

Philip Fitzherbert – Sermon 2

The question of the existence of God is the single most important question we face about the nature of reality.

To quote Anthony Kenny:

After all, if there is no God, then God is incalculably the greatest single creation of the human imagination. No other creation of the imagination has been so fertile of ideas, so great an inspiration to philosophy, to literature, to painting, sculpture, architecture, and drama; no other creation of the imagination has done so much to stir human beings to deeds of horror and nobility or set them to lives of austerity or endeavour.

Is that what God is? A gorgeously fertile figment of the imagination, with man the true reality, or has the thought of him been the inspiration of much human creativity precisely because he is the creative ground of all that is?

I like the story of a radical English theologian who had been giving a lecture to a group of clergy. At the end, one of them said “Professor X, do you believe in God?” He received a carefully nuanced academic reply, “No,” “No” said his interrogator, “I just want to know if you believe in God.” Professor X then said, “I believe; indeed, I know, that at the heart of reality is One who reigns and loves and forgives.” It was a splendid reply, going with unadorned directness to the heart of what belief in the existence of God is all about. David Palin says that

“A theistically satisfactory concept of the divine must conceive of the divine as being intrinsically holy, ultimate, personal and agential.”

Does such a concept of God make sense? If so, do we have a reason for believing in such a being?

Neither question is easy to answer. God is a different kind of being from any other about which we might speak and is not part of that metaphysical monism, for his active will is the sustaining ground of that single created reality. As Diogenes Allen says,

“God is not the final member of a succession of beings studied in cosmology or any of the sciences, any more than God was at the top storey of Aristotle’s hierarchical universe, the unmoved mover.”

We have to use the language of the finite being to try to talk about the infinite – we have no other means at our disposal – but it will always have to be in some stretched cosmological sense. It is less misleading to speak of God as personal rather than impersonal but that is not a licence for the naiveté of the picture of an old-man-in-the-sky.

If the notion of God was incoherent, he could hardly exist.

In 1900 any competent first year philosophy undergraduate could have demonstrated the “incoherence” of anything, appearing sometimes like a wave and sometimes like a particle. Yet that is how light was found to behave and, through the universe-assisted logic of that discovery, we have led to the invention of quantum field theory, which combines wave-like and particle-like behaviour without a taint of paradox. This though the first, the conceptual question has logical priority. I attach greater importance to the second, the evidential question of whether we have reason to believe God actually exists.

We do have the backing of science to our beliefs. Professor Frank Tipler’s book, *“The Physics of Immortality,”* has without question given the proof, through physics, of the existence of God and the reality of immortality.

This book is a description of the Omega Point theory, which is a testable physical theory for an omnipresent, omniscient, omnipotent God.

So, we have a belief system which places God at the centre of the universe. This belief system has the backing now of science and Tipler’s book has never been challenged in any meaningful way. The book is now an icon in modern physics.

To finish, I use a poem by Thomas E. Brown that many of you will recognise. All around us is evidence of the presence of God.

*My garden is a lovesome thing, God wot!
Rose Plot
Fringed pool
Fern’d grot
The veriest school
Of peace, and yet the fool
Contends that God is not-
Not God! In gardens! When the eve is cool?
Nay, but I have a sign
‘Tis very sure God walks in mine!*

Take a look around, the hand of God is everywhere! He is truly omnipresent.

Amen.