

# Letter to Nereyda

a short introduction to Christian Materialism

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# Letter to Nereyda

## a short introduction to Christian Materialism

Dear Nereyda,

The purpose of this letter is stated by its subtitle.

The book's own introduction to *Christian Materialism* is long. It needed to be long because it wants to tell the whole story of the great march of ideas from pre-scientific thinking through hellenism and scholasticism to their inevitable conclusion in materialism.

This was a good idea. But it would also be good to recognize that not everyone knows about the role of Greek philosophy in the price of their bananas, and fewer still would have an easy time understanding Aristotle's philosophy and the way it tried, for eight hundred years, to provide a middle ground between an absolute distinction between matter and spirit and the great step forward which is materialism. Most people who might be interested in knowing what *Christian Materialism* aims to accomplish do not need a detailed knowledge of the history of philosophy. The matter can be made much simpler. Such is the purpose of this "short introduction."

"Short" though it may be, our short introduction departs from the same place as the long introduction to *Christian Materialism*—the appearance of the theory of evolution and how it upset religion in the last century.

In describing the origin of things in terms of a natural process involving millions and millions of years, evolution, at first, appeared to prove the bible "wrong," to deny the need for a Creator and even the existence of God, and to say that man is just another animal who certainly has no soul.

As history has told, however, these dire predictions did not prove true. In dealing with evolution—as it was being supported with more and more scientific evidence—the Church came to an explicit understanding of the distinction between the truth and the way the people of a given time and place need to understand it. This made it possible to say that God created by

means of evolution; it made possible a deeper and more correct understanding of what the bible actually is; and this made possible a whole host of religious steps forward. We can say this: By giving up the security of a book of literal truth, religion and humanity grew a lot!

But it is necessary to notice that religion has not exactly prospered in the years following its reconciliation with evolution. In many important ways just the opposite has happened. The West is not faithful.

Now, some of this is certainly due to the explosion of scientific progress than began with the Renaissance about five hundred years ago, led to an explosion of prosperity in this past century, and has spoiled people throughout society.

But it is also true that this same explosion of scientific progress involved *ideas*, and many of these ideas raised questions that religion has not been able to handle. After all, science accomplishes a lot by being scientific; it requires evidence and proof; this is how we know the truth. This has not been the way of faith. Instead, to many, faith seems to be a vestige of our pre-scientific past. It is belief in fairy tales, belief without real evidence or argumentation, belief in whatever believers want to believe. And it has not helped that believers appear to prove this point by their many disagreements; and this has left religion even less credible than it would have been anyway.

Besides this, scientific progress raised questions about many concepts that religion would seem to require. If everything can be studied, for example, so can human behavior. Isn't it now obvious that behavior is the product of human nature and the particulars of a person's past? And if this is true how are people responsible for what they do? And how can they be condemned? And was this ever a thing a god would do, to condemn people, none of whom asked to be born, to an eternity of torment? And even if it were, *what* exactly is being condemned, or rewarded? What goes to heaven or hell? What is a soul?

This, Nereyda, is the crux of the question. For most of human history people noticed that they had a body they could see and touch, and there was another part of them that could think and feel. This, quite naturally, gave people the idea that a human being consists of a body and a soul. The body, obviously, is made of matter. The soul is something else. And

the soul is the part that knows can know God, choose good or evil, and then go to heaven or hell. This made sense for quite a long time. But it was not to make sense to modern science. Modern science wanted to know: What is the soul? Where is the soul? And how does it move my eyes as I read this sentence, or feel pain if I get burned?

Isn't it now clear that what we call the soul is just the working of our brains? Doesn't this explain why mental things have physical effects, and why physical things have mental effects? This is materialism—the idea that everything can be explained by the working of material things. Isn't this the way everything else in the world is already explained?

Surely you've noticed: Medical science now takes materialism for granted.

Materialism was always the idea underlying evolution. How else could chemical soup lead to civilization?

So, how are we free, or good, or bad? Aren't our "spiritual" experiences best explained by psychology? What goes where when finally we die?

Naturally, materialism means big problems concerning anything that might be called "spiritual." Forget the historical debates about the divinity of Christ and the necessity of grace..., what do these words even mean?

And what is faith, and why would we need something so nebulous in order to know our Maker? Certainly faith can not be the basis of how society functions....

And so faith has been shoved faith to the margins of society, and there is no sign that this situation will ever change.

But this situation is going to change and Christian Materialism is going to change it.

Christian Materialism starts with an explanation of reality in terms of matter which makes sense of the spiritual. Involving the way that matter makes things by being organized into different structures, it gives proper attention to the fact that different structures can themselves be organized into far more complex structures, and so it is the organization of matter can increase level by level, where each level possesses “higher” characteristics not present at lower levels. It is here that spirituality is shown to make sense; and, as an extension of the fact that reality is made richer level by level, it is also shown that knowledge increases level by level, and does so by a very transparent pattern which leads to knowledge of God and certain other truths of faith.

Christian Materialism goes from there to offer an understanding of personal responsibility which violates no law, and is just as plainly true as the principles that were once used to argue against responsibility! We then find that the same idea points the way to answer the question that has quietly undermined faith for many centuries, If we were made for life with God, why aren't we there? The answer to this question points the way to an answer to the immemorial problem of evil.

Christian Materialism then provides a full answer to the problem of evil, addressing directly the disparity of fortunes dealt out to individuals in a world supposedly made by God and in His hands. We get our answer by discovering and demonstrating that humanity's participation in its own creation is, in fact, a family business. This idea makes deeper than ever sense of the Church's doctrine concerning itself; and it helps us to make sense of the historical “mystery” of the Trinity. Meanwhile, other perspectives gained from materialism help us to make sense of the doctrines of the incarnation, redemption, the Eucharist, and every other essential spiritual concept which the Church has treasured.

Like in the case of evolution, by giving up the security of the-way-we-used-to-think, religion and humanity will be growing a lot.

Best of all, Nereyda, armed with our new ideas, the Church will again make sense to a world that has already discovered that it needs something spiritual in order to live fully, die peacefully, and to achieve unity, but knows not where to go. This will begin a Renaissance of faith that did not take place when modernity was born.