

The launching of
“REASON AND RELIGION IN AN AGE OF SCIENCE”

Author: Father Terry Kelly SJ
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Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is indeed an honour and delight for me to be chosen to launch this book by Father Terry Kelly. He is a Jesuit Schoolmaster in the classic mould. He reads voraciously in science, especially his chosen field of physics, and in theology and philosophy, and continually updates his presentations to his students. He has been a teacher of senior science and philosophy and religion at Saint Ignatius College for almost 30 years. I had the privilege of teaching alongside of him for 15 or so of those years, with Father Terry conducting senior classes on “Faith and Science” and myself conducting classes on “Reason and the Existence of God”. We taught in the Jesuit tradition, that questions are never wrong. By definition, only answers can be wrong. To question keeps alive the life of the mind. Frequently, several times a week, Father Kelly and I would discuss with each other about what we were teaching in our course that particular day. Terry Kelly is one of my Jesuit brothers and a valued colleague in education, and hence my sense of privilege at being asked to launch his book.

I am told that after Dan Brown published the *Da Vinci Code*, one of the unexpected results was a significant increase in the number of people applying to become members of Opus Dei! Similarly, never has so much interest been shown in God in the secular press since the publication of Dawkin’s *The God Delusion*. The interest continues, despite Dawkins’ obvious polemic against the Creator. In Dawkins’ work, God is shown to be a very unpleasant character – cruel, vindictive, capricious, unjust, bullying, and to cap it all off, he is non-existent! That was the observation by James Roberts in a recent article in *The Tablet* (9 June 2007) entitled, “Reaching Towards Mystery”.

The article by Roberts deals with a meeting of cosmologists at the University of Hertfordshire. The title “Reaching Towards Mystery” is indicative of an attitude of positive and humbled enquiry concerning the origins and the cause of the universe. The engagement in the study of science is seen as a work that is revelatory of God’s workings. It is an intellectual attitude and approach far healthier than any approach such as the “God at the Gaps” approach whose latest manifestation has taken the form of proposing “Intelligent Design”. There is nothing at all wrong with the phrase

“Intelligent Design” concerning the universe, but it is a phrase that masks an approach that says that science cannot explain this or that, and therefore God must exist. As science advances, the gaps, of course, get smaller. It is far healthier intellectually and within the strong Christian tradition not to attempt to state the existence of God because of what we do not know, but rather because of what we do know, and the wonder caused thereby.

At that conference described by James Roberts, the point was made that Sacred Scripture does not offer proofs of God’s existence, but pointers to His presence. Good science does the same. Indeed, in one of his books, Paul Davies, with whom Father Terry Kelly has corresponded, makes the claim that science offers a surer path to God than even religion itself.

If one’s attitude is that science is the revealing of the mind of God working in matter, then it makes science a hugely fascinating exploration. Father Kelly writes of the marvels of matter:

“For many people the picture of the universe that they have discovered is breath-taking. A transition in perception has taken place from the eternal and infinite static universe of the 1920’s to a seemingly miraculous cosmos that there is a beginning from nothing, a self- development from utter simplicity through various stages to eventually arriving and being capable of unravelling the marvels hidden in matter itself...”

For the open-minded religious person this scientific picture fits in well with the Creator God, and the already known intelligent God. Each new scientific step adds to the knowledge of God’s intelligence, creativity and subtlety. We are the recipients of an enormous gift from the All-Powerful One – a cosmos given beautiful laws and the freedom to find itself.”

In a number of ways the present scientific reflections on creation accord not so much with the First Way of Aquinas, which focuses on design, but more on the Fourth Way, which talks of finality, purpose in physical laws, and so on. Interestingly, Aquinas presents his arguments, not as proofs, but as indications, as ways, as pointers. It

He who creates them and keeps them in being, He has given them first life or consciousness, and so on.

237. Realise that all gifts and benefits come from above ...like sunbeams from the sun, or streams from their source.

The early Jesuits went into all fields of knowledge, from mathematics to music, from the classics to astronomy. There are some thirty craters on the Moon named after early Jesuit astronomers. Early Jesuit botanists isolated Quinine, and the Camellia flower. Intriguingly, Matteo Ricci, the leader of the first of the Jesuits in China, was teaching the Copernican principle to the astronomers in China at the same time as Galileo was getting in trouble for the same teaching in Rome! This conviction, that such an attitude and approach is revelatory of the workings of God in the universe, was expressed powerfully by the French Jesuit, Teilhard de Chardin, when he wrote his Hymn to the Universe. As a palaeontologist, he was working in China in the 1920's, and found himself, without bread and wine to celebrate Mass. So he composed a meditation which saw all Creation as the Mass, the positive and creative phenomena being encompassed by the Bread of the Eucharist, and the destructive and death-dealing being embraced by the Wine.

“All the things in the world to which this day will bring increase; all those that will diminish; all those too that will die; all of them, Lord, I try to gather into my arms, so as to hold them out to you in offering. This is the material of my sacrifice; the only material you desire ... Over every living thing which is to spring up, to grow, to flower, to ripen during this day say again the words: This is my Body. And over every death-force, which waits in readiness to corrode, to wither, to cut down, speak again your commanding words which express the supreme mystery of Faith: This is my Blood.”

In an address on June 11th this year to a summer school organised by the Jesuits at the Vatican Observatory, and which was dedicated to the study of extra-solar planets, Pope Benedict XVI emphasised the desire of the Church “to embrace, encourage and promote scientific study on the basis of her conviction that faith and reason are the like the two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth”.

As said above, it is difficult to see how scientists can avoid undertaking their work in a state of awe. It is again intriguing that at great moments of such discovery, it is often only religious language that is appropriate. On Christmas Eve in 1968, when the Apollo 8 craft emerged from behind the Moon, and the astronauts saw then the Earth as no human being had ever seen it, they stopped their technical reports, and as they contemplated the marvel of the orb of the Earth in all its colour and beauty, they read from Genesis 1.1-10. They were stunned at what they saw. There is a conviction expressed that by St Paul in his Letter to the Colossians, “All things hold together in Him”.

On the 20th July, 1969, astronauts Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin landed on the Moon. While Armstrong prepared for his moonwalk, Aldrin unpacked bread and wine, and describes what he did next:

“I poured the wine into the chalice ... in the one-sixth gravity of the Moon, the wine curled slowly and gracefully up the side of the cup. It was interesting to think that the very first liquid ever poured on the Moon and the very first food eaten there, were communion elements.”

Father Terry Kelly is a man passionate about his study, and he combines all the elements of his reading into his presentations. This book is written lucidly and clearly. It sets out the scientific method, and how the integrity of the scientific method must be respected. It covers an outline of Scripture and the basic Christian teachings. Although so much of my presentation has focused on the scientific side, Terry’s work is also more than simply competent in its outline of religious truths. He also points out to students the fact that science is not the explanation of all things, and has its own limits.

“Modern science may appear as the most powerful form of knowledge ever. In some ways, it seems to make all other forms of knowledge irrelevant. However, this is far from the whole picture: many crucial aspects of our lives are dealt with by other forms of knowledge. Whom do I trust? What are my interests? Whom will I marry? What is my life’s purpose? Faith, self-

knowledge, values, purpose of the universe, God and conscience: these are not conclusions obtained by the scientific method.”

He mentions the mysteries that science does not yet explain, how things can evolve from simple to complex, from the one item of matter going through the eye of a needle to the vastness of the galaxies, and that our observation is that the normal process is for complex to degenerate into simple, rather than simple grow up into complex. How does a clod develop into a thinking person? How does clay contain the elements of consciousness?

This work should not be restricted to high school students, but will be valuable reading for any person interested in integrating their faith and reason, the two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth.

It is with delight and great respect that I launch this work.

Thank you.

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