

## SCRUTINY OF GUNNING FOR GOD<sup>1</sup>

Atheism has no answer to death, no ultimate hope to give. It is an empty and sterile worldview, which leaves us in a closed universe that will ultimately incinerate any last trace that we ever existed. It is, quite literally, a hope-less philosophy. Its story ends in the grave. But the resurrection of Jesus opens the door on a bigger story. It is for each one of us to decide whether it is the true one or not.<sup>2</sup>

These, the last words in Dr John C Lennox's book, *Gunning For God*, would with but few modifications be fittingly found in an encyclical addressing the folly of atheism.

On any day one may hear some modern Catholic claiming that his faith is not based on reason, that it is not necessary to prove God's existence and that, in any event, it cannot be done. That this view is in breach of Catholic teaching and that it was condemned at the (first) Vatican Council<sup>3</sup> does not trouble him, for he thinks the Church did not really begin until Vatican II. The stalls are full of books condemning belief in God as if harmful to society. Public figures in great numbers advocate atheism, and the world suffers as popes, bishops and priests neglect their teaching responsibilities by remaining silent on the essentiality of a rational defence of belief in God, yet another mark of the flight from reason that has characterised Catholic thought in the last fifty years.

The silence has been filled episodically by others among whom the Protestant academic John C Lennox is a notable contributor. In his recent book *Gunning for God* he insists on truths atheists refuse to acknowledge, such as that—

- atheism is just as much a belief system as any religion<sup>4</sup> ;
- atheists owe the very instruments that enable them to criticise it to the immense influence for cultural and moral good of one religion, Christianity<sup>5</sup> ;
- their attitude to rational objections to their assertions manifests signs of a wilful blindness<sup>6</sup> ;
- the 'hard-wiring' of morality in human nature is consistent with the view that human beings are created in the image of God as moral beings<sup>7</sup> ;
- the thinking of atheism is incapable of providing any intellectual foundation for morality ;
- the 20<sup>th</sup> century embrace of atheistic secularism coincided with a burgeoning of human depravity in an unprecedented degree<sup>8</sup> ;

---

<sup>1</sup> John C. Lennox, *Gunning for God, A Critique of the New Atheism*, London, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> *Gunning for God*, op. cit. p. 232.

<sup>3</sup> *If anyone will have said that the one true God, our creator and Lord, cannot be known with certainty in the light of human reason by the things that have been made, let him be anathema.* Session III, April 1870.

<sup>4</sup> *Gunning for God*, op. cit., p. 86 : 'Not believing in God does not leave [atheists] in a... vacuum. Their books are replete with all the... beliefs that flow from their anti-theism. These beliefs form their credo, their faith - much as they like to deny that they have one.'

<sup>5</sup> At p. 74 : '[It] gave the world... the universities that educated [them]... [It] provided the hospitals and hospices that care for them, and that undergirds [their] freedoms and human rights...'

<sup>6</sup> At p. 82 : '[I]t is hard to avoid the impression that we are not actually dealing with intellectuals at all, but with people so obsessed with their own agenda that they have lost touch with reality.'

<sup>7</sup> At pp. 98-9.

- scientific evidence tends *against* the evolutionist (i.e., atheist) view as to how man came to appear on the earth<sup>9</sup>.

But Dr Lennox is not able to do the job that a Vicar of Christ could do, if only we could find one with the intellect, and the starch, and for all that is admirable in his arguments, much more could be said about why atheism is systematic nonsense. Dr Lennox does not know much about Aristotle, and his ignorance of metaphysics leaves his arguments bereft of a proper philosophical underpinning. It is admirable that he should contend (against, indeed, views expressed by certain Catholics) that, of all the religions, only Christianity can be said to be founded by God. He is, however, hampered by his Protestantism which blinds him to the need to adhere to *all* Christ's teachings. Here are some of the shortcomings.

I. Dr Lennox has been likened to another Chesterton or a C S Lewis, but Chesterton, for one, would never have written this—

“The Bible teaches that creation is contingent ; that is, God as Creator is free to make the world as and how he likes.” (p. 28)

Contingency has nothing to do with the will, whether God's or anybody else's, but with what is ontologically prior to will and to intellect, namely, *existence*.<sup>10</sup> The contingent is that which has no guarantee of existence, that which can be-not. If the Bible teaches that creation is contingent it is precisely because—as it also teaches—God, its Creator, is *not* contingent : *He cannot be not*. Man is contingent : God is necessary. When He replied to Moses' question who it was that was sending him, God said, *Tell the people of Israel that He Who Is has sent me to you*<sup>11</sup>, a point reflected in the *Dialogue* of St Catherine of Siena. *I am*, God the Father says to her, *He who is ; you are she who is not*.

Nor could God have made creation 'as and how he likes'. Pius XII expressed the truth involved in his address *Ci Riesce* (December 1953)—

“[N]o human authority, no state, no community of states, whatever be their religious character, can give a positive command or positive authorization to teach or to do

---

<sup>8</sup> At page 89 Dr Lennox quotes the following from David Berlinski : “Somewhere in Eastern Europe, an SS officer watched languidly, his machine gun cradled, as an elderly and bearded Hasidic Jew laboriously dug what he knew to be his grave. Standing up straight, he addressed his executioner. ‘God is watching what you are doing,’ he said [and]... was shot dead. What Hitler did not believe... what Stalin did not believe... what Mao did not believe... what the SS did not believe... what the Gestapo did not believe... what the NKVD did not believe... what the commissars, functionaries, swaggering executioners, Nazi doctors, Communist Party theoreticians, intellectuals, Brown Shirts, Blackshirts, Gauleiters, and a thousand party hacks did not believe, was that God was watching... That is... the meaning of a secular society.” (David Berlinski, *The Devil's Delusion*, pp.26-7)

<sup>9</sup> *Gunning for God*, op. cit., p. 150 : ‘[T]he New Atheists mock such ideas of *original sin*... dismissing the *Genesis* account as a primitive symbolic aetiological myth. However... most scientists assert that *Homo sapiens* sprang from a common ancestor...’

<sup>10</sup> I am using hyperbole here : strictly speaking God is identical with His will as He is identical with His intellect. Both essence and existence—*what* something is and *that* something is—are dependent on the Creator as products not, as it were, of the Divine whimsy, but by force of the Divine intellect reflecting the majesty of the Divine Being. God is not free to contradict His own nature. He could not, for example, create something which was not good, or that was not ordered with (and subordinated to) the rest of creation, or that was not ontologically true.

<sup>11</sup> *Exodus* 3: 13 et seq.

that which would be contrary to religious truth or moral good... Not even God could give such a positive command or positive authorization, because it would be in contradiction to His absolute truth and sanctity."

There are some things that not even God can do.<sup>12</sup>

II. Nor would Chesterton have volunteered this offering—

"We cannot, as Aristotle thought, determine the nature of the universe by starting with abstract philosophical principles. He held that there were certain *a priori* principles to which the universe had to conform..." (p. 28)

Aristotle did no such thing. He viewed reality the way the geometrician views a plane figure bounded by three straight lines. He did not start with *a priori* principles, as the moderns conceive that phrase—concepts originating no where but in mind. He began, as the geometrician begins, with reality, with things, deduced their natures, and exposed the principles underlying them and the corollaries.

III. One error feeds another : he writes—

"One of [Aristotle's] principles was that perfect motion must be circular. Since [he] thought that everything beyond the moon was perfect, it followed that the planets must move in circles. It was only when Kepler, a Christian, decided to break free of this Aristotelian metaphysical constraint, and allow the astronomical data on the movement of Mars (already collected by Tycho Brahe) to speak, that he discovered that the planets actually moved in equally 'perfect' ellipses." (pp. 28-9)

Perfect motion *is* circular for the reasons Aristotle gives in his *Physica* and *De Caelo*, reasons endorsed by St Thomas Aquinas in his commentary on the texts [*In VIII Physics*, Ll. 14-19 ; *In I De Caelo* L iii]. If Aristotle (and, with him, St Thomas) thought the movements of the heavens were perfect he was addressing what reality showed, albeit constrained by the astronomy of his age. But, such was the force of his intellectual analysis, that even with the benefit of a profoundly better knowledge of the motions of the heavenly bodies his conclusions remain valid today. Indeed, modern scientists have yet to grasp the fulness of their subtleties and the implications they contain.

That the planets (and indeed all heavenly bodies) move in perfect ellipses does not detract from the perfection of circular motion ; it confirms it. For such compound motions are simply variations of the perfection of circular motion taking account of what was hidden from Aristotle, the influence of other massive bodies. Were he alive today, Aristotle would point out to the modern scientist that while such masses serve to measure circular motion, whether simple or compounded in ellipses, they do not explain *why* they so move. And in this he would be supported by Newton and by Einstein. Gravity is one of the great unknowns of modern science (as both these scientists acknowledged) and it is unknown because science is besotted with materialism. Science may explain how gravity operates ; it cannot explain why. But, with his grasp of metaphysical principle, Aristotle could have !

---

<sup>12</sup> Because they would be opposed to the truth. He cannot exercise His creative power to contradict His very nature. He could not create another God like to Himself, or create a square circle. The first involves contradiction, i.e., impossibility ; the second contrariety, the two forms cannot exist in the one subject, the one drives out the other.

Dr Lennox's speaking of 'metaphysical restraint' as if metaphysics was opposed to reason, says much for the limitations of his knowledge and understanding.

IV. At pages 50 and 51 he says this :

"In my own field of pure mathematics, "proof" has a rigorous meaning, so that when one mathematician says to another "Prove it", they expect to be presented with a watertight argument proceeding from accepted axioms via accepted rules of logic to a conclusion that [he] can expect also to be accepted by all mathematicians... What is important for us here is that such mathematically rigorous proof is not available in any other discipline or area of experience..."<sup>13</sup>

This last assertion is false. Mathematics proceeds *a priori*, from principle to corollaries, from cause to effect : this is the reason for the certitude of its conclusions, albeit that they concern what is essentially mental being. In contrast, while they concern real being, it is true that science, forensic activity, and the general action of the investigator of history or of present facts, proceeds *a posteriori*, from effects searching for a cause. It is true also that this mode of procedure suffers the limitations of the need for sufficient instances of effects for the investigator to reach any level of certainty about causes. But the philosophy of being which began with Aristotle does not proceed in this fashion. And its conclusions are as certain as those of mathematics precisely because they are not induced from facts but deduced from principle. That Dr Lennox is not familiar with the rigour of Aristotelian Logic is clear, too, from the way he endorses, at the conclusion of his chapter 4, what Dr David Berlinski asserts to be a syllogism.

V. At pages 64 and 65 Dr Lennox contends that one of Christ's commands was the explicit prohibition of the use of force to defend Christ or his message.

"To take the sword, gun, or bomb in Christ's name is to repudiate both Christ and his message."

This is simplistic : in the absence of distinction, it reduces Christianity to Quakerism. No Christian is entitled—as the Muslim thinks *he* is entitled—to impose his religion by violence, for to do so is to contradict the principle that man, made in God's image, is free and his freedom is to be respected as the gift of God. But the Christian *is entitled to defend* his religion, his Christian family, his fellow Christians and indeed his non-Christian fellowmen, against aggression. He is entitled to defend civilisation against the depredations of the mindless ideology of Mohammedanism which is at root a heresy mocking the one religion founded by God. He is entitled to advance the Cross of Christ against the Muslim folly.

However, Dr Lennox is on firmer ground when he says (at p. 65)—

"Jesus taught his followers not to hate their enemies but to love them; and he acted accordingly when the armed crowd came with Judas to the Garden of Gethsemane to arrest him."

Even when the Christian is defending against an unjust aggressor he is bound to love him as a creature made in God's image and as worthy of respect. The immorality of killing the innocent troubled the members of many aircrews during World War II detailed to bomb German cities and, according to anecdotal evidence, moved them to

---

<sup>13</sup> He repeats the claim in chapter 8 : "[P]roof in the rigorous mathematical sense is not available in any other discipline or area of experience, not even in the so-called 'hard' sciences." (p. 190)

dump their bombs in the countryside. Christian may fight Christian, each defending the right, or what he perceives to be the right, to the death and still do so in accordance with Christian principle. And Dr Lennox is right to quote Christ's words, *He who lives by the sword will die by the sword.*

VI. Again he writes with limited vision when he says (at pp. 70-1)—

“one does not become a Christian either by birth or by any ceremony or ritual performed on you as an infant... one has to become a child of God by a personal act of trust in Christ as Lord. That act of trust is a free and unforced commitment based on evidence. That step cannot be made by an infant... Christ's ordinance of baptism was given as a public symbol to express the Christian life on the part of those who had already received it : baptism was given not to generate that life in the first place.”

It is Christ, the Risen Christ, the Christ *over Whom death has no more dominion*<sup>14</sup>, who determines how one becomes a Christian, and He established a Church to deal with the issue. She mandates the baptism of the children of believers precisely because *it is baptism that generates the life of the child of God in the first place.* Dr Lennox reduces the real to the symbolic as he ignores, or relegates to insignificance, the doctrine of Original Sin. St Paul lays the groundwork here—

“If by one man's offence death reigned through one, (namely Adam), how much more they who receive abundance of grace of the gift and of justice, shall reign in life through one, Jesus Christ.” (*Romans* 5: 17)

What is at issue is not something physical (material) but metaphysical. Baptism produces the *habitus* of faith as it produces the *habitus* of charity, the love of God and of one's fellow man. These virtues are dispositions of the will given by God to fulfil the obligations of faith and charity, dispositions that exist *prior to* any act that fulfils these obligations.

Baptism confers a new nature on the child. Just as human nature involves dispositions of the will—to seek life, nourishment, social interaction, and so forth—dispositions that exist prior to, and which are presupposed to, any action, so the new nature conferred by baptism includes dispositions in the child to act in pursuit of the supernatural good that exists prior to, and presupposed by, any meritorious action.<sup>15</sup> St Thomas Aquinas puts it eloquently—

“The spiritual regeneration effected by baptism is somewhat like carnal birth in this respect, that as the child while in the mother's womb receives nourishment not independently but through the nourishment of its mother, so also children before the use of reason, being as it were in the womb of their mother the Church, receive salvation not by their own act but by the act of the Church.”<sup>16</sup>

The child is quite unaware of the gift it is given via conception by God (the parents are merely instruments). We would not allow that the child must abide the attainment of the use of reason before he accepts the reality of his existence. (Whether he later chooses some silly ideology as grounds for denying it is a matter about which he may exercise his free will.) As life is freely given by God to all, so in

---

<sup>14</sup> *Romans* 6 : 9

<sup>15</sup> This is taken from the exposition of the Catholic position in Dr John A Lamont's paper on religion and the state at [https://www.academia.edu/877072/Catholic\\_teaching\\_on\\_religion\\_and\\_the\\_state](https://www.academia.edu/877072/Catholic_teaching_on_religion_and_the_state)

<sup>16</sup> *Summa Theologiae*, III, q. 68, a. 9, ad 1.

baptism is the Life of Grace, a much higher gift, given to those fortunate to have had Christian parents.<sup>17</sup> Whether the child having reached manhood continues to accept the gift is another matter.

Dr Lennox proceeds, inevitably, to make further errors, finding himself in agreement with Christopher Dawkins (as if *Dawkins* would know) on what it is that constitutes a Christian ; misunderstanding the place of the state qua the family, and so on (see pp. 71-2).

VII. With the following he heads in the right direction but does not quite *arrive* (as the French might say) :

“Whatever [Hitler and Stalin] were by label or background, they were atheists in practice. What they had in common was a utopian vision for the remaking of humanity in their own image; and in so doing they effectively created a substitute religion...” (p. 84).

If you abandon belief in God you are not thereby relieved of the need for belief. This is an inevitable consequence of the debility of the human intellect. As Chesterton said, a man who will not believe in God will believe in anything. What substitutes for religion is ideology, that is, someone’s idea elevated to serve as a surrogate for reality. Many defective religions, such as Mohammedanism and Mormonism and the pseudo-religion, Freemasonry, bear the hallmarks of ideology quite as harmful as the follies inspired by people like Karl Marx. And one need not embark on a study of these false religions to realise how, since the 1970s, ideologies have come to dominate peoples’ lives, notably the ideologies of secular humanism and of feminism. The frequent invocation in public life of the need to conform to ‘political correctness’ is eloquent of the universality of the phenomenon.<sup>18</sup>

VIII. While he mocks the atheists for their materialism, Dr Lennox seems blind to his own commitment to the materialist paradigm. This is evident in the claim—

“there is widespread acknowledgment on all sides that it is very difficult to get a base for morality in nature.” (p. 99)

For those who provide this ‘widespread acknowledgement’ are, all of them, caught in the materialist net. Yet his approach serves a purpose for it enables us to see the arguments of atheists, and those of the philosophers responsible for placing them in this bind, addressed from their own base. A little of the history of recent thought will assist.

The error of René Descartes (1596-1650) in suppressing the objective, the real, in favour of his own personal perceptions left the thinkers of his day with the material objects of sensed perception detached from their foundations and, what was worse,

---

<sup>17</sup> Protestant, and most secular commentators on ‘religious belief’ for that matter, reduce God to a construct of the mind rather than a reality. They do not understand that God is real, that true faith in God has God, not man, as its author. True faith in God is consistent with man’s nature but it is not from man : *it is from God*.

<sup>18</sup> Even such mundane obsessions as ‘global warming’ and ‘carbon capture’ betray the need for some sort of belief system even as they deny the influence of an overarching intellect ordering the planet and man’s destiny on it.

left them with their own ideas detached, likewise, from reality.<sup>19</sup> There were two effects on philosophic thinking, *subjectivism* (all thought starts with the thinker) and *materialism* (nothing beyond the material exists or can exist). Each of these aberrations, the reader should note, begins with a pre-conception on the part of the thinker. Reality is no longer to be permitted to dictate how he shall think. The precursor, or prophet, of this mindset was the Franciscan heretic William of Occam (c.1287-1347) whose defective philosophy was to be a catalyst for Luther's rebellion. The philosophers that followed Descartes like David Hume (1711-1776), John Locke (1632-1704), and Bishop George Berkeley (1685-1753), simply teased out the implications of Descartes' folly.<sup>20</sup>

Because he is confined in his materialist cell it is impossible for a materialist to grasp the reasoning deriving morality from the demands of nature. One hundred years ago Chesterton compared the mindset to madness.

"If you argue with a madman, it is extremely probable that you will get the worst of it ; for in many ways his mind moves all the quicker for not being delayed by the things that go with good judgment. He is not hampered by a sense of humour or by charity, or by the dumb certainties of experience. He is the more logical for losing certain sane affections. Indeed, the common phrase for insanity is in this respect a misleading one. The madman is not the man who has lost his reason. The madman is the man who has lost everything except his reason."<sup>21</sup>

As the madman is detached from reality, so is the materialist thinker, something that is clear in the opinions of those Dr Lennox quotes with a view to debunking ; this, for instance, from Jacques Monod —

"One of the great problems of philosophy is the relationship between the realm of knowledge and the realm of values. Knowledge is what "is" and values are what "ought" to be. I would say that all traditional philosophies up to and including communism have tried to derive the "ought" from the "is". This is impossible. If it is true that there is no purpose in the universe, that man is a pure accident, you cannot derive any ought from it."<sup>22</sup>

And the assurance by the scientific correspondent of London's *Sunday Telegraph*—

"It is not just the religious explanation of the world that is contradicted by the scientific explanations of our origins. So, too, are most of our ethical values, since

---

<sup>19</sup> With his *cogito ergo sum* (I think, therefore I am) Descartes reversed the dictate of reality which is *sum ergo possum cogitare* (I am, therefore I can think).

<sup>20</sup> The errors of these philosophers turn on the epistemological question *What is it that we know when we know ?* In **Occam** the error is *Nominalism* which asserts that the names we give things are nothing but names, collectives of singular perceptions. This is incipient materialism. In **Locke** the error is *Empiricism* whose assertion it is that the materials of knowledge and reason derive from experience *and nothing else*. The mind is purely passive. **Berkeley** extends this empiricism by denying the existence of a material world, for once one denies the substrate of phenomena (the physical appearances), these cannot be explained other than as ideas of the perceiver. **Hume** carries the principle to its logical conclusion by rejecting the objective value of the principle of causality ; a corporeal substance is nothing but the sum of impressions. Each of these thinkers reduces the intellect to a sort of sense, denies its immaterial power to know universal realities and identify them in the singulars of observation. There are three effects : 1. all knowledge is reduced to sensation ; 2. the concept of substance (the underlying reality which makes a thing be what it is) is lost ; and, 3. the true concept of causality is denied.

<sup>21</sup> G K Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, London (The Bodley Head), 1908, Chapter II. 'The Maniac' ; my copy, a Fontana reprint, 1963, p. 19.

<sup>22</sup> Jacques Monod and A. Wainhouse, *Chance and Necessity*, London, Collins, 1971, pp.110, 167 ; quoted in John C Lennox, *Gunning for God*, op. cit., p. 106.

most of them have been shaped by our religious heritage. A scientific account of mankind has no more place for free-will or the equal capacity of each individual to be good and act justly than it has for the soul.”<sup>23</sup>

The objective reality of moral obligation, as plain as the nose on one’s face, disappears behind the cloud of these materialists’ pre-conceptions. They are like men in a room with but one window, its pane flawed and yellowed, arguing over what the distorted light reveals. Dr Lennox uses a similar metaphor —

“They openly confess that they are not prepared even to listen to arguments that go outside the bounds of their naturalism. Of course it is honest of them to say that they have decided to imprison themselves inside the small world of their naturalistic castle. But whether that attitude is reasonable, or whether there is a world outside that they have put beyond their own reach, is of course quite a different matter.”<sup>24</sup>

It is Chesterton (again) who puts his finger on the issue.

“[The] peril is that the human intellect is free to destroy itself. Just as one generation could prevent the very existence of the next generation by all entering a monastery or jumping into the sea, so one set of thinkers can in some degree prevent further thinking by teaching the next generation that there is no validity in any human thought... There is a thought that stops thought. That is the only thought that ought to be stopped.”<sup>25</sup>

In any sane society atheism, and philosophy which leads to it, would be suppressed for the welfare of its citizenry.<sup>26</sup>

Contrary to Monod—and, indeed, contrary to Dr Lennox’s own view—it is precisely in nature that morality has its ground. Nature is an intricate and ordered reality standing between two intellects, the Divine and the created<sup>27</sup>, in which each elemental creature exercises, at its proper level, a particular gift. The materialist does not see the formal, indelible, and immutable essences of the things of nature, realities produced and kept in being by an intellect like his own but infinitely more powerful.

Any sane man will insist that stealing is evil for a man but not for a dog. He acknowledges, as part of common sense, that there is in a man a reality a dog lacks. What is it? Whatever that distinguishing reality is, the stupendous truth is that *it is not material!* Here, in the insistence on the critical function that the formal plays in every material thing, is the clue to the confusion which makes the materialist conduct

---

<sup>23</sup> Alasdair Palmer, “Must Knowledge Gained Mean Paradise Lost”, *Sunday Telegraph*, 6<sup>th</sup> April 1977, quoted in John C Lennox, *Gunning for God*, op. cit., p. 107. These thinkers share a common misconception about science (experimental science). They assume it is impossible for science to be interpreted other than through *materialist* eyes. But science is quite indifferent to a scientist’s philosophical predilections. Were he alive today, Aristotle, whose take on reality differs radically from that of modern philosophers, would see in science’s discoveries infinitely more profound realities than those currently posited. He would, moreover, insist that human morality is consistent with a right understanding of nature. On this score, let the reader do something Jacques Monod clearly neglected to do, study something of the thinking in Aristotle’s *Nichomachean Ethics*.

<sup>24</sup> *Gunning for God*, op. cit., p. 229.

<sup>25</sup> G K Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, op. cit., Chapter III. ‘The Suicide of Thought’, p. 33.

<sup>26</sup> Which is one of the reasons we should study the values of the Middle Ages. For in mediaeval times atheists *were* suppressed!

<sup>27</sup> *Rem naturalis inter duos intellectos constituit*. St Thomas Aquinas, *De Veritate* 1, 2. The first is the Divine intellect, its constitutor; the other is the created intellect its receptor, who, marvelling at the thing made, is led rationally to give thanks and hyperdulia to its Creator.



himself so stupidly.<sup>28</sup> The principle at stake, the *Principle of Indeterminacy*, is simple common sense—

*That which can be many is not one of the many.*

If water can be hot and can be cold, it gets its heat, or lack of it, from something other than itself. (If water was hot from itself, wherever you had water there would be hot water.) If matter can be a man, can be a dog, can be a tree, it has not from the fact that it is matter the reason why it is a man, a dog or a tree. The reason, in each case, is something else. In the case of water the heat is an *accidental* form ; in the case of matter, the 'man-ness', the 'brute animal-ness', and the 'vegetative-ness', is (in each case) a *substantial* form.

Matter has an infinitely variable character, as experience shows : of itself it is no one of the things it can be. Matter is merely *the substrate* of reality. The materialist wants to make it the whole of reality.

Which brings us back to the ontological, and temporal, source of the materialists' problems, their denial of the greater part of reality when they deny the existence of the immaterial. But why did they in the beginning feel so constrained to deny its existence ? Why do they feel so constrained about it today ? The reason is that once you admit a *formal* (immaterial) cause which determines a thing to be what it is you implicitly admit an intellectual factor or *efficient* cause, and a *final* cause, the end for the sake of which the efficient cause has produced these myriad forms. That is, implicitly you admit the existence of a Creator and Conservator of reality.

IX. Dr Lennox's *reductiones ad absurdum* of the materialists' endeavours are perhaps best illustrated by this criticism of Richard Dawkins' attempt to provide a basis for morality and man's instinctive inclination to act in consideration for others :

"[He says] that, even though man is nothing but his genes, he can somehow rebel against [them] when they would lead him to do wrong... [Yet]... at the beginning... Dawkins says : "We are survival machines—robot vehicles blindly-programmed to preserve the selfish molecules known as genes." But then he appears to retreat from this position in the final chapter... "For an understanding of modern man, we must begin by throwing out the gene as the sole basis of our ideas on evolution"; and gives us as his grand conclusion the encouragement to rebel against a genetic tyranny. But how can we rebel, if we are nothing but our genes ? If there is no non-material, non-genetic, element or force within us, what is there in us that could possibly have the capacity to rebel against our genes and behave morally ? Nowhere does Dawkins tell us about the origin of such a capacity or when it appeared. And where would we ever get any objective moral principles to guide us in that rebellion ?"<sup>29</sup>

Every materialist, every evolutionist, has recourse, via a back door, to the threefold causality he denies. What else is natural selection but an invoking of *final* and *formal*

---

<sup>28</sup> The brute animal lacks the two powers found in man, intellect and its condign appetite, will. The consequences are that a man is an end in himself, whereas a brute has more the character of means. He has what the brute does not, absolute rights and proportionate responsibilities. These demand a fitting response, acknowledgement that its possessor must conform his conduct to a rule, *do good, avoid evil*. The influence that gives a brute its nature is really, i.e., formally (immaterially) distinct from the influence which gives to a man *his* nature, yet both are part of that larger reality, *nature*.

<sup>29</sup> *The Selfish Gene*, Oxford (OUP), 1976, quoted in *Gunning for God*, op. cit., p. 111.

causality while excluding (by attributing the effects to blind accident) an overarching mind drawing its intricate designs and directing its beneficent ends ? What else is the reliance on chance but an invoking of *efficient* causality while denying a factor intellect ? Chance is a cause *per accidens*, the concatenation of *per se* causes producing either a happy or tragic result. No materialist has yet explained why its operations in producing their hypothetical 'macro-evolution' should have been happy rather than tragic ones. Dawkin's appeal to a blind influence programming men as 'survival machines' is a further instance of the syndrome. No computer has a fraction of the complexity of a living man and no computer is 'blindly-programmed'. Why should a man be when Dawkins' computer is not ?

X. Then there is the problem of evil. Every atheist and not a few Protestants are caught up with the evil in the world. But what is evil ? Is it something, or is it nothing ? If it is something, is it a positive or a negative something ? Dr Lennox rightly mocks the atheists for their 'solution' —

"[E]vil for them is just part of the way the world is. Indeed, what they might... be hard put to explain is why there is any good at all, let alone so much of it. Why are they protesting against evil, since they don't actually believe that it exists?"<sup>30</sup>

But he does not quite address the reality at stake which is that evil is something negative, the lack, not of any good at all, but of a *due* good<sup>31</sup> which leads inevitably to the most critical question in the debate, not *Why is there evil in the world?* but, *Whence comes the good in the world of which evil is the lack ?*

It is not until his final chapter that Dr Lennox deals with the evidence for God which comes through what he calls 'direct perception', quoting the telling passage of St Paul in *Romans* chapter 1 :

"[W]hat can be known about God is plain because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived ever since the creation of the world in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For though they knew God they did not honour him as God or give him thanks..."

There is admirable counterpoint in his berating of atheists for spending their lives—

"hiding behind the idea that, because they have found what they think is the only mechanism involved in life's origin and variation, they have somehow explained life. They seem unaware of their elementary category mistake, in thinking that the existence of a mechanism somehow obviates the need for an agent who designed the mechanism." (p. 228)

He goes on to quote Wittgenstein to the point—

"The great delusion of modernity is that the laws of nature explain the universe for us. The laws of nature describe the universe, they describe the regularities. But they explain nothing."

XI. His Protestantism moves Dr Lennox to present Christ's teaching with a Calvinist slant :

"[A]ll can be 'justified' [i.e. be put right with God] by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus... we hold that one is justified by faith apart from

---

<sup>30</sup> *Gunning for God*, op. cit., p. 136.

<sup>31</sup> Why is blindness an evil in a horse but not in a tree ? Because sight is *due to* a horse ; it is not due to a tree.

works of the law ... to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness". (at p. 153, citing St Paul in *Romans* 3: 24, 28, and 4: 5)

This assessment addresses the word 'grace' superficially (materially) as denoting something freely given but it does not comprehend *what* is given. St Paul said much more on the topic than may be extracted from the above quotes and to ignore what he said elsewhere, and what the other apostles said, falsifies their teaching. In his epistle to Titus St Paul is clear : "They profess their faith in God but their actions give the lie". (*Titus* 1: 16) And St James, whose epistle Luther was careful to excise from his version of the Bible, was typically forthright : "Faith without good works is dead". (*James* 2: 17) Justification is much more than the Protestant's conceived 'covering-over' of man's sinfulness ; it involves a conversion of mind and heart. Justification consists in—

'the translation from that condition in which man is born as the son of the first Adam, into the state of grace and adoption among the children of God through the second Adam, Jesus Christ...'<sup>32</sup>

How could it be compatible with the veracity and the sanctity of God to declare the sinner justified if he remained in his sinful state ?

The same influence affects his assessment of Christ's words on the eucharist :

"At the Last Supper in Jerusalem, when he instituted the ceremony by which his first disciples and all subsequent believers should remember him, he chose bread and wine as eloquent symbols of his death : 'This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me... This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.'" (p. 159)

Which is curious considering his defence of the fundamental claim that Christ rose from the dead. If Christ was God and could rise from the dead, why could he not turn bread into His body and wine into blood for the nourishment of his faithful followers ? Moreover, Christ addressed the objection implicit in Dr Lennox's interpretation in His words to the Jews—

"Amen, Amen, I say to you, if you do not eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you will not have life in you. Anyone who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life and I shall raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink..."<sup>33</sup>

This approach is of a piece with Dr Lennox's flawed views about baptism.

## Conclusion

It may be suggested that we should not cavil unduly with what Dr Lennox has written, that we should commend him for putting heart into many believers in God for his systematic exposure of the debility of the arguments atheists advance. But there is a critical matter at stake here.

Those who reject God's authority are, like the builders of the Tower of Babel, brought to confusion. When they impose their own will on what God has revealed they construct a false, a man-made, religion. Soon disagreement sets in and, *quot homines tot sententiae*, this false religion begins to assume differing guises. It

---

<sup>32</sup> Council of Trent, Session VI (January 13<sup>th</sup>, 1547), ch. 4 ; Denzinger 796.

<sup>33</sup> *John* 6: 53 et seq.

degrades into quasi-religions like Unitarianism (which has much in common with Mohammedanism), Deism and Freemasonry which lead inevitably to atheism.

Which is precisely where we are today, almost 500 years after the revolt inspired by Martin Luther and prosecuted so indulgently, and diligently, by Henry Tudor. The process is logical :

- atheism denies God's existence, the ground of which is—
- a denial of God's authority, the ground of which is—
- a rejection of what God has revealed implicit in the election of the Protestant 'believer' to pick and choose among the truths, rather than embrace them all.

The missteps in the *theological* order have their parallel in the *philosophical* order. Realism (moderate realism, not the exaggerated realism of Plato),—the intellectual acceptance that we are determined by things outside ourselves (by reality, by nature); that *what we know* is *what is*, and that truth is the identity between *what is asserted* and *what is*;—gives way to the view that the thinker's own position determines the truth. Instead of reality as the measure, he thinks himself and his ideas are the measure.

*What matters is what I think.* Subjectivism denies what underlies the objective world and concentrates on what appears, on the superficial. It denies the immaterial (the formal) in favour of the material, the sensible, and proceeds to assert that this is the whole of reality. It takes a further step : it reduces the intellect to a sense, a high-level sense, but no more than a sense. It rejects the universal, the concept and the reality of indelible, enduring, natures exemplified in innumerable individuals, in favour of a latter-day Heracliteanism that maintains (against all the objective evidence) that every thing is in a state of flux, busily 'evolving' into something else. These two aberrations, *subjectivism* and *materialism* provide a sort of ersatz substitute for *realism* and, after development, return to confirm and give vigour to the atheistic tendency which, as Dr Lennox rightly remarks, "has no answer... no ultimate hope to give".

It is here, in his own backyard so to speak, that the provenance of the evil Dr Lennox attacks began its life. Unless we throw off the false interpretations of what the Son of God revealed to mankind and embrace, again, the teachings of the Institution Christ established on earth, and of which He remains the Head, the Catholic Church, disorder and atheism will continue to flourish.

Michael Baker

15<sup>th</sup> July 2014—*St Bonaventure, Bishop and Doctor of the Church*