Bertrand Russell Through The Alleys Of Filipino Religiosity

Atty. Alden Reuben B. Luna, Ph.L
San Beda College

One is often told that it is a very wrong thing to attack religion, because religion makes men virtuous. So I am told; I have not noticed it.

- Emmanuel Levinas

Introduction

The rendezvous of the supernatural and man – a phrase which, although very limited, can be used as a simple way of illustrating what religion is. Religion, along with art and science, counts as one of the most fundamental and pervasive aspects of human civilization. "(It) has existed for as long as there have been human beings on the earth"[1].

Religion is not a novel masterpiece of the civilized world as we know it; nor is it an innovation ushered in by the educated or the pious. On the contrary, it has always been at the heart of humanity even before empires rose from the grounds of antiquity. Some scholars even say that religion is a by-product of "cultural evolutionism"[2].

Religion is not simply an institutionalization of man's assent to a spontaneous divine revelation; it is also an apparent off-shoot of his constant adaption to both his and his surrounding's ever changing needs[3] . It can also be described "as a natural outgrowth of humanity; a natural product of a brain built by natural selection to make sense of the world with a hodgepodge of tools whose collective output isn't wholly rational"[4], but is nevertheless nothing short of being human.

---

[1]Linda Trinkaus Zagzebski, Philosophy of Religion: An Historical Introduction, (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 1.

[2] Robert Wright, The Evolution of God, (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2009), 12.

[3]Edward Tylor, for example, saw animism as a natural early product of the same speculative curiosity that had led to modern thought. According to him, it had been the "infant philosophy of mankind", assembled by "ancient savage philosophers." It did what good theories are supposed to do: explain otherwise mysterious facts economically. (Ibid., 13)

[4]Ibid., 15.

However, the attempt of certain scholars and philosophers to explain the fundamental concept underlying religion went from digging beneath its very foundation, into a bold assertion that it is nothing more than a convenient way of addressing humanity's deepest tragedies and conundrums.

For one, Ludwig Feuerbach believes that much of the appeal of Christianity merely lies in its promise of immortality. According to him, a sundry of fears embrace humanity, but that of death is what sends chills into our spines the most. Christianity, in promising eternal life, offers to take this fear away from us. It is the idea of an expedient escape from human fears, particularly death, vis-à-vis the notion of eternal life that accounts for the attractiveness of religion, and its strong grip upon the human mind.[5]

Sigmund Freud, the father of psychoanalysis, went a step further by launching a direct attack into the very existence of religion. History shows that his path towards the field of psychoanalysis was actually fuelled by his opposition to religion. Freud believed that religion was a great hindrance to societal progress, and that it is merely a product of the mind, an illusion. According to him, the impetus that pulls humanity into embracing the idea of religion is nothing more than an upshot of "man's need to make his helplessness tolerable and built up from the material of memories of the helplessness of his own childhood and the childhood of the human race. It can clearly be seen that the possession of these (religious) ideas protects him in two directions – against the dangers of nature and Fate, and against the injuries that threaten him from the human society itself.[6]"

For Freud, as for Feuerbach, religion is nothing more than wish-fulfilment. He believed that religion is a reversion to childish patterns of thought in response to feelings of helplessness and guilt, and that the idea of "god" is only a creation of the mind in order to pacify man in his seemingly endless miseries[7]. Furthermore,

[5] Ludwig Feuerbach, The Essence of Christianity, trans. Marian Evans, (London: Trubner & Co., Ludgate Hill, 1881, 10.

[6] Sigmund Freud, ***The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XXI: The Future of an Illusion, Civilization and its Discontents, and Other Works (1927),*** 17.

[7] Life in this world serves a higher purpose; no doubt it is not easy to guess what that purpose is, but it certainly signifies a perfecting of man's nature. It is probably the spiritual part of man, the soul, which in the course of time has so slowly and unwillingly detached itself from the body, that is the object of this elevation and exaltation. Everything that happens in this world is

for him, most people who cling to religious doctrines only do so because they have been accustomed to it[8]. Religion, to him is a childish delusion while on the other hand atheism is a grown-up realism. He considered this as a psychological problem.

Moreover religion, for Karl Marx, is no different from other social institutions in terms of its dependency upon the material and economic realities in a given society. It has no independent history; instead it is the creature of productive forces. The religious world is but the reflex of the real world. From this notion, he went on to express his critique on religion.

> *Religious distress is at the same time the expression of real distress and the protest against real distress. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of a spiritless situation. It is the opium of the people. The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is required for their real happiness. The demand to give up the illusion about its condition is the demand to give up a condition, which needs illusions.* [9]

For him, religion's purpose is to create illusory fantasies for the poor. Economic realities prevent them from finding true happiness in this life, so religion tells them that this is an acceptable situation

---

an expression of the intentions of an intelligence superior to us, which in the end, though its ways and byways are difficult to follow, orders everything for the best—that is, to make it enjoyable for us. Over each one of us there watches a benevolent Providence which is only seemingly stern and which will not suffer us to become a plaything of the over-mighty and pitiless forces of nature. Death itself is not extinction, is not a return to inorganic lifelessness, but the beginning of a new kind of existence which lies on the path of development to something higher. And, looking in the other direction, this view announces that the same moral laws which our civilizations have set up govern the whole universe as well, except that they are maintained by a supreme court of justice with incomparably more power and consistency. In the end all good is rewarded and all evil punished, if not actually in this form of life then in the later existences that begin after death. In this way all the terrors, the sufferings and the hardships of life are destined to be obliterated. Life after death, which continues life on earth just as the invisible part of the spectrum joins on to the visible part, brings us all the perfection that we may perhaps have missed here. And the superior wisdom which directs this course of things, the infinite goodness that expresses itself in it, the justice that achieves its aim in it—these are the attributes of the divine beings who also created us and the world as a whole, or rather, of the one divine being into which, in our civilization, all the gods of antiquity have been condensed. The people which first succeeded in thus concentrating the divine attributes was not a little proud of the advance. It had laid open to view the father who had all along been hidden behind every divine figure as its nucleus. Fundamentally this was a return to the historical beginnings of the idea of God. (Ibid., 17-18).

[8]We ought to believe because our forefathers believed. But these ancestors of ours were far more ignorant than we are…The proofs they have left us are set down in writings which themselves bear every mark of untrustworthiness. They are full of contradictions, revisions and falsifications, and where they speak of factual confirmations they are themselves unconfirmed. It does not help much to have it asserted that their wording, or even their content only originates from divine revelation; for this assertion is itself one of the doctrines whose authenticity is under examination, and no proposition can be a proof of itself. (Ibid., 25-26).

[9]Karl Marx, Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right, 6.

because they will find true happiness in the next life.[10] To him, the social function of religion is merely to cloud people's minds and anaesthesize them from the sufferings of their alienated condition. He went further by saying,

> *To abolish religion as the illusory happiness of the people is to demand their real happiness. The demand to give up illusions about the existing state of affairs is the demand to give up a state of affairs that needs illusions. The criticism of religion is therefore in embryo the criticism of the vale of tears, the halo of which is religion.*[11]

Accordingly, the remark of Marx that religion is the opium of the people is but part and parcel of his general theory of dialectical materialism. In a nutshell, according to this theory, history is the ongoing result of a constant tension between two classes, an upper class of rulers/owners and a ruled and exploited underclass. Religion, actually, is not the problem per se, but the manifestation of the great injustice [that wields the scepter of the society;] an institution whose sole purpose is for the momentary consolation to the people's despair.[12]

While some of the above-mentioned concepts might cause the ire of many Filipinos, a closer look at our religious milieu might cry a different tune from how religiosity is being portrayed in our society. For most Filipino Christians, to dig deeper into the abyss of one's faith is like crossing the boundary of unfaithfulness to God – which is commonly frowned upon in a predominantly Christian nation like ours. Many are afraid to confront their doubts because of the fear that this attitude is a thoroughfare towards the furnace of hell. But maybe it is exactly in unveiling our innermost doubts that we can better understand our own faith. Maybe a little shake of faith is not necessarily bound towards unbelief; maybe it can serve as a tool to reestablish and rejuvenate its personal roots to each believer. Bertrand Russell challenges this orientation. To him, since God and faith are matters which cannot be explained thoroughly and lie beyond the niche of probable knowledge, then there is no reason to even consider them.

[10] Himel Shagor, Marx and Religion: A Brief Study.
[11] Karl Marx, Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law, 10.
[12] Douglas J. Soccio, Archetypes of Wisdom, (California, USA: Thomson Wadsworth, 2007), 12.

Russell's Critique Of Religion

Bertrand Russell was part of the parade of scholars who think coldly about religion. His critique of religion is gushing forth from the school of thought from which he emerged. He was well known for his works on mathematical logic and analytic philosophy. Because of these he became a leading thnker of the discipline known as Analytic philosophy[13], which attacks philosophical problems by analyzing the language in which they are expressed. To him, the traditional arguments as regards the existence of God run through the alleys of conundrum in the way they are expressed. For him, these arguments are full of absurdities and cannot satisfy the demands of logic and language.

Furthermore, from a practical vantage point, in Russell's opinion the teaching of religion to children inhibits their ability to think clearly and to cooperate with others whose beliefs differ from theirs. Far from being the source of great contributions to the civilizations of the world, religion has done nothing more than help fix the calendar and provoke Egyptian priests to chronicle eclipses.[14] For Russell, "religion is based…primarily and mainly upon fear. It is partly the terror of the unknown and partly…the wish to feel that you have a kind of elder brother who will stand by you in all your troubles and disputes. Fear is the basis of the whole thing – fear of the mysterious, fear of defeat, fear of death. Fear is

[13]Analytic philosophy, also called linguistic philosophy, a loosely related set of approaches to philosophical problems, dominant in Anglo-American philosophy from the early 20th century, that emphasizes the study of language and the logical analysis of concepts. Analytic philosophers conduct conceptual investigations that characteristically, though not invariably, involve studies of the language in which the concepts in question are, or can be, expressed. According to one tradition in analytic philosophy (sometimes referred to as formalism), for example, the definition of a concept can be determined by uncovering the underlying logical structures, or "logical forms," of the sentences used to express it. A perspicuous representation of these structures in the language of modern symbolic logic, so the formalists thought, would make clear the logically permissible inferences to and from such sentences and thereby establish the logical boundaries of the concept under study.

Another tradition, sometimes referred to as informalism, similarly turned to the sentences in which the concept was expressed but instead emphasized their diverse uses in ordinary language and everyday situations, the idea being to elucidate the concept by noting how its various features are reflected in how people actually talk and act. Even among analytic philosophers whose approaches were not essentially either formalist or informalist, philosophical problems were often conceived of as problems about the nature of language. An influential debate in analytic ethics, for example, concerned the question of whether sentences that express moral judgments (e.g., "It is wrong to tell a lie") are descriptions of some feature of the world, in which case the sentences can be true or false, or are merely expressions of the subject's feelings—comparable to shouts of "Bravo!" or "Boo!"—in which case they have no truth-value at all. Thus, in this debate the philosophical problem of the nature of right and wrong was treated as a problem about the logical or grammatical status of moral statements. - Analytic Philosophy, http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/22568/analytic-philosophy (Accessed on October 23, 2014)

[14] Rev. Ralph Allan Smith, Why Bertrand Russell Was Not a Christian.

the parent of cruelty, and therefore (it is no wonder if cruelty and religion have gone hand-in-hand). It is because fear is at the basis of those two things."[15]

Specifically, the centerfold of his critique is Christianity. In his work Why I Am not a Christian, he starts by defining who a Christian is:

> *I think, however, that there are two different items which are quite essential to anyone calling himself a Christian. The first is one of a dogmatic nature -- namely, that you must believe in God and immortality. If you do not believe in those two things, I do not think that you can properly call yourself a Christian. Then, further than that, as the name implies, you must have some kind of belief about Christ. The Mohammedans, for instance, also believe in God and immortality, and yet they would not call themselves Christians. I think you must have at the very lowest the belief that Christ was, if not divine, at least the best and wisest of men. If you are not going to believe that much about Christ, I do not think that you have any right to call yourself a Christian. Of course, there is another sense which you find in Whitaker's Almanack and in geography books, where thepopulation of the world is said to be divided into Christians, Mohammedans, Buddhists, fetish worshipers, and so on; but in that sense we are all Christians. The geography books counts us all in, but that is a purely geographical sense, which I suppose we can ignore.*[16]

From his self-crafted definition of what it is to be a Christian is, he gave two general propositions why he is not one. He said, "Therefore I take it that when I tell you why I am not a Christian I have to tell you two different things: first, why I do not believe in God and in immortality; and, secondly, why I do not think that Christ was the best and wisest of men, although I grant him a very high degree of moral goodness."[17]

As mentioned above he criticized the traditional arguments of proving God's existence. The reason being that according to him, they fall short of the parameter of absolute certainty. He started by saying:

> *To come to this question of the existence of God, it is a large and serious question, and if I were to attempt to deal with it in any adequate manner I should have to keep you here until Kingdom*

[15]Bertrand Russell, Why I am Not a Christian: an Examination of the God-Idea and Christianity, (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1927), 1.

[16]Ibid., 2.

[17]Ibid.

Come, so that you will have to excuse me if I deal with it in a somewhat summary fashion. You know, of course, that the Catholic Church has laid it down as a dogma that the existence of God can be proved by the unaided reason. This is a somewhat curious dogma, but it is one of their dogmas. They had to introduce it because at one time the Freethinkers adopted the habit of saying that there were such and such arguments which mere reason might urge against the existence of God, but of course they knew as a matter of faith that God did exist. The arguments and the reasons were set out at great length, and the Catholic Church felt that they must stop it. Therefore they laid it down that the existence of God can be proved by the unaided reason, and they had to set up what they considered were arguments to prove it. There are, of course, a number of them, but I shall take only a few. [18]

The First Cause Argument

The first argument that Russell Contested is the First Cause argument. The argument of First Cause runs like this: *everything that exists has a cause, and since a being cannot cause itself (or its own existence) then one's existence must be caused by another. And so to avoid infinite progression, there must necessarily be a First Cause whose existence is not caused by another and through whom all other existence comes from; and this we call God.*

And his objection to it is very simple: if we ask about the cause of the Universe, there seems to be no reason not to ask about the cause of God. And if we insist that God needs no cause, then we might as well say that the Universe needs no cause. As Bertrand Russell himself wrote: *"If there can be anything without a cause, it may just as well be the world as god, so that there cannot be any validity in this argument."*[19]

According to Russell, there is no real reason we can give for insisting that the world must have a cause. It's just too incongruous because no matter what is said, the statement would just go in circles. For him, the argument of the First Cause is logically fallacious that he cannot but reject it; it does not necessarily follow that since everything has a cause then there must be a God. Furthermore, he considers this argument as something that is old-fashioned and thus it cannot serve any purpose in the contemporary world. In other words, the present era have already

[18]Ibid., 3.
[19]Ibid.

fashioned the necessary answers to the riddles and dilemmas of the past and that even the arguments for God's existence would find no place in it. As Russell claimed

> *"the argument is no better than the Indian's view of the world where they just compose presuppositions to escape the further inquiries...There is no reason to suppose that the world had a beginning at all. The idea that things must have a beginning is really due to the poverty of our imagination. Therefore, perhaps, I need not waste any more time upon the argument about the First Cause."*[20]

The Natural Law Argument

Against this argument, he made two clear points. The first is that this is just the result of the confusion brought about by the understanding of Natural Law, human law and conventions and chance. According to him:

> *"(this) was a favorite argument all through the eighteenth century, especially under the influence of Sir Isaac Newton and his cosmogony. People observed the planets going around the sun according to the law of gravitation, and they thought that God had given a behest to these planets to move in that particular fashion, and that was why they did so. That was, of course, a convenient and simple explanation that saved them the trouble of looking any further for any explanation of the law of gravitation."*[21]

Russell's second point is that we can ask "why does God made these laws rather than others?" And here he offers us a dilemma. Either God had a reason or he didn't. If he didn't, says Russell,

> *"you then find that there is something that is not subject to law, and so your train of natural law is interrupted. If you say, as more orthodox theologians do, that in all the laws which God issues he had a reason for giving those laws rather than others -- the reason, of course, being to create the best universe, although you would never think it to look at it -- if there was a reason for the laws which God gave, then God himself was subject to law, and therefore you do not get any advantage by introducing God as an intermediary. You really have a law outside and anterior to the divine edicts, and God does not serve your purpose, because he is not the ultimate law-giver."*[22]

[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid., 4.
[22] Ibid., 5.

In a nutshell, if this is the case then God is not God since he had no control on everything. The fact, according to him, that not everything seemed to follow the so-called "Natural Law" and that science had started laying down an ample of proofs and facts about what have been believed as within the realm of the divinity gave Russell a hard time accepting the said argument. For him, in the conflict between religion and science/reason, the latter has had the upper hand[23]. It was for him absurd because it defies logic and is thus invalid.

The Argument from Design

Based on this argument, it is said that everything in the world is a design of a higher intellectual entity and everything is made just so that we can manage to live in the world. One updated version of this argument is Crafted by William Paley: "Suppose I had a watch upon the ground…When we come to inspect the watch, we perceive…that its several parts are framed and put together for a purpose, e.g. that they are so formed and adjusted as to produce motion, and that motion so regulated as to point out the hour of the day…This mechanism being observed…the inference we think is inevitable, that the watch must have had a maker… who completely comprehended its construction and designed its use."[24]

Russell offers two objections. The first is that much of what the design argument was intended to deal with is dealt with by evolution. We are adapted to our environment, roughly, because if our ancestors had not adapted thus, they would not have survived. And the mechanisms of adaptation involve a healthy dose of random genetic mixing and mutation. Therefore, the argument from design finds itself just a mere shadow of the growing knowledge being pulled out of the earth. It was, according to him, something that has just gained popularity during medieval

[23]According to Russell, between religion and science there has been a prolonged conflict, in which, until the last few years, science has invariably proved victorious…Creeds are the intellectual source of the conflict between religion and science, but the bitterness of the opposition has been due to the connection of creeds with Churches and with moral codes. Those who questioned creeds weakened the authority, and might diminish the incomes, of Churchmen; moreover, they were thought to be undermining morality, since moral duties were deduced by Churchmen from creeds. Secular rulers, therefore, as well as Churchmen, felt that they had a good reason to fear the revolutionary teaching of the men of science." (Bertrand Russell, Religion and Science , 1935,) 7-8

[24]Bruce Waller, Coffee and Philosophy, (New York: Pearson Education, Inc., 2006), 27.

period because of the lack of the necessary to support so-and-so. Russell's further objection is that the world is too bleak a place for it to be plausible that it was designed. And the example he gave is the existence of evil which is an obvious fact. He said:

> *When we come to look into this argument from design, it is a most astonishing thing that people can believe that this world, with all the things that are in it, with all its defects, should be the best that omnipotence and omniscience have been able to produce in million(s) of years...Moreover, if you accept the ordinary laws of science, you have to suppose that human life and life in general on this planet will die out in due course: it is merely a flash in the pan; it is a stage in the decay of the solar system; at a certain stage of decay you get the sort of conditions and temperature and so forth which are suitable to protoplasm, and there is life for a short time in the life of the whole solar system. You see in the moon the sort of thing to which the earth is tending – something dead, cold and lifeless.* [25]

Charles Darwin shares the same perspective. He said:

> *"I had no intention to write atheistically. But I own that I cannot see as plainly as others do and as I should wish to do, evidence of design and beneficence on all sides of us. There seems to me too much misery in the world. I cannot persuade myself that a beneficent and omnipotent God would have designedly created the Ichneumonidae with the express intention of their feeding within the living bodies of caterpillars, or that a cat should play with mice."*[26]

Because of all the ironies that he felt are corollary with the aforementioned principle, he was led to the utter rejection of the argument of design as nothing but a flimsy attempt at consoling humanity of its miseries and tragedies.

Moral Argument for Deity

This argument run along this lines: we need God to explain why there are any moral principles at all -- to explain how there comes to be a difference between right and wrong. In other words, God is the basis of all moral principles. Here, Russell gave his counterclaim by saying that if the difference between right and wrong is merely a result of God's arbitrary fiat, then it is meaningless to say that

[25]Russell, Why I am Not a Christian, 6.
[26]Charles Darwin, The Autobiography of Charles Darwin, (London: Collins, 1958).

God is good. Furthermore, he said that if it makes sense to say that God is good, there must be a different basis for the rightness and wrongness of things than God's will. Thus, it is wrong to say that God is the basis of all moral principles since they are independent of God's will. And so it does not follow that there is a God simply because of the existence of moral principles.

Argument for the Remedying of Injustice

Pursuant to this argument, without God, there is no justice; we need to posit God in order to vouch cosmic justice. And this Russell readily dismissed. Looking around, there would always be a cry againts injustice. And because of this phenomenon, it was difficult for Russell to affirm this argument. According to him, if the universe seems unjust, then the evidence seems to say that the world is not just after all. And to say that there must be a God to remedy injustice is to escape from the facts and evidences laid. He said:

> *...so they say that there must be a God, and that there must be Heaven and Hell in order that in the long run there may be justice. That is a very curious argument. If you looked at the matter from a scientific point of view, you would say, "After all, I only know this world. I do not know about the rest of the universe, but so far as one can argue at all on probabilities one would say that probably this world is a fair sample, and if there is injustice here then the odds are that there is injustice elsewhere also." Supposing you got a crate of oranges that you opened, and you found all the top layer of oranges bad, you would not argue: "The underneath ones must be good, so as to redress the balance." You would say: "Probably the whole lot is a bad consignment;" and that is really what a scientific person would argue about the universe. He would say: "Here we find in this world a great deal of injustice, and so far as that goes that is a reason for supposing that justice does not rule in the world; and therefore so far as it goes it affords a moral argument against deity and not in favor of one."*[27]

Thus, this argument is for him illogical and invalid because saying that God is needed for justice and yet the world utters a different tune treads through the path of inconsistencies.

[27]Ibid., 8.

...in a nutshell...

Russell said: "My conclusion is that there is no reason to believe any of the dogmas of traditional theology and, further, that there is no reason to wish that they were true. Man, in so far as he is not subject to natural forces, is free to work out his own destiny. The responsibility is his, and so is the opportunity."[28] Furthermore, he added that: "Dogma demands authority, rather than intelligent thought, as the source of opinion; it requires persecution of heretics and hostility to unbelievers; it asks of its disciples that they should inhibit natural kindness in favor of systematic hatred."[29]

For him, religion merely suppresses man's natural inclination for intellectual pursuit of the truth. Religion is somewhat a left over from the infancy of our intelligence, and will soon fade away as we adopt reason and science as our guidelines. "The whole conception of a God is a conception derived from the ancient oriental despotisms. It is a conception quite unworthy of free men.... We ought to stand up and look the world frankly in the face. We ought to make the best we can of the world, and *if it is not so good as we wish, after all it will still be better than what these others have made of it in all these ages."*[30] Since neither religion nor faith can be explained thoroughly by reason, and that it neither can be dragged down within the realm of precise scientific embrace, then both should be dismissed as nothing but poorly woven invention of an overly imaginative minds of certain people. Science, not the dogmas of religion, should be the foundation of human civilization. Reason, not faith, should be the language of all humanity. "Even if the open windows of science at first make us shiver after the cozy indoor warmth of traditional humanizing myths, in the end the fresh air brings vigor, and the great spaces have a splendor all their own."[31]

[28]Bertrand Russell, Is There a God?, commissioned by, but never published in, Illustrated Magazine (1952: repr. The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell, Volume 11: Last Philosophical Testament, 1943-68, ed. John G Slater and Peter Köllner (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 543-48 quoted from S T Joshi, Atheism: A Reader

[29]Bertrand Russell, The Degeneration of Belief.

[30]Russell, Why I Am Not a Christian?, 6.

[31]Bertrand Russell, What I Believe?, 5.

A CONSTRUCTIVE RESPONSE TO RUSSELL'S CRITIQUE OF RELIGION

My response to the criticisms argued by Russell as regards religion will be two-fold: the first one is a presentation of the apparent insufficiencies in his critique of religion; the second are points from Russell's works which, in my belief, would help strengthen the withering authenticity of religiosity in the Philippines.

To start with, it must first be made clear that Russell himself admits that one source of his original interest in philosophy was the desire to discover whether or not a sound intellectual defense could be provided for any sort of religious beliefs. But, as can be gleaned from the discussions made above, he was so committed to pure reason that although at the outset he wanted to believe, he chose to succumb to the dictates of his reason on the ground that religion and faith cannot be grasped in its entirety by the human mind. He was so engrossed with reason and science that he was also led to assert that one should only believe what is warranted by sufficient scientific evidence; all others which falls short of the empirical demands of science should pushed aside, or otherwise suspend judgment.

Moreover, this animosity towards religion can also be attributed to his deep methodological commitment to both rationalism and scientific empiricism: Russell tends to treat "religion" as either a body of doctrine to be intellectually analyzed, or as a phenomenon to be observed objectively from the outside. In the first case, Russell found flawed arguments; in the second, flawed institutions perpetrating violence and oppression. His own spiritual insights belonged to a different order – and although they changed his life deeply, they were not allowed to change his philosophical position.[32]

"I wish to propose for the reader's favourable consideration a doctrine which may, I fear, appear wildly paradoxical and subversive. The doctrine in question is this: that it is undesirable to believe a proposition when there is no ground whatever for

[32]Claire Carlisle, Bertrand Russell on the Science v Religion Debate, http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/belief/2013/nov/25/bertrand-russell-science-religion, accessed on November 7, 2014.

supposing it true."[33] This was Bertrand Russell's own words while referring to the belief on God or Christianity despite the least grounds to support such convictions. The general flaw, I believe, with Bertrand Russell's arguments and criticisms is the fact that he got stuck within the quagmires of "reason". His skepticism is so bound to the limited frames of the philosophical endeavor which he and his comrades had established – as if nothing lies beyond the confines of their narrow noggins. I am not saying that it is wrong to utilize the tools that our reason offers us; but to assume that the whole kit and caboodle of reality is only that which their limited minds project (and all others being considered as a bunch of non-sense freaks in a circus parade) is not so "philosophical" after all.

As physical beings, we only experience reality in piecemeal. Our perception of reality is never in its entirety. Perception is thus understood as "a manner in which we, as embodied beings, are projected into the world"[34] The body is the "stage director of my perception"[35] and the very necessity for our situatedness – for my being-in-the-world. We grasp space through our bodily situation. A "corporeal or postural schema"[36] gives us at every moment a global, practical, and implicit notion of the relation between our body and things, of our hold on them…For us the body is much more than an instrument or a means; it is our expression in the world, the visible form of our intentions.[37]

This perspectivity and situatedness is at the same time the very reason for the ambiguity of experience – for, as aforementioned, we never experience a thing in its totality. We are only occupying a particular situation; we only perceive from a single nook at a given time, seeing only a part of the object. And since our embodied manner of existence is finite, it only goes to show that every human situation is ambiguous and every perspective incomplete.

[33]Bertand Russell, On the Value of Scepticism.

[34]Dermot Moran, Introduction to Phenomenology, 424.

[35]Merleau-Ponty, Visible and Invisible, 8.

[36]It is my body which makes this piece of paper I am writing on stand out for me against the background of a table filled with a circus of books and other jams or, alternatively, enables me to shift my gaze towards the cell phone next to the cup of coffee so that the cell phone momentarily becomes the figure while this paper recedes to the background. My bodily space enables me to survey the objects within my vicinity. The objects, in turn, form a system around me, displaying themselves while concealing others. "If it is true that I am conscious of my body via the world, that it is the unperceived term in the center of the world towards which all objects turn their face, it is true for the same reason that my body is the pivot of the world" (Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, 82).

[37] Merleau-Ponty, An Unpublished Text, 5.

This ambiguity is a testimony of our relationship with the world, with the real. It is the mark of our embodiment. It is a reminder of our finitude; but it is, at the same time, an invitation to discover new perspectives and never be imprisoned within the peripheries of our juxtaposed worlds. There is always something more to explore, something that escapes our grasps, our perception. So much so that there is indeed in things the intermingling dialog of absence and presence, transcendence and immanence, visible and invisible.

> *The ipseity is, of course, never reached: each aspect of the things which falls to our perception is still only an invitation to perceive beyond it, still only a momentary halt in the perceptual process. If the thing itself were reached, it would be from that moment arrayed before us and stripped of its mystery. It would cease to exist as a thing at the very moment when we thought to possess it. What makes the 'reality' of the thing is therefore precisely what snatches it from our grasp.*[38]

The transcendent and the invisible should not be seen as negativity, but rather "other dimensionality"[39]; this is precisely because phenomenon is a constitution of both the immanence and transcendence, of both the visible and the invisible. Reality always escapes man's attempts to imprison it within the confines of reason - for never do we (or can we) perceive the reality in its totality; our perception is always perspectival. As one moves towards a thing through perception – in its immanence – one comes to realize that there is more to what is given – a transcendence – or the possibilities of the way the other and unseen side may unfold. Not everything we see is real; and conversely, not because we don't see, doesn't mean it isn't real.

Therefore, Russell's overwhelming devotion to the realm of reason and science without accounting for the slightest possibility that such cannot thoroughly explain everything, and in the process hastily burying six feet under those which do not conform with their obviously limited parameters, is misplaced, if not stubborn. Not everything can be quantified. Quantity and language are limited, and hence cannot submerge beneath their grasps the vast entirety of any single reality of being. Therefore, faith, religion and God,

[38]Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, 233.
[39]Merleau-Ponty, The Visible and the Invisble, 236.

which are part and parcel of that niche which cannot be entirely quantified, and which would always escape the objectification of words, should not be dismissed as mere fiction of the mind, or an end-result of the frailty and misery of man's flight.

More than anything, his ire towards religion seems to be based upon his own personal experience. (Because) In order to understand the real Russell, we should not overlook his childhood religious experiences — which consisted mainly of Unitarian indoctrination by his Victorian grandmother. During this period Russell, in a quiet, reflective manner, came to rebel against his grandmother's moralistic asceticism. This does not, of course, justify Russell's present-day anti-Christian position nor does it account for his adherence to humanistic and scientific rationalism. But herein probably lies the formative source of Russell's religious orientation. For the Unitarians are non-conformists who, as Williston Walker[40] points out, set themselves against all creeds of human composition.[41]

Finally, Russell's critique is hardly philosophical for he ends up being the very close-minded person that he thought was Christianity.

> *If Christianity is true, then it is reasonable for Russell to appeal to logic, for Christianity teaches that a rational God created the world as a rational system and that He also created man with a capacity to understand both God and the world. Christians do not believe that man's understanding can ever be exhaustive. Man can never perfectly understand himself, the world, or God. But man can have true understanding because God has created the world in such a way that the world reveals truth to man, and God has given man special revelation, especially in Holy Scripture, to teach man what he could not learn from the creation and guide man in the correct interpretation of the creation. In short, knowledge is possible if the world is what the Bible defines it to be. Russell rejects the Biblical view, but at the same time, he attempts to graft the fruits of this worldview onto his irrational view.*
>
> *Again, if Christianity is true, then it is reasonable for Russell to appeal to ethical norms, for Christianity teaches that there are ethical absolutes which transcend time and place. God is a righteous God. Whatever contradicts His will is sinful and evil, in any generation, in*

[40]Williston Walker, A History of the Christian Church, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1959), 443.

[41]Arnold Weigel, A Critique of Bertrand Russell's Religious Position, Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society, (Ontorio, Canada: Thornhill) 157.

any place in heaven or on earth. Russell rejects this view of ethics, but in its place he has nothing to offer that can serve as a standard to criticize Christ or anyone else.[42]

...a wake-up call

However, although I believe that Russell's critique falls short of its main goal of dismantling the fundamentals of religion, I equally confide in the fact that his vilification serves as resounding reminder of the worsening paradoxes of Filipino religiosity. As discussed above, two of his criticisms against religion can be summarized in two-fold: first it is ultimately based upon man's fear for death and the unknown; second, its dogmas have cast anchors upon its members which they blindly and involuntarily ascribed to because such doctrines have metamorphosed into a habit. And having spent nine years in the seminary, and what seems to be an epoch of teaching Theology subjects, I have been a witness to the many Catholic faith clichés that have anchored hard on our society – clichés that Russell had himself seen and experienced. The four corners of the classroom is actually a good place to start, if I am to cite a few examples.

"Do you believe in God?" – a question that I always throw to my students to kick things off in my Theology classes; setting the pace, as others would call it. A hodge-podge of confident, if not arrogant, yeses and indifferent nods is what usually boomerangs back to me. And in order to tickle their imaginations, and hopefully trigger their scarce interests, a little bit further, I would ask them anew: "Do you still go to mass?", "Do you still read the Bible?". And unsurprisingly the confident affirmation slowly fades, the clatter of unwanted noises dies down, and the deafening silence of doubt wields the scepter. And alongside the momentary hush is the seemingly perpetual scream of uncertainty – a withering mask of prestige and gravity: is religion still relevant? Juxtapose this with the overwhelming contradiction being presented by the fact that the Philippines, while being a predominantly Catholic/Christian nation, has also been a breeding ground for freaks and corrupt politicians and undisciplined and unruly citizenry. A nation where most are being taught to give, and yet many suffer within the claws

[42]Smith, Why Bertrand Russell Was Not a Christian, 24.

of poverty.

Every January, the Feast of the Black Nazarene serves as a welcome sight of Filipino religiosity. Each year, it undeniably creates a big fuss – a spectacle, I might say; as Black Nazarene devotees congest the streets and alleys of Manila. Towels flying; voices resonating in harmonious melodies of cheers and shrieks; people diving in and out of the swarm of devotees whose goal is simple – to at least catch a glimpse of the Nazarene. But while the mission is meek, the execution is almost beyond the realm of sanity. On its surface, they seemingly portray the depth of Filipino faith – but looking the event vis-à-vis other attending circumstances pulls into the scepter doubts as to the sincerity and genuineness of this so-call "faith". Which now boils down to the question: is this really a clear showing of a genuine devotion, or a mere desperate resort and escape from the quagmire of sufferings and problems they find themselves in? Is there depth in their chants of praise and worship, or are they all but part of an old-aged tradition which has simply been part of their system? My answer to this is that it is a little bit of both.

One of the key characteristics of religion is the realm of mystical experience. Over and above the intellectual appreciation of religion, these experiences seemingly takes precedence as more often than not, it appeals to the affective and emotive side of a human person. This is especially true with Filipinos, who are known for being emotional and sensitive. In Quiapo, for instance, most of the devotees of the Black Nazarene are either alleged recipients of some sort of miraculous gifts from God or are hoping to have their cups also filled with such blessing. According to William Rowe[43], mystical experiences of the divine can either be veridical (a genuine encounter with absolute oneness) or delusory[44]. Hence, with Filipino religiosity as the context, are these religious gatherings really expressions of profound faith to God, or a sorry sight of mass hysteria? Again, to this, I have to say it is an amalgam of these two contradicting realities.

Albert Einstein said: "*The further the spiritual evolution of mankind advances, the more certain it seems to me that the path*

[43] Philosophy of Religion: An Introduction, (California, USA: Thomson Wadsworth, 2007).

[44]According to Bertrand Russell, a mystic, like the drunkard, produces abnormal bodily and mental states within himself. Such states, he argues, lead to abnormal, unreliable perceptions, perceptions which are more than likely delusory. (Ibid., 84-85).

to genuine religiosity does not lie through the fear of life, and the fear of death, and blind faith, but through striving after rational knowledge." [45] Many utter the words, "I believe in God…", which resonate as nothing more than echoes from a banging gong devoid of meaning as they do not genuinely manifest in their actions. Some hold firmly to the doctrines and teachings of the Church without really understanding the reason behind the letters and inscriptions. Still others follow the same path of religiosity only because it is the road where the greater majority of the populace trekking – because it is what we got used to.

Faith ought to be a personal assent to God – an assent which gushes forth from one's own individual encounter with the divine, not necessarily through the grandeur of miracles, but more importantly in the routineness of day-to-day living. It should not solely be based upon what others say or upon the panoramas being offered by culture and tradition; rather, it must be juxtaposed with one's attempt to understand for himself the reason behind the belief – the purpose of each affirmation. Neither should its bedrock be made of emotions alone; instead it must be amalgamated with reason and intelligence – a humble attempt to understand the tenets and contents of faith, without falling into the trench of arrogance like that of Russell's critique of religion. To doubt or push the query button does not necessarily lead to disbelief; on the contrary, it deepens the very foundation of one's faith. Reason and faith must go hand-in-hand; religion and science must walk through the same alley of enabling the people to understand life better, rather than reinforcing the dividing line created by history between them.

But ultimately, all such attempt of understanding one's faith must be geared towards putting the letters of all those holy books into a more meaningful practice. Rather than asking what you can get from your religion or from God, ask what you can do for your religion – and eventually, for others. Each one of us in constant pursuit for meaning, which brings us to the physical, the metaphysical, sometimes to the delusional, and back. And since the world we live in is never a private realm but is rather shared by all, we ought to be open that one's perspective is never the entirety of reality. I see something you do not see and vice versa. Or even when two persons are gazing at the same mountain, the

[45] Albert Einstein, Science and Religion, 5.

way each other sees the mountain will stay different. But it is precisely these distinct points of view that make human relations more meaningful – for there is always something to share. Indeed, meaningful relations do not rest with ontic commonalities, of empty traces, of myopic simulations; if there is something that must be shared by two individuals, that should definitely be their respective quest for meaning – a doctrine which is embodied in almost all religion, but is not exclusive to religion. We are all called towards a dialectic relationship with each other; an active communion mediated by language, culture, freedom and a single horizon towards the weaving of one single history which transcends the language of either religion and science.

Religious convictions such as empathy, charity and intersubjectivity is not something which we reduce to mere words in sermons and in novels of various sorts; it is something done, something that is lived.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Darwin, Charles. *The Autobiography of Charles Darwin*. (London: Collins, 1958).

Einstein, Albert. *Science and Religion. London:* Collins, 1980.

Feuerbach, Ludwig. *The Essence of Christianity, trans.* Marian Evans. London: Trubner & Co., Ludgate Hill, 1881.

Freud, Sigmund.*The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XXI: The Future of an Illusion, Civilization and its Discontents, and Other Works.* 1927.

Marx, Karl. *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law.* London: Collins, 1985.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *Phenomenology of Perception. Trans.* Colin Smith. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962.

_____. *The Visible and the Invisible. Trans.* Alden L. Fisher. Boston: Beacon Press, 1963.

Moran, Dermot. *Introduction to Phenomenology.* New York: Routledge, 2004.

Russell, Bertrand. *Why I am Not a Christian: an Examination of the God-Idea and Christianity.* London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd. 1927.

_____. I**s There a God?,** commissioned by, but never published in, Illustrated Magazine (1952: repr. T*he Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell, Volume 11: Last Philosophical Testament,* 1943-68, ed. John G Slater and Peter Köllner. London: Routledge, 1997.

_____. *On the Value of Scepticism.* London: Routledge, 1997.
Smith, Ralph Allan. Why Bertrand Russell Was Not a Christian.
Soccio, Douglas J. *Archetypes of Wisdom.* California, USA: Thomson Wadsworth. 2007.
Walker, Williston. *A History of the Christian Church.* New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1959.
Waller, Bruce. *Coffee and Philosophy.* New York: Pearson Education, Inc., 2006. 27.
Weigel, Arnold. *A Critique of Bertrand Russell's Religious Position, Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society.* Ontorio, Canada: Thornhill.
Wright, Robert. *The Evolution of God.* New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2009.
Zagzebski, Linda Trinkaus. *Philosophy of Religion: An Historical Introduction.* Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing. 2007.
Philosophy of Religion: An Introduction. California, USA: Thomson Wadsworth. 2007.