
What Will You Choose?

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*
by the Rev. Canon George Maxwell**

Christian Smith, in *Moral, Believing Animals: Human Personhood and Culture*, defines religions as "sets of beliefs, symbols and practices about the realities of superempirical orders that make claims to organize and guide human life." (98)

A superempirical order is one that is not normally observable with just our five senses. It cannot be directly seen, heard, smelled, felt, or tasted.

It isn't just supernatural, though. If something is supernatural, then it is not part of nature, which, by implication, consists only of physical matter. We understand nature as including both the spiritual and the physical—that is, both the empirical and superempirical together.

It isn't just transcendent, either. In this context, I think transcendent is another way of saying supernatural. We believe that God is both transcendent and immanent—that is, hidden in the empirical.

Smith maintains that we are all moral, believing animals. We all continuously place our faith in premises, assumptions, and suppositions that we cannot objectively justify without recourse to other believed-in premises, assumptions, and suppositions.

Even the scientific method is based on assumptions about objectivity that it can't objectively prove—its exclusivity, for example, or the idea that you can ever really step out of time and space enough to be totally objective.

This is why you can't ever really prove the existence or nonexistence of God using scientific means.

The nonreligious or secular believe (pun intended) that the only reality that actually exists is what they can empirically observe.

Smith notes, though, that they too organize their lives in accordance with a moral order that is beyond themselves, one that exists at least in part outside of themselves. That's what it means to be self-conscious, to be able to step back and look at ourselves as if from a distance. It's just that they believe that this order is immanent only, that it exists only in empirical reality.

In other words, we all have to choose. To what are we going to commit ourselves, to what moral order will we subscribe? Even not making a choice is, of course, a choice. As Bob Dylan says, "you gotta serve somebody."

As for me, I choose God.

What will you choose?

Canon George Maxwell
Vicar

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