

Universal search for a Creator God

I confess myself puzzled as to why, when a random physicist unschooled in Aquinas pops up and says that Creation might have come out of nothing ("New stirrings out across the universe", 21 January), *The Tablet* hails this as a threat to traditional theology.

Creatio ex nihilo has always been a proposition of the faith. That the maths is finally catching up with that is, to me as a natural scientist at least, no great wonder. Those who enthusiastically argue for a "multiverse" have deliberately entered down a non-scientific blind alley which ill becomes any scientist: I was trained only to propose hypotheses which are testable by observation or experiment.

The multiverse concept (it is not fit to be called a hypothesis) fails both tests, as by definition we cannot observe or perturb anything in another universe. If we can detect it or affect it, it's in this universe. This doesn't mean the universe "proves" the existence of God. It merely means that scientists need to live with the universe, whether they believe in God or not, and drop untestable concepts that they erect by special pleading – neglecting the *lex parsimoniae* (Occam's razor) – in their frantic attempts to dismiss the ambiguous universe we actually inhabit, which is in every way compatible with a Creator God.

(Professor) Paul Younger

Director, Newcastle Institute for Research on Sustainability

The idea of "something" from "nothing" is a good way of describing Creation. Many of the problems among believers and non-believers arise from treating God as a "thing" among other things. For God is "no thing", and that "something" comes into existence spontaneously and gratuitously is precisely the unfathomable and ultimately unknowable mystery of the Creator God. The closest image to this that human beings can grasp is the idea of love – spontaneous, gratuitous, unfathomable and inexplicable. Hawking, Krauss et al. may actually have pointed us in the true direction of God in their hypothesis of a universe that comes from nothing.

Kevin J. Alban O.Carm

Bursar General

Curia Generalizia dei Carmelitani

Crusader myths

John Morrish's review of the three-part BBC2 series *The Crusades* (Arts, 21 January) seemed uncritically to accept its message – that the Crusades demonstrated a violence inherent in Christianity and to a lesser extent Islam.

To this end, the series started with Robert the Monk's sensationalised version of Pope Urban II's sermon at Clermont, the beginning of the First Crusade, and explained Christian



The Crusaders: were they determined to "exterminate" or just "drive out"?

Orlando Bloom (left) in a scene from the film *Kingdom of Heaven*. Photo: CNS

belief as little more than hell for sinners. The episode ignored Urban's character, his dilemmas, his motivation and particularly his long struggle against the Norman war culture. It gave the impression of an unprovoked attack on Islam rather than a response to the plea of Emperor Alexius I for aid against the Seljuk Turks' overrunning of his empire.

The presenter, Dr Thomas Asbridge, suggested more than once that Pope Urban was glorifying killing: in fact his exhortation was *exterminare* – which means, as exterminate originally meant in English, "to drive out". The account of the Crusaders' massacre of the citizens of Jerusalem ignored the fact that the city commanders bargained for their own lives and left – in contrast with Balian later who surrendered the city unconditionally to Saladin, sworn to massacre the population, and ransomed every single citizen.

One is used to the media's dull acceptance of atheist myths about Christianity. But Dr Asbridge is a professional historian and should know better. So should John Morrish.

Tom McIntyre

Frome, Somerset

Trident challenge

As a Scotsman, I find your leader ("Be careful what you wish for", 28 January) lordly, patronising and outrageously blind to a matter of fundamental morality. You list defence as a positive Unionist prerogative, but it is in this area that our claim for independence is most strong. As the redoubtable Bruce Kent said recently: "I am an Englishman, but I support Scottish independence because it is the best way to get rid of Trident."

Trident cannot simply be relocated to England. There is no place for the support system at present operating in Coulport, where 150 nuclear missiles are stored underground in the mountains at Loch Long (the largest nuclear arsenal in Europe). England does not have such mountains, so there is no place for a support system. Consequently, Scotland's freedom from Trident is also the UK's.

The Scottish Catholic Bishops and the

Vatican are unanimous in condemning nuclear weapons. What is incomprehensible is the evasive and ambiguous attitude of the English bishops. Whatever happened to the much vaunted "unity of faith and morals" which, we are told, characterises the Catholic Church?

Schedule 5 of the Scotland Act 1998 reserves to Westminster "control over nuclear, biological and chemical weapons and other weapons of mass destruction". Thus, by its own words the British state recognises that Trident is a WMD. As such, it is a prohibited class of weapon. Why do the English bishops give consent by silence to Trident, an illegal and immoral WMD?

Brian Quail

Scottish Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament

Conscience and Obama

I don't understand how President Barack Obama's insistence that Catholic institutions, such as hospitals and universities, include contraception in their health-care packages violates the "individual consciences" of Catholics in those institutions, as you appear to suggest ("In defence of conscience", Leader, 28 January). He is not forcing them to avail themselves of contraception, merely giving them the choice, which is more than the Church currently does. Can we take it that Pope Benedict's defence of "freedom of conscience", which you quote, signals an imminent change in official teaching in this and other related areas?

(Emeritus Professor) Terry Wright

Fenham, Newcastle upon Tyne

Reformation song

In reference to ecumenical dialogue between the Vatican and the World Lutheran Federation (WLF) ("Vatican and Lutherans to 'heal memory of the Reformation'", The Church in the World, 7 January), Nikolaus Schneider observed that it was necessary to find a common view of the past. Such efforts are already taking place.

In February 2011 a joint task force, whose mandate was to produce a study of the biblical foundations of the doctrine of justification, as called for by the 1999 Joint Declaration of the Doctrine of Justification, held its final meeting in Wittenberg. Originally sponsored by the Vatican's Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity (PCPCU) and the WLF, the 12-member task force consisted of four Catholics, four Lutherans, two Methodists, and two from the Reformed Tradition, and was chaired by Bishop Emeritus Walter Klaiber, a Methodist. I was one of the Roman Catholic members.

The 132-page document produced by the task force, "The Biblical Foundations of the Doctrine of Justification: an Ecumenical Follow-Up to the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification", was endorsed by the

general secretary of the WLF, the secretary of the PCPCU, the general secretary of the World Communion of Reformed Churches, and the general secretary of the World Methodist Council, and presented to the World Methodist Conference in Durban on 5 August. Paulist Press will shortly publish the document.
(The Rev. Professor Dr) Raymond F. Collins
*Brown University
Providence, Rhode Island, USA*

Immigration watch

Your lead editorial of 14 January was entitled “Thank God for immigrants”. Indeed so, but for how many should we give thanks?

Many have the positive characteristics of family loyalty and work ethic to which you point. However, arrivals are now exceeding departures by 250,000 a year. Is it “mean spirited” to point out that, if this is allowed to continue, our population will reach 70 million in 16 years’ time, with two-thirds of the increase a result of immigration?

This is nothing to do with “the clever use of statistics”, as you suggest. It is a straight quote from the official body responsible and it is the prime reason that Migration Watch UK, far from being “anti-immigration”, is in favour of immigration at a sustainable level but is firmly opposed to mass immigration – as is 70 per cent of the British population.

(Sir) Andrew Green

Chairman, Migration Watch UK

Back to basics

Your correspondent Daphne McLeod (Letters, 14 January) justifies her advocacy of a return to teaching in Catholic schools which conforms to *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* by quoting two bishops and their encouraging results. As far as Australia is concerned, churches are not crowded and seminaries are very much smaller than 20 years ago. I have attended the same church for many years and we have gone from a roster of five Masses on Sunday with an 80 per cent attendance to a roster of three Masses on Sunday with an attendance needing less than 30 per cent seat occupancy. This is common in this country. If this is success we need to think again. Your correspondent has been misled.

Anthony P. Millar

Double Bay, New South Wales, Australia

Soul matters

In response to Janet Holbourne’s request for information on any recent discussion on the origin of the human soul in the light of evo-

lution (Letters, 28 January), may I offer my recent book, which was the subject of my article (“Humanity’s destiny”, 14 January) which initiated your correspondence on evolution?

In *Christianity in Evolution: an exploration*, I examine the view of Pope Pius XII requiring Catholics to believe that even if we accept evolution so far as our bodies are concerned, all individual human souls are directly and immediately created by God as immortal. My conclusion is that, notwithstanding the appeal of your correspondent David Andrews (Letters, 21 January) to this requirement on the authority of the Catholic Catechism, it is a view which has to be revised in the light of evolution and the remarks of such modern theologians as Karl Rahner.

(The Rev. Professor) Jack Mahoney SJ

London

Janet Holbourne’s problem centres on the supposed uniqueness of humans in having an immortal soul with the absence of that in animals. Surely, we did not “acquire” a soul, like a separate add-on. That view comes from thinking that soul is identified with reason, and that only the “reasonable” soul has immortality.

This dualism is not sustainable on many counts. One, as soul is that which “animates”, animals too have that principle (as do vegetables, but not minerals). Another is that animals have a more reasoning capacity that was traditionally believed, whereas some humans do not, and no human does at some time. More importantly, biblically, the premise does not stand. Genesis talks of God breathing life into “living souls” i.e. all creatures; animals are described in Isaiah, Revelation and elsewhere as living harmoniously in the presence of God, and so on. What distinguishes the evolved human being is the representative (“image of God”) honour of responsibility for the rest of creation, achieved when we developed consciences. When God “loves into being”, that itself confers immortality.

(Dr) Deborah Jones

General Secretary, Catholic Concern for Animals

Devilish plot

In discussing Archbishop Vincent Nichols’ football support (Notebook, 21 January) you referred to Manchester United as “the Red Devils”. This soubriquet properly belongs to their rugby league neighbours, Salford. The best English RL team in the 1930s, they helped to introduce the 13-a-side code to France. Seeing their distinctive red jerseys and their exciting handling skills, French spectators christened Salford *Les Diables Rouges*. Journalists were responsible for giving the name, translated, to the Old Trafford soccer team after the Second World War.

John B. Griffin

Leigh, Lancashire



The living Spirit

Forgiveness of sin therefore means now, instead of God seeing a man’s life as an insult and a horror in his sight, he can only see, all that there is to see, a thing of beauty. Our whole life a complete success story in God’s sight. Nothing in our lives remains that is not beautiful for God to see. Complete freedom from all guilt and all blame. The credit for this is Christ’s, of course, not ours: it is he who intervened at such unimaginable cost, day after day of our guilt. But a thing is as God sees it. When God can only see our lives as things of beauty, that is how they truly are.

John Edwards SJ

*Ways of Forgiveness
(Catholic Truth Society, 2012)*

Laughter has long departed from the Church and theology. Once stepping into the church, we Christians leave our laughter behind. We forget to laugh ... We are too conscious of the straight-line God staring at us from a pedestal high above. He seems ready to catch any sign of mischief in us. But a religion that has done away with laughter can be a dangerous thing.

A laughing and dancing God – this is the god of most Asians and Africans outside the Christian Church. This God laughs with them as well as weeps with them. This God dances with them as well as mourns with them.

C.S. Song

*A Maryknoll Book of Inspiration
Michael Leach and Doris Goodnough (eds)
(Orbis Books, 2010)*

God’s absence among religious people, among religious groups, his absence where it is claimed that he is worshipped, is something terrifying today. Or sad in the utter extreme, because it is not his wrath, exactly, it is his loneliness, his loss-ness among us ... Do not be discouraged. The Holy Spirit is not asleep. Nor let yourself get too frustrated. There is no use getting mad at the Church and her representatives. First there is the problem of communication, which is impossible. Then there is the fact that God writes straight on crooked lines anyways, all the time, all the time.

Thomas Merton

*Precious Thoughts
Selected and edited by Fiona Gardner
(Darton, Longman and Todd, 2011)*

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