

**ESSAYS
PHILOSOPHICAL**

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Essays philosophical by Brother Azarias

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BY
BROTHER AZARIAS
Of the Brothers of the Christian Schools

WITH PREFACE BY
THE RT. REV. JOHN J. KEANE, D. D.

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PREFACE.

BROTHER AZARIAS, as Christian educator and leader of thought, has rendered such service to the youth of our generation as deserves their lasting gratitude. The republication of his writings, while the most appropriate monument to himself, will make him a benefactor to generations yet to come.

Having consecrated his life to the humble, yet sublime vocation of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, his exceptional abilities were entirely devoted to that training of the young in knowledge and in virtue which alone deserves to be called education. Along that upward pathway of the mind and heart he advanced with his disciples to higher and higher levels. Following the bent of his genius, the needs of his scholars, and the guidance of Providence, he gradually passed from the plane of elementary instruction to learned studies in literature and philosophy. Happy they among his youthful admirers who were able to keep up with him in the onward march—even they whose intellectual powers could not go so far and so high received from him an impulse and an inspiration which brought them higher than they would otherwise have reached.

Such a teacher naturally became a writer. His essays met a responsive chord in the public mind,

and so he came to be regarded as one of the foremost exponents of Catholic thought. Hence the request of the Concord School of Philosophy for his essay on Aristotle and the Christian Church.

His studies were always conscientious. With the instinct of a true scholar, he never spoke or wrote on any subject of importance without having first, as far as possible, mastered its literature. The numerous references appropriately appended to his essays show how remarkably wide was his reading and how truly extensive his erudition. From a mind thus stored with the very best thought expended on the subject he gave forth synoptic views which were not only invaluable to his scholars, but also interesting and useful to older men too busy to do such reading for themselves.

He has done a special service to students and studious people by the literary, historical, and philosophical research condensed into his essay on Aristotle and the Christian Church. A widespread return toward a study of the Peripatetic and Scholastic philosophies, and of religion in the light of them both, is one of the most notable and significant intellectual facts of our day. Thinking people needed to be made acquainted with that fact, with its significance and value, and this service Brother Azarias has rendered them, and rendered interestingly and ably. His study of the fortunes of the Aristotelian philosophy at an epoch when its agreements and disagreements with Christian doctrine were most hotly discussed in the schools and the intervention of the Church in the dispute became a necessity, has given

him an admirable opportunity to show in how far Aristotle led up to Aquinas, and in what the philosopher was used, in what corrected and transcended, by the theologian. Had he possessed the historical information recently given to the world by the researches of Denifle, his sketch of the great scholastic controversy would probably have been more complete in some details. But it may be doubted whether the momentous philosophic lesson to be learned from the facts would have been thereby rendered more cogent and beautiful.

This relation between philosophy and religion must, in the nature of things, be a matter of intensest interest to reflective minds. It stares us in the face everywhere and perpetually. The what, the how, the why, the whence, the whither, of the universe, have ever pressed on the minds of men, and press on them to-day, urgently, irresistibly. Science, philosophy, and religion have their answers, and these answers blend into the system of truth.

The human mind instinctively seeks to know facts, their relations, their laws, and thus builds up science.

It equally seeks to know what and whence and whither these facts, and so builds up philosophy.

Man is the central fact for both science and philosophy. Endowed not only with intellect but with conscience, his instinct for right knowing is inseparable from an instinct for right doing, for such a course of conduct as will suit his origin and lead to his end. Ethics are the crown of philosophy.

The Creator wills this right knowing and conse-

quent right living for man, more than man can will it for himself. Now history shows that the efforts of reason after this right knowing and right living have led to uncertain and unsatisfactory results. Hence it equally shows that reason was not meant to reach these all-important conclusions by its unaided powers. Light is shed from above on the nature, the origin, the destiny of the universe and of man, and thus the pathway of duty is made doubly clear. This is the *sophia* toward which *philosophia* strains upward.

Thus it is seen that philosophy and religion have the same object: the universality of things, man the central fact of all, God the origin and end of all, the right relations between man and God and all.

Two lights shine upon the mind. The first is from below, from the intelligibility of things. The second is from above, from the Wisdom that planned and made all, and understands all, and is the light of all, and is mirrored in and reflected by all. Thus the direct light perfects the reflected light and corrects the aberrations caused by the created medium. Its chief purpose is to show man his way to his end, but in so doing it necessarily illumines not only the field of ethics but all the other domains of philosophic thought.

When the Incarnate Word brought to mankind "the fullness of the truth," they already possessed the philosophies of antiquity. Much in these needed to be corrected. Their authors acknowledged that they but groped in dim twilight. But much also was the legitimate working of reason on manifest facts and evident principles. It was mind-work worthy of

humanity and of its Author, and it was approved and blessed by Him and by His Church. This was especially true of the work of Socrates, and of his great disciples Plato and Aristotle. The light of revelation corrected the errors naturally resulting from the intellectual conditions of their epoch. The Church took the true and beautiful things which they had wisely discussed and worthily expressed, showed how they were logical stepping-stones to the higher truths made known by revelation, and thus built up the systematic presentation or philosophy of religion which is called theology.

In theology, every revealed truth is not only stated with all possible clearness, but is reverently scrutinized, analyzed, discussed. "*Credo ut intelligam;*" "*Fides quærens intellectum;*" these have been its mottoes always.

In it, moreover, every conclusion of philosophy is tested by the fuller search-light from above, that it may be cleared of misunderstanding and mistake and made truth indeed.

Hence, while in a certain sense it may be truly said that "the Church is not a School of Philosophy," there is a sense in which it may be said that she is *the* School of Philosophy. All truth fits into the sublime truth, which is her special concern, and is illumined and fortified by it. She welcomes truth of any kind, no matter by whom discovered or enunciated, because every truth will in some way be useful to mankind. She warns against pernicious errors. She condemns the folly that would make reason self-sacrificing and would ignore or refuse the higher light ;