

## ABBÉ LEMAÎTRE, THE BIG BANG, AND SO ON

Recently the parents of a home-schooled family sought my advice on a page that appeared in their Catholic schooling program praising the Abbé Georges Lemaître for his scientific views about the beginnings of the universe. They were concerned that what he had said did not seem to gel with what God has revealed in *Genesis*. The Abbé studied physics and mathematics and obtained a doctorate in science before he obtained any qualification in the philosophy of the Catholic Church. Before he was exposed to the sanity of the Church's moderate realism then, he had been immersed in the mix of materialism and subjectivism to which modern science subscribes. I was happy to assure the parents that when the Abbé advanced his thesis on the origins of the universe he had been talking through his biretta!

His opinion that the universe had begun with the explosion of a single particle, was mocked by English astronomer Fred Hoyle as asserting it had begun with 'a big bang'. To Hoyle's surprise, his criticism came to be accepted as a good summary of the Abbé's thesis by the scientific community. But the thesis is replete with problems.

Modern scientists are heirs of adoption of the philosophy promoted by the thinkers of the Enlightenment led by Francis Bacon and René Descartes. These cooperated in a program of abandoning common sense grounded in the metaphysics of Aristotle. In Descartes' view, instead of measuring thought by reality, thinkers should treat reality as measured by thought. Under this influence it was inevitable that scientists would be blind to the peril of treating mental being (which exists only in mind) as convertible with reality. This is the first problem with the Abbé's thesis. One may *imagine* that the universe began with the explosion of a single atom but it hardly accords with our experience of what happens in reality.

The second problem arises from a corollary of Descartes' teaching. He had proclaimed *Cogito ergo sum* - 'I think therefore I am'. In doing so he inverted the order of reality that before something can act it must exist: *agere sequitur esse* - do follows be. Before there could have been 'a big bang', a megalithic explosion (if it ever occurred), there had to be something to explode, something 'to go bang'!

But there is something even more radically wrong with the thesis, another effect of the error of confusing mental being with the real. God created the fish and the sea in which they live. Which came first, the fish or the sea? The sea obviously because fish cannot exist in a vacuum; they have to be somewhere. The sea is, moreover, an essential condition of their existence. Here is the principle: before something can exist there must be a place for it. Before God created the stars, planets, moons etc., he had to establish a place, a 'where', in which to locate them, which we call 'space'. Hence, the order in which the universe came into being is—

Somewhere  
Something  
Explosion (maybe!)

In other words, whatever came first in the order of creation, it was not a big bang!

As regards 'space', modern science has a further problem. Just because one can imagine non-being somehow existing—an existent nothing—it does not follow that it exists in reality. The word 'nothing' signifies 'no thing'. Mankind uses a *positive* word, a *positive* concept, to signify something *negative*. We give a positive value to what does not exist. It is part of human speech to do this: the mind is not compelled to operate in the way reality operates. Another example is the word 'night'. Night is not a something but its absence: n + light (i.e., no light) = night.

There is no such thing as an existent nothing. Therefore what modern science means when it uses the expressions 'space', or 'void', does not signify reality for there is no such thing as an existent nothing. The heavenly body, the universe in which exist the stars, planets, moons, asteroids, comets, etc., is not a self-subsistent nothing. It is something. More than this, even if it cannot be detected, it is a material thing. Aristotle saw this, as did St Thomas. It is hidden from modern scientists (it was hidden from the Abbé Lemaître) because they subscribe to a foolish philosophy. One of the great questions for science, once it shakes off the burden of its slavish adherence to the protocols of the Enlightenment, is the nature of this body.

---

We are creatures of time and space and may feel overwhelmed by the Church's teaching that God is not limited by time, but is eternal; that his power is not limited as is ours, but is infinite. St Thomas tells us that we know God in this life by what he is like, by what he is not, and by what he is more than. God is *like* his creatures; he is *not* (any of) his creatures; he is *more than* any of his creatures. There are two conclusions at which experimental science has arrived which can be of great help to our belief because they are expressed in terms of time and place (space). When science tells us that the age of the universe is some 13.8 billion years old we can get some idea of God's eternity. When it tells us that the universe is some 98 billion light years in extent, we can get some faint idea of God's immensity, the immensity, that is, of his power.

No matter how great these two measures are, God, their creator, is yet greater.

Michael Baker

November 11<sup>th</sup>, 2022—*St Martin of Tours*