

## Belief 2 - 16th Oct 2022

We left our cliff-hanger last Sunday with the scientists stubbornly refusing to even contemplate that there could be God as well as science, and not that their god was science, although it probably is. Our Progressives, however, were dangling on the end of a metaphorical rope, which should give them no confidence whatsoever.

We have seen and shown, I hope, that our experience of the world is, first of all, unique, and then that what we truly believe will depend entirely on what we can find to be reliable. If we are on shifting sand, then our house will not stand.

So let us look at some things that we can count on to be completely reliable.

Going back to my childhood and boarding school in the 50's and 60's, I could guarantee that disobeying rules would reliably produce first a serious telling off, and the next time a beating of some sort - depending on the teacher and his preference of weapon.

I learned that disobedience did not pay - but unfortunately, it only taught me not to make that same mistake again, and I found plenty of others that got me caned - again.

Nevertheless, it showed me that there was a point beyond which I could not go, or the cane would come crashing down.

As an inquisitive child, I was constantly pushing the boundaries and asking questions, and in an allegorical way, I think that was what God was encouraging in the mythical Garden of Eden - explore your environment, see what works and what doesn't.

We demonstrated last week that what we found generally to be reliable - like parental love (if we were one of the lucky ones), food in the shops, trains that ran (eventually) and so on, but that they were not wholly reliable. Sometimes they let us down.

We discovered or observed that our scientific community was really only happy with absolute certainties, and that they would be uncomfortable with being questioned on issues that challenged their assumptions - like the existence of mesons and quarks and so on.

Still less are they comfortable when challenged on the possibility of a co-existent God, working with their precious evolutionary theories.

As exploratory people, those of us who could happily accept the concept of evolution and Darwinian selection, also discovered that there were holes in it - rather like our friends 'black holes' but much more dangerous, because they

paved the way to let God into the picture; a Higher Power - a source of intelligence, possibly providing a plan, a template for the universe we find ourselves in.

Again, I don't have time or space to give you the whole argument, but challenge any Darwinian evolutionist on the 'Cambrian Gap' and the sudden appearance of complex organisms without any apparent precursors.

Again, challenge the scientific community on 'what was there before the Big Bang?' - and they will throw back at you - 'what was there before God?' For these references, read Stephen Meyer's book, 'Darwin's Doubt.'

Because for us limited human beings, the whole concept of infinity is one that has driven people insane, we learn from this that if we are to try and define God, we are lost from the start. Indeed, if we could define God, then I would suggest that God would not be God, and would be way too small, because by so doing, we would have constrained the infinite into the finite. Not possible.

So your scientist doesn't like the idea of God before the Big Bang, but cannot answer the question of what was there then? If, as the Dawkins of the world will persuade us, the universe (?plural? - they don't know either) originated from something a trillionth the size

of the full stop or period at the end of a sentence, then the question is, 'Where did that come from?'

Hutchins, Fry, Harris, Dawkins et al., will tell you that there is no such thing as the supernatural - because there is no other way to explain the Resurrection - but they already do - because for there to be something from which the universe began, then whatever it was, had to be beyond the natural world and its laws - because they hadn't been created or formed or evolved - or whatever you want to call it - yet. Ergo, supernatural.

It is beyond the scope of this sermon to disprove the various objections that the

scientific world has held to the non-existence of God, but please read David Berlinski's excellent book, 'The Devil's Delusion', which he wrote in response to Richard Dawkins' 'The God Delusion'.

One of the most irritating things I find about those atheists who are given space and time on television shows is their supreme arrogance concerning the veracity of their views and the delusional stance of all those who oppose them. I have seen Dawkins tell an entire audience of believers that he was sorry, but they were all deluded. It clearly has never occurred to him that he might be the one who was deluded.

I need to ask you to accept that science has no more proven that God is a fantasy than theists have proved that neutrons are a fantasy. It is much more likely that both exist, because there is so much evidence that points that way.

Let us move forward then, with our challenged intellects, to the acceptance that we, as a church, believe in God. For each one of us, that idea, that concept, will be distinctly individual - and may even change shape every day. But God will still be there.

By believing in this way, we also tacitly believe that there is some way in which we can access this God. Different faiths have different

ways, and older civilizations have had some pretty ghastly ways in the past.

We tend not to sacrifice our children on altars these days - however great the temptation at times - and we rarely sacrifice animals in this country, though it still goes on. Hinduism still has ritual sacrifice of goats, sheep, water buffalo and other animals, and even the Muslims are encouraged to sacrifice during Eid. Jews and Christians don't get away with it either; in Judaism it is called 'Korban', and in Christianity it is called 'Kourbania.' It is still practised in some rural villages in Greece where a sheep will be offered to the saints. Northern Macedonia and Bulgaria also practise this custom.

We tend to prefer prayer and praise without the bloodshed these days, and a lot of us practise meditation and the discipline of silence to enter into the presence of God.

But we are not here to discuss the existence of God any further, only that in our experience we have come to the conclusion that God is real for us.

As Christians, we have to have formed some idea of what we believe to be true of what our Holy Book has to say about this God. And - to be honest - there isn't a whole lot when it comes down to physical descriptions.

Apart from the creation account, we have only visions of God, which will be - of necessity - intensely personal. Therefore we are left with Jesus' description that God is 'our Father' and his Father.

It is fair to say that in human terms Jesus had no knowledge of advanced physics, and neither would anyone he spoke to. So, it was necessary for him to find a way of relating himself to the world as they knew it.

In a patriarchal society where women were clearly second-class citizens, it would be appropriate for him to identify his origin as 'heavenly', as that was consistent with the ideas of the day. For him to start talking about indestructible energy, and how it

converts from one form into another, would have completely lost all his listeners. They would have needed something much more tangible to comprehend, so the idea of describing his own origins in family terms would have been understandable to people in those days.

However, the world has moved on, and our scientific friends have given us more discoveries to unite with our theological beliefs. What this does not mean is that we have to jettison the bible as completely irrelevant, and throw our faith away with the Sunday school bathwater.

Nevertheless, we do need to throw away our Sunday school theology where it is too sugary-sweet and fluffy, and replace it with something altogether more robust, sweaty, and hairy.

To this end, we have to accept that a lot of the stories about Jesus' birth, his life and miraculous actions have a significantly partisan gloss on them. This is quite understandable, because we think that each of the gospels drew on eye-witness accounts of those who were followers of Jesus. Discussion still occupies scholars who are divided over who actually wrote the gospels, given that initially they were all derived from an oral tradition.

Nevertheless, our job is to retain the kernel of our belief, which is the historic truth of Jesus' existence, which has been verified by other authors some of whom were secular, and even opposed to Jesus. Tacitus, Josephus, the Mishnah, the Talmud, the Qu'ran, Pliny the Younger, and Mara bar-Serapion, all reference the historical Jesus.

Given that we are now in a position to truly and reliably believe that Jesus existed - we have shown a preponderance of evidence - we can move on to the most important division between what I suggest we believe and the Progressives - and their gnostic, modern, and frankly fantastic claims.

But you'll have to wait until next week for that.