational system must have some rational basis for its existence. I ask, what is the basis for order in a universe which in its origin is complete chaos? I note that if one begins with chaos, it cannot be mere complexity. In complexity, we have wholes and relationship between wholes. From the structures of the greatest galaxies down to the very subatomic

particles, we have wholes formed of smaller wholes, each in exquisite relationship one to another. Unity in diversity, the equal ultimacy of the One and Many is a reflection of the Three Persons of the Holy Trinity—One God. In true chaos, we cannot have wholes of any kind! We must begin with broken pieces of some kind of non-wholes. We cannot even imagine chaos. It is nothingness. It is the nirvana of the Buddhists. For if we allow anything meaningful in the origin, any wholeness, we imply the Creator, which humanists cannot grant. Well, no, you confess no rational explanation for the irrational turning into the rational.

What about personal dignity and meaning? How does a chaotic universe produce something as meaningful as you are? Do you experience relationship and love? Yes. What is the rational source and origin for these things in a world of pure mechanistic determinism?

My friend has a highly developed sense of morality, of right and wrong, in the context of his humanistic ideal. What is the basis for that morality? Why is the protection of life important, but the life of the unborn is not? Shouldn't a world of chaotic and meaningless material cosmic accident have no morality? No answer.

If you live in a materially deterministic universe of pure accident, how is it that you have personal liberty? No answer.

In socialism, everything belongs to everyone. Rousseau claimed that private property was the beginning of social evil. Everything belongs to all. When you take a bite of your sandwich, at what point does the sandwich stop belonging to mankind at large, and becomes yours alone? On what rational basis? Why is it yours instead of someone else's?

Let me understand this. I am irrational because I believe in God. This is so in spite of the fact that the greatest civil morality with liberty, justice and generosity ever known grew out of a distinctly Christian culture. In fact, it was a very specific brand known as the Reformed Christian faith. I am brainwashed, though you recognize the success we have had in our completely Biblical form of education practiced in our home and the schools we administered. You acknowledge the sacrificial efforts of Christians to serve their fellow man—the Red political districts in America far outstrip the Blue political districts in philanthropy, for example—but Christians have no rational basis for our ways?

Well, yes, my friend admits, there are mysteries in his system and he will likely never know the rational origins of the things he believes. How is he then more rational, and I less so?

Returning to Dr. Van Til, notice he claims complete unity in his worldview. Even the most subjectively bizarre phenomena we must endure in this life occur in a system of reason and purpose. How do we navigate the apparent incongruities? We understand our heavenly Father is greater than all we know, think we know, or acknowledge that we cannot know. Within that

wonderful world of provision and goodness we live—as we trust our Father, no matter the mysteries—those who receive Him know that God’s ways are good and we can trust Him. His ways are true and good. Everything works together for the good to those who trust Christ Jesus and are called according to His purpose. How do I know? The Bible tells me so. But also, history tells me so. Even my own experience tells me so.

This is the season Christians celebrate the Resurrection of the very Son of God. God Himself come to earth as man. Jesus lived and suffered as man. He suffered and died—for our sake. And in the greatest triumph of history, He rose again from the dead. Because He lives, I live. And so do all who trust Him and accept Him on His terms.

What a choice we have! We may convince ourselves we are rational and believe in something out of nothing, meaning out meaninglessness, and life and love out of pure accident. We can live in the depressing belief that we live as nothing—an illusion of meaning. And when we are gone, we are swallowed up in nothing. This is life!?!

Otherwise, we may believe in the unity of life that God provides as our good Father. We appropriate the very Resurrection of Jesus Christ to our own conversion and live a life of complete meaning and unity—even now while we do not yet see clearly—darkly as through a poorly rendered glass—even unto eternity when we shall know just as we are known (1 Corinthians 13:12).