

Atheist Dawkins' opinions converge with Catholic Father?

By John Sylvester

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In a recent interview of Father George Coyne by confirmed atheist Richard Dawkins, the latter seemed almost delighted that, for once he had found a member of the Catholic church who actually subscribes to his Darwinian theories. But this is the man Pope Benedict XVI sacked as his chief astronomer after a series of public clashes over the theory of evolution. On the surface their theories only seemed to differ in one fundamental aspect: faith in a creator.

What Father Coyne seemed to be saying is that evolution can only be evolutionary in nature once the "system of evolution" has been created and that the universe therefore needed a "creator". But his views are so far removed from traditional Catholic thought that the Pope removed him from his position as director of the Vatican Observatory after he repeatedly contradicted the Holy See's endorsement of "intelligent design" theory, which essentially backs their "Adam and Eve" theory of creation.

Ultimately, all christian teaching subscribes to Intelligent Design ("creationism") by imagining that not only is there is a "reason" for the universe's existence but that it needs constant tinkering with. In his book, *The God Delusion*, Richard Dawkins comically remarks on Adam and Eve: "Their sin? Eating the fruit of a forbidden tree? Seems mild enough to merit a mere reprimand. But the symbolic nature of the fruit (knowledge of good and evil, which in practice turned out to be knowledge that they were naked) was enough to turn their scrumping escapade into the mother and father of all sins..." He was either joking or he entirely missed the spiritual metaphor there: because of materialist Adam, Man fell from Grace.

The other point that Mr Dawkins dismisses is the terminator logic: that the huge "potential difference" the creator manifested to create us needed a creator's creator to create the creator, and so on ad infinitum. Although atheism and religion are seen as polar opposites, no one can ever know and it's a fallacy to suggest otherwise; except for the faithful, of course, who terminate and call it God. This is the "faith" ascribed to by Father Coyne but it is as intellectually impure as it gets to the atheist.

Dawkins' most testy opinion, in the opening to Chapter 2 of the book is that: "The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully."

Catholics favour "intelligent design", a concept which states that God directs the process of evolution, over Charles Darwin's original theory which holds that species evolve through the random, unplanned processes of genetic mutation and the survival of the fittest. When sacking Coyne the church responded to an explosive debate on evolution argued that Darwinian concepts of "random variation and natural selection" were incompatible with the Catholic belief that there is a divine purpose and design to nature.

There are some that think God "pulled back the veil on the reality behind the One God revealed to Israel and showed us that within God there is a three-ness - Father, Son and Holy Spirit". But that is mere conjecture from a lonely source.

If we move on to Hegel for a moment, who introduced the concept of integrating opposite views by taking a thesis and its anti-thesis, and creating a synthesis, or combination of the two, we get somewhere closer to what Christians believe: the Trinity; that the Son and Holy Spirit proceed from the Father.

In Hinduism, also, Lord Brahma is the first member of the Brahmanical triad, Vishnu being the second and Shiva, the third, with Brahma being the creator of the entire universe. In the Qabalah, there is similar conceptual Trinity of Absolute No-Thing-ness, defined as Ain, Infinite Space, defined as Ain Soph and Limitless Light, defined as Ain Soph Aur.

Perhaps, among all the religions, only in Zen Buddhism do we not find the idea of a god as there is no way to characterise what either are. In general, the Zen attitude is that words and truth are incompatible, or at least that no words can capture truth, is its ascent from theological dualism.

But all this leaves us where? That Father Coyne's religion only differs to a certain extent from Richard Dawkins' atheism in that, on the surface, he believes in a divine creator? Perhaps, yes. The videos on YouTube are worth a look for anyone that is interested in the subject.

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