

ARE YOU A TOURIST?

P. F. JENSEN

"THE CHRISTIAN FAITH"

I once lived in an ancient and beautiful city which was visited by thousands of tourists each year. On many occasions friends would call on us, and I would escort them on a sight-seeing tour of the city. It was very striking indeed that, on the whole, my friends saw very little of what there was to be seen. Again and again I would point out some feature of interest, and they would be looking the wrong way, or be distracted by something that did not matter in the slightest. Sometimes I would take them to some spot where exciting history had been made, but they would only say something polite and move on without really understanding what they were looking at.

Now let me hasten to say that I do not blame my friends for this. I, too, have been a tourist, and I know that when you travel it is possible only to take in a little of what you are shown. In fact you could much more readily blame the ignorant natives of a city like that; people who had lived there all their lives and were blind to its glory. My real point is this: just as people are sometimes blind to the glories with which they are surrounded, so, too, we are often blind to the meaning of the world in which we live. We behave like tourists, or worse.

Take the fact that you know right from wrong, for instance. Where did that knowledge come from? I know that you learnt it from your parents - but where did they acquire it? Do you think that right and wrong is simply made-up by the human race? If it is, why should I try to do the right? Why can't I make up my own list of right and wrong, one that would suit me a lot better?

Now questions like these are quite puzzling. You may never have considered them before. You may have lived all your life without even thinking about them. In this respect you are like the tourist who passes through the world never seeing what is really there. What can we make of this common human experience of knowing right from wrong?

Some people who have thought about it argue that it shows that there is a God. Just as the fact of Law in our community means that there is an authority who made and supervises the Law, so the fact of a moral order shows that there must be God. Whether this is true or not, it is certainly very difficult to show that right and wrong truly exist without God being there to support them.

This observation is sometimes called 'the moral argument for the existence of God.' I think that many people who reject it do so because of fear of the consequences. For, if God is the author and guardian of the standards of good and evil, it means that we are accountable to him for breaking them. It means that he will judge us one day and we will be ruined. No wonder we often prefer not to think about this aspect of life - we are all cowards. But to be blind to this is to be like the tourist. In the end you can say that you have been on the earth; but you will never be able to say that you understood anything of real importance while you were here. And, in God's world there is no room at all for tourists, only citizens.

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