

No Need For God? – Trinity 16

Amos 8 vv 4-7 p922, I Timothy 2 vv 1-7 p1192, Luke 16 vv 1-13 p1050

Stephen Hawking has announced that it is no longer rational to believe in God because modern Physics can explain the origin of the Universe. His logic seems to run something like this. Human beings always want things explained. This, indeed, is the impetus behind Science. When we run out of explanations for things, we resort to God to fill in the gaps in our understanding. So, the more we understand the world, the less need we have for God. For some time now physicists have held that the Universe originated in a Big Bang, but have had no satisfactory explanation of what caused the Big Bang. Accordingly, some people have been inclined to say that it must have been God who caused the Big Bang. Now, Hawking argues, we can see how the laws of Science could have themselves created the Universe without any need for a personal Creator and that, therefore, there is no God.

Hawking's logic breaks down on that last point. It may well be that modern Physics can explain how the scientific laws we already know about might (perhaps inevitably) create a universe or even a multiplicity of universes. There are very few people in the world today who sufficiently understand what Hawking is talking about and even they disagree among themselves about the viability and implications of the theories in question. There is no reason in principle, however, why Science should not explain the physical mechanisms behind the Big Bang. Over the millennia, human beings have come to understand many things that were previously complete mysteries or even entirely unknown. Discovering things and explaining things is an important part of what it is to be human. Dare I say that this is the way God made us?

Anyway, while it may be true, that one day human beings will be able to explain how the Big Bang happened in terms of the laws of Physics, we should still be left with a huge gap – if we want one. Where did the laws of Physics come from? Almost everything we know about, nearly everything we experience, everything we can see and touch and measure with scientific instruments, depends on something else. Something made it. Someone begat it. Something explains it. Ultimately we have to believe that there is an infinite regression of causation – that everything is caused by something right back to infinity, or else we have to believe that something just is, that something simply exists without any cause. You can believe that matter and energy just are, that the universe Physics describes simply is, without any other cause or explanation. Most people, however, believe that God is the ultimate cause and that everything else depends for its existence on Him. What you cannot prove scientifically is which of these two ideas is true. Either the physical universe has no cause outside itself or it is caused by something or Someone outside itself, but there is no observation you can make or experiment you can carry out which would decide the issue one way or the other. You can guess. You can attempt an informed hypothesis. You might have faith or belief one way or the other. You might turn to the resources provided by Philosophy, Theology and maybe the humanities. But you cannot prove scientifically whether or not God exists and whether or not God is necessary for the existence of the Universe we inhabit. So Hawking has not closed the final gap in our human understanding of the universe and thereby rendered God even an unnecessary hypothesis. He has certainly

not disproved the existence of God. Explain the how questions and you are still left with Why?

However, what we mean by God is something infinitely bigger and better than a convenient explanation for what we cannot otherwise explain. *God of the gaps* is an insult to God and to what human beings mean by God. The evidence of archaeology and anthropology is that humans beings have always been religious. We humans have always related to the spiritual. Belief in God never has been simply a scientific or philosophical theory, an idea which could be disproved or become outdated or redundant as human knowledge advances. Children growing up naturally absorb religious ideas. Humanity is naturally religious. The Christian explanation for this is that we are made in the image of God. We are made to be loved by God. We are made to love God back and therefore to love one another.

Our readings today bring out some of the implications of what it means that human beings are religious. St Paul talks about prayer. Prayer for human beings is as natural as breathing. Prayer makes sense of our lives. Praying, we find the resources to manage. He speaks about giving thanks. Our natural response to the world around us is wonder. We see the Universe and we praise the Creator. He speaks about prayer for those in authority. Our social order as human beings is intimately bound up with our faith. Rulers are agents of God. They are answerable to Him for how they rule. We owe them our loyalty because, how ever imperfectly, they represent the rule of God. It is in religion that we find meaning and purpose for our lives. Ultimate Truth is to be found in God, not just scientific truth, but the truths of Philosophy and the Arts, the truths of beauty, order, wisdom, law and every other aspect of human enquiry and endeavour. Faith is a relationship, a relationship of love between the individual believer and God Himself. Religion encompasses everything in this world, but this world is only a fraction of all that there truly is. Faith is about salvation; it is about a union with God, which is not merely for this Universe but for all eternity: eternal love; ineffable, eternal joy in the presence of God in communion with all those who love Him. Amos speaks about justice and mercy, about concern for the poor and needy. Religion provides the framework in which we are called to live this life and prepares us for the life which is to come. Today's Gospel reading is pretty mysterious, but it too speaks about the stewardship of this world's things (the things which Science investigates) in the light of the true riches of eternity. Whatever else we can say about the Parable of the Unjust Steward, it does describe us as *the children of light*.

In I Corinthians 8, St Paul speaks of the knowledge which puffeth up and the charity (or love, *αγάπη*) which edifieth. There is a human approach to knowledge which leads a person who think he's clever to disparage others and to despise God. Such knowledge is destructive of the community and of religion and of the *cultured despiser* himself. Love, however, builds up. It edifies. Love (or charity, *αγάπη*) builds faith. It builds community. It builds us up as human beings. Paul goes on "But if any man love God, the same is known of him." As we are perfected in Christ, so we come to know God as He knows us. So we come to know all things. Knowledge (Science) is not opposed to faith. Faith brings us through love to knowledge. Only a few people like Stephen Hawking can understand Physics, but absolutely anyone can come to the knowledge of God through Jesus Christ our Lord.