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TOGETHER IN CHRIST



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EDITORIAL

This issue is different! The centre spread, courtesy of Desmond Miller, is in full colour and is part of our aim to improve *Together in Christ* for readability and interest.

Maureen Liddy reports on *Together in Europe* at Stuttgart last May. This gathering demonstrates the legacy of John Paul II's invitation to all Faith and Church leaders to Assisi and Rome as preparation for the Jubilee of the 2nd Millennium.

Terry Davies introduces *Street Pastors*, bringing a new style of missionary work to our high streets by being there for the lost sheep of our communities. Alun Morinan has described his first night on the streets (9.30 pm – 1.00am including preparatory prayer and debrief) as a very rewarding and tiring Friday night.

Lambeth Palace recently hosted a meeting of ESBVM. As well as a tour of the Palace we learn some of the background work and theology that has served ARCIC II and for the agreement about Mary in the Seattle Statement.

Discussion on the King James Bible continues with the final part in February 2008. Make sure you have subscribed for it.

For those wanting more meat with their gravy, the *Ontological Argument* is re-presented. Don't say were not challenging enough! It's a view you can take or leave. Whether you agree or not, God remains.

This year has seen some fascinating articles showing how Unity is alive and active in our churches. Back issues are available for £1.20 each if you missed out or want to send copies to a friend.

Please pray for those involved in the bulletin and for its development as a tool for Christ's Church.

Michael

TOGETHER FOR EUROPE STUTT GART 2007

This remarkable gathering of more than 9,000 people representing 240 Christian Movements and Communities from all over Europe took place in Stuttgart, Germany on Saturday, 12th May. Many Church Leaders and politicians were also present, while others sent very positive messages of support.

The initiative for such a gathering originated in 1998 when Pope John Paul II invited the leaders and representatives of the European Movements to meet with him at Pentecost in Rome. There was a huge response and thousands thronged St Peter's Square in a spirit of joyful hope and enthusiasm to celebrate the diverse charisms which the Holy Spirit has bestowed upon the Church.

During this historic event the Holy Father expressed his desire that the Movements would continue to build a network of relationships with each other and collaborate with their distinctive gifts to be a Christian witness throughout Europe.

There was an immediate response to this request and a current of communion began which led to the first *Together for Europe* event in 2004 where 180 Movements were represented in Stuttgart. A joint declaration was made there, promising to work together with all people of goodwill to build true brotherhood in Europe.

This year's event showed the growth and development of the Movements and their influence on society, particularly in the areas of the family, work and economy, the poor and underprivileged, peace and justice and the city. Many positive experiences were given to illustrate how the Gospel is the basis of bringing peace and fraternity in every situation. One couple

shared a very moving experience of trying to build bridges between the divided communities in their town in Northern Ireland despite immense difficulties and disapproval from both sides. Their faith in the Gospel message of love for every neighbour sustained them.

His Holiness, Pope Benedict XVI sent his special blessing in a message which was read by Cardinal Bertone. In it the Holy Father quoted Pope John Paul II saying his words were more relevant than ever:

I would like to mention in a particular way the loss of Europe's Christian memory and heritage, accompanied by a kind of practical agnosticism and religious indifference, whereby many Europeans give the impression of living without spiritual roots and somewhat like heirs who have squandered a patrimony entrusted to them by history.

Cardinal Bertone continued:

the Holy Father hopes that the meeting may strengthen the desire for communion which animates lay Movements and Communities of the different Churches; that it may contribute to overcoming prejudices, nationalism and historical barriers, and may urge people to work so that the spiritual dimension may not weaken in the Europe of post-modern times.

Cardinal Walter Kasper, President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, spoke of his joy in seeing the Churches of Europe growing closer together with new attitudes of sharing in a spirit of communion. He said the Gospel gives us the hope and energy to build peace and solidarity in Europe, then to look beyond to the needs of the world, especially Africa.

Bartholomaios, Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, said: 'The secularized man of our time suffers simultaneously

from material saturation and spiritual impoverishment.’ He urged all Christians to build a personal relationship with God so we can overcome divisions and see everyone as brothers and sisters: ‘Let us look for our original Christian roots, so that an inspired desire becomes tangible reality’.

The Catholic Patriarch from Armenia said that this coming together of Christians has been initiated by the Holy Spirit

in order to give Europe a new heart according to the plan of God, a renewed soul to unify the peoples of Europe in the Spirit of the Gospel . . . they will discover every day new ways, new ‘formulae’ which will diminish the significant differences and increase the number of unifying values . . . The Holy Spirit astonishes us with his initiatives which generate light, joy and peace.

Messages of encouragement and blessing were also given by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams; Cardinal Peter Erdo, Archbishop of Budapest and President of the European Bishops Conference; Cardinal Vlk of Prague; Cardinal Karl Lehmann, President of the Catholic Bishops Conference in Germany; Rev Dr Samuel Kobia, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches; Pastor Thomas Wipf, President of the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe; Johannes Friedrich, Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, and many others.

The many politicians who supported the day included Jose Barroso, President of the European Commission; Angela Merkel, Chancellor of Germany; Mary McAleese, President of Ireland; Bertie Ahern, Prime Minister of Ireland; Romano Prodi, the Italian President, spoke of the challenges facing Europe in the Middle East and Africa which give us a great impetus to grow together to bring unity, fraternity, reconciliation and peace.

The vibrant joy of being part of this collaboration and enrichment gave the participants a new determination to live the Gospel together ‘for the glory of God and the good and blessing of all humanity’.

However, this was not just an emotional or superficial feeling, for a leitmotiv running throughout the day was a profound sense that the sufferings of Europe’s past history and the experience of the present ‘dark night’ can be resolved only through our love for Jesus, Crucified and Forsaken.

In the final talk Chiara Lubich, foundress of the Focolare Movement, reminded us that it is *Jesus Forsaken* who is present in every division and suffering of society, and with Him we can overcome them. This gives birth to and spreads in the world what we could call the ‘Culture of the Resurrection’. *Jesus Forsaken*, the modern day Crucifix, radiates the light of the Risen Lord and makes us generous in sharing His gifts. We want to give priority to loving and following our model – Christ Crucified and Forsaken. In this way we will be able to take upon ourselves the cry of today’s humanity, and through His ‘cry’ which redeemed everything, build around us that human family for which the world is yearning.

This was the essence of a most inspiring event.

Maureen Liddy

WOULD YOU LIKE TO CUT YOUR HIGH STREET CRIME RATE?

Then why not get your own Borough to start a *Street Pastors Team*? Wherever such a team has been set-up, police statistics show a drop in the crime rate. For instance:

30% reduction in Lewisham in the first

13 weeks

95% reduction in Camberwell

74% reduction in Peckham



Would you like to see that happen in your own High Street? London has *Street Pastor Teams* in eleven out of its thirty-three boroughs and would like them in every Borough! Don't you, too? You could help by starting one!

The role of the team is not to preach heaven and hell – it is about caring, listening and helping. Training is provided, as is a simple uniform. A DVD and booklet are available from the Ascension Trust, PO BOX 3916, London, SE9, T: 020 7771 9770, email: ascensionswjp@yahoo.com or www.streetpastors.org.uk.

The Police asked *Churches Together in Beckenham* to consider forming a team here in Beckenham. Eleven of our churches attended a meeting called to discuss this proposal. Many wanted to start immediately and completed application forms then and there! Training starts in September. Rev. Julia Binney, of Elm Road Baptist Church, is helping to set-up the project and is looking for a coordinator.

The beauty of this project is that it gives CTIB a project on which all sixteen churches can work happily TOGETHER and in UNITY. Just what we've been searching for! We must not let it fail. So please pray for our success.

Terry Davies St. Edmund's, Beckenham.

A VISIT TO LAMBETH PALACE

Lambeth Palace is the London seat of the Archbishop of Canterbury and has been so since about A.D. 1200. The Palace is situated on the south bank of the Thames upstream from Westminster Bridge on what used to be Lambeth Marsh which derives its name from *loamhithe or muddy landing place*.

The Palace is hidden from view by a high brick wall above which one can see the tops of mature trees suggesting an extensive garden. Access is via the Tudor gatehouse near Lambeth Bridge built by Cardinal Morton in 1495. Passing through the great doors one turns to the right and into the garden/courtyard. The east side is dominated by the Neo-Gothic style building faced in bath stone designed by the architect Edward Blore in 1828. This is the archiepiscopal residence and secretariat.

The northern boundary of the courtyard is formed by the Great Hall, a structure ravaged under Cromwell and rebuilt by Archbishop Juxon after 1660 in a gothic survival style with a hammer beam roof. In the nineteenth-century the Hall was converted to a library. Restored after suffering war damage, it remains one of London's most attractive buildings.

The foundations of the private chapel of the Archbishops of Canterbury, date back to 1198. Remains were seen when visiting what is now the crypt chapel, but the main chapel itself was not completed until the 1220s. St Anselm was the first to occupy the site, but did not own it at that time

The fifteenth century Lollards' Tower – a water tower – retains its name on the tradition that Wycliffe's supporters were imprisoned in it; Wycliffe himself underwent his second trial for heresy in the chapel at Lambeth in 1378.

The Guardroom, a first floor hall, was reconstructed by Blore in the 1840s re-using a fine arch-braced roof, elaborately moulded from the mid-fourteenth century.

Behind the main residence is the garden, one of the oldest and largest private gardens in London. This parkland style garden has mature trees, pond and hornbeam allée, a formal rose terrace and herb garden.

The occasion for this visit was the celebration on 5 July 2007 of the fortieth anniversary of the founding of the Ecumenical Society of the Blessed Virgin Mary by Martin Gillett. The reception was held at the Palace at the gracious invitation of Archbishop Rowan Williams, a Patron of the Society. In his absence we were welcomed by the Rt. Rev. Christopher Hill, Bishop of Guilford and a Moderator of the Society.

The Meeting opened in The Great Hall which is now the Library with a prayer seeking the intercession of the Blessed Virgin written by the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and read by Metropolitan Kallistos Ware of Diokelia. In his opening talk Bishop Hill commended the Society for a notable achievement in that the collected papers of the Society provided a major theological resource on Mary and ecumenism of great value to those engaged in the preparation of ARCIC II's document, *Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ*. As to the future he considered that the Society might engage in the field of Christian anthropology in the light of the current debate on sexuality. Right doctrine about Mary has always been a safe guard of right doctrine about Christ and the Incarnation. In the area of interfaith relations he suggested that Islam's reverence for the Holy Family and Mary may be a starting point for further dialogue.

Fr Bill McLoughlin, the General Secretary of the Society, followed with a short résumé of the history of the Society which was founded by Martin Gillett on 20 April 1966 to advance the study at various levels of the place of the Blessed Virgin Mary in

the Church under Christ, and of related theological questions, and in the light of such study to promote ecumenical devotion.

The Librarian and Archivist, Dr Richard Plummer, then spoke about Lambeth Palace Library which was founded in 1610, and is one of the oldest public libraries in England. Archbishop Bancroft had taken the opportunity to save for posterity important books that had come from monastic libraries at their dissolution. On his death he bequeathed his collection of more than 6000 printed books and 500 manuscripts to his successors, the Archbishops of Canterbury in perpetuity. At the suggestion of Francis Bacon, a Catalogue was begun in 1612. Abp Abbott dedicated the Library to the service of God and the Church, the King and the Realm and especially to the Archbishops of Canterbury. From the outset it was a public library and remains so today. There are now some 200,000 books and 6,500 manuscripts. The Archive contains the records of the Archbishops of Canterbury and Diocese since the middle ages. The Library is in effect the ‘memory of the Church of England’.

Dr John Newton, former President of the Methodist Conference, expressed the Society’s thanks to the Archbishop, the Palace staff and the Librarian for their support in welcoming the Society and giving a guided tour of the palace and special exhibits.

The Reception ended with Evening Prayer from the *Ecumenical Office of Mary, The Mother of Jesus* in the Chapel led by Dom Aidan Bellinger, Abbot of Downside and sung by the Youth Choir of All Saints Church, Blackheath.

It was a pleasure and a privilege to have been at this historic meeting.

Desmond Miller

LAMBETH PALACE



The Tudor Gate House

The main
Residence
and
Secretariat



The Great Hall



Dr Plummer
addresses
the ESBVM
in the Library

Fr Bill McLoughlin
proposes a toast
in the Guard Room



Rt Rev Christopher Hill
Bishop of Guilford



Metropolitan Kallistos Ware



Dom Alberic Stackpoole

Archimandrite
Aemilianos
Papadakis



King James Bible Part II

In Part One I examined the way the *King James Bible* or *Authorised Version* (AV) followed four earlier English translations. What are the consequences of all this for today?

A serious difficulty of biblical translation concerns the translation of ecclesiastical words, the effects of which are lasting. The English word *church* is really a contraction of *kyriakon* meaning *The Lords People* – literally those whom God has ‘called out from the world’ (*ek kaleo* hence the word *ecclesiastical*. see Matt 16:18). Likewise our English word for *priest* is a contraction of the biblical *presbuteros* (hence the *presbytery*) meaning *elder*. In the same way our term *bishop* is a contraction of the biblical word *episcopē* (See 1 Tim 3:1–2; Titus 1:7; 1 Peter 2:25) meaning *overseer*. Tyndale erased all these words. Church became *congregation* (technically incorrect), presbyter was rendered as *senior* (corrected later to *elder* under pressure from St Thomas More) and *overseer* became normative instead of *bishop* (as seen in the modern New International Version). In one sweep Tyndale dispensed with the old order – no church, no bishops and no priests. At least the AV translators reversed this policy putting back the old ecclesiastical terms, but for anyone formed in broad protestant traditions such as the present writer, the presumed faults and failings of the Catholic Church in the 16th century were ingrained. It was believed that the moribund Catholic Church had prevented the distribution and reading of scripture and wanted everything to remain unintelligibly preserved in Latin. All this was said to uphold a false concept of the church, which was not seen in scripture. The truth is never so simple.

That the Catholic Church was vibrant and that the Christian faith was well known and understood on the very eve of the reformation, even in the minds of simple people is now certain. It can be demonstrated by reference to liturgy, church art, street pageants and dramas, pilgrimages and the liturgical cycle of the church’s year (‘Popish Reveries’). All this was subsequently

suppressed. But has it ever occurred to wonder how those old *Reformers* were able to produce any such translation of the Bible in the first place? From what texts were they translating? How and where in Western Europe were they able to gain access to any reliable ancient manuscripts except copies of the increasingly despised *Latin Vulgate*? What great institution had safeguarded these scriptures already for 1600 years?

Mention has already been made of the Douay-Rheims Bible in English, but many will be unaware that long before that, with the blessing of the Pope, 'to revive the languishing study of the Sacred Scriptures', Cardinal Cisneros in Madrid had embarked on a huge biblical project with the top religious scholars of his time. Acquiring many manuscripts they met in the city of Alcalá de Henares (in Latin, *Complutum*). Work began in 1502 and continued painstakingly for fifteen years. The result was the *Complutensian Polyglot Bible*. It printed an authentic and reliable text of the entire Bible in three ancient languages, Hebrew, Latin and Greek. From this text, dependable vernacular translations might have subsequently been made. This was an extraordinary and entirely Catholic achievement. Work proceeded with caution and publication was delayed until both the Old and New Testaments could be published together. It received official papal sanction in 1520 by Pope Leo X.

Meanwhile in an attempt to get there first, Desiderius Erasmus had hurriedly created his own version of a New Testament text in Greek which was published 1516. Erasmus obtained an exclusive four-year publishing privilege from Emperor Maximilian and Pope Leo X. His text gained the venerated title *Textus Receptus*, i.e. 'Received Text' in protestant circles. It held a disproportionate influence in biblical translation until the mid 19th century. Part of the reason for the wide spread success of Erasmus text, apart from its early appearance, was that whereas the *Complutensian Polyglot* ran to six heavyweight and very expensive volumes, (only 600 copies were ever printed of which about 120 survive) Erasmus (New Testament only) had been cheaply printed.

The first two (and least reliable) editions alone ran to 3300 copies and provided a lucrative marketing exercise.

It is nowadays recognised that Erasmus had not had access to good manuscripts. For his New Testament he had no more than two or three late Byzantine texts not earlier than 12th century presumably belonging to a Greek Orthodox Community. Erasmus did not even have a complete New Testament manuscript from which to work, he recreated part of the Book of Revelation and certain other missing verses by translating from the Latin Vulgate back into Greek. Apart from the inadequacy of Erasmus' sources the first edition of 1516 contained many printing errors. Erasmus revised his work four times between 1516 and 1535 each time with reference to other (late) manuscripts. It was not until 1522 that he was able to consider the evidence of the *Complutensian Polyglot*. He could not avoid the conclusion that here was in general a better text than his own. Accordingly he imported a large number of its readings into his own revised text of 1527.

Despite the fact that Erasmus' 1519 edition is prefaced with words of encouragement both to and from the Pope (dispelling arguments that the Catholic Church was wholly against the progress of Biblical translation), it may now be seen why, with hindsight the Catholic Church was reluctant to endorse his premature work and any subsequent translations that might be made from it. Hence, apart from his own provocative translation tendencies, Tyndale's New Testament of 1522 was especially suspect. By the time the AV translators set to work nearly 100 years later Erasmus' work had run to five revised editions. The older Catholic scholarship supplied in the *Complutensian Polyglot* was well known and received and an array of later scholars had refined and published more accurate Greek texts through the century.

It should not be assumed, as some might mischievously suggest, that there are so many divergent manuscript traditions that the Bible can not actually be relied upon in any form. Quite the opposite is true. In reality all manuscripts coming from so many

parts of the world in every different age show extraordinary continuity. The occasions where manuscripts disagree are so few and infrequent that they create all the more interest for that reason. Perhaps the most significant examples of textual discrepancy are the longer or alternative endings of St Mark's Gospel at Chapter 16:8 and the story of the 'Woman taken in Adultery' John 8:1–11. This latter story is not found in all manuscripts of St John's Gospel and sometimes appears located in different parts of the narrative. It even appears once as part of St Luke's Gospel. There is not space to discuss the technicalities of textual criticism here. A simple explanation in these examples might suggest the displacement of a loose page perhaps in the very first 'autograph' copy of the gospel. Elsewhere the loss or inclusion of an occasional word perhaps in a scribal copying error can make all the difference. An example of this would be at Matthew 5:22 'But I say unto you, that whosoever is angry with his brother *without a cause* shall be in danger of the judgment.' (AV). The words 'without a cause' are missing in Catholic Bibles because alternative manuscripts were preferred by the translators. While such a discrepancy seems so minor, the consequences are significant, after all Cain had a good *cause* to murder his brother!

Now where are all these discussions leading? I want to make three points:

1. The decision of Erasmus (who remained a Catholic) and the later Protestant reformers to allow only the Hebrew text of Old Testament Scripture, was a break with the tradition of the early church. This is very strange when their claimed intention was always to *restore* the practice of the early church.

The introduction to the *Catholic Version of the New Revised Standard Bible*, 1993, puts it well:

Regarding the number of the books of the Old Testament canon and their arrangement, Protestants and Jews on the one hand, and Roman Catholics and Orthodox Christians on the other, hold different beliefs. From the time of the Reformation

in the sixteenth century, Protestants have adopted the Jewish canon of the Old Testament, which was established by the rabbis at the end of the first century AD. This canon includes only those books that were written in Hebrew and Aramaic. In addition to these books, however, Roman Catholics, following the ancient tradition of the Christian church, also hold the Deuterocanonical Books of the Old Testament to be sacred and inspired, and therefore canonical. Protestants and Jews call these books *Apocrypha*, a word that means ‘hidden or concealed,’ an inappropriate title for works that were part of the Greek Old Testament (the Septuagint) from pre-Christian times. The Roman Catholic canon, which was fixed by the time of the Council of Hippo in 393 and reaffirmed by the two Councils of Carthage in 397 and 419, was formally defined by the Council of Trent in 1546. This canon contains seven Deuterocanonical Books: Tobit, Judith, the Wisdom of Solomon, Sirach (also known as Ecclesiasticus), Baruch including the Letter of Jeremiah as chapter 6, and 1 & 2 Maccabees; and extra portions of two other books: the additions to Esther; and the Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Jews inserted between verses 23 and 24 of Daniel 3, Susanna as Daniel 13, and Bel and the Dragon as Daniel 14.

2. We have seen that Erasmus did not have access to good manuscripts in the production of his Greek text. Today, as well as an array of medieval manuscripts, bible translators work from five major manuscripts from the 4th or 5th century supported by hundreds of papyrus *miniscules* surviving from earlier periods.

The *Codex Bezae* was used by Calvin who received this 5/6th century text from his friend Theodore Beza who had supplied the groundwork for the Geneva translation. This MSS, now seen in Cambridge, contains only the New Testament and is believed to have originated in south-west France.

The *Codex Vaticanus* was a primary manuscript used, among others, by the Polyglot Editors. This is a ‘complete’ text of Old and New Testaments although the end section is missing part

way through Hebrews. This text may actually have been one of fifty originally ordered by the Emperor Constantine circa 325 and completed by the famous Eusebius of Caesarea. It has survived for centuries in Rome. It is suggested that Pope Leo X refused permission for the publication of the *Complutensian* until this (and other precious manuscripts) returned to Rome. Hence the *Complutensian* failed to appear until 1522.

The *Codex Ephraemi Rescriptu* was also consulted by the Polyglot Editors. This is a 5th century MSS, but only of the New Testament. It is a palimpsest – the original text had faded and was overwritten in the 12th century with another work although the biblical text is still visible. It had travelled via Constantinople and Florence to Paris courtesy of the Medici family. This MSS is the subject of further computer analysis today.

The *Codex Sinaiticus* came to light in 1856. It was uncovered in a concealed vault of the famous St Catherine's Monastery in the Sinai desert. It is a sister text to *Vaticanus*. Dated sometime around AD 330–350, it may be one of the same set of fifty. This MSS has become separated. The largest section may be seen in the British Library, other pages are held in Russia, Leipzig and St Catherine's Monastery. Currently an international project is in hand to reunite it as a complete 'virtual' text.

The *Codex Alexandrinus* is a 5th century MSS containing both Old and New Testaments. The Patriarch of Constantinople presented it as a gift to James I, although too late for consultation in the AV project, it did not arrive in England until 1627 when Charles I had come to reign. This MSS may also be found in the British Library.

If we take *Vaticanus*, *Alexandrinus* and *Sinaiticus* as the oldest (complete) manuscripts available today, it should be noted that these texts include all those books of the Old Testament as seen in Catholic Bibles, but now removed from Protestant bibles. Why is it that these manuscripts are considered so precious while their

witness to the Old Testament books in Greek is ignored outside of Catholic and Orthodox traditions?

3. The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS) at Qumran in the last century has still not been adequately considered. Popular writers, employing more imagination than scholarship, have created so much speculation that the subject is very misleading. The simple reality is that the Scrolls are the oldest surviving manuscripts of the Hebrew (Jewish) Bible, i.e. our Old Testament together with certain apocalyptic and other non-biblical writings that illustrate the interests of the Qumran community. Until their discovery the oldest complete Hebrew manuscripts were as late as 8th century AD. The Dead Sea Scrolls supply the text of Scripture as Christ himself would have read them. They also indicate the use of some of those texts included in the Catholic Old Testament but now excluded by Jews and Protestants – among them Ecclesiasticus (in Hebrew) and Tobit. The Jewish/Hebrew canon of scripture was not fixed until sometime after the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70 – well into the Christian period. It would appear that by this time the Rabbis deliberately excluded some of those books which had become popular with the new Christian sect: Ecclesiasticus, Tobit, Wisdom of Solomon and Maccabees and in particular those found only in the Greek which they considered profane. A ferocious row was still ongoing in Jewish circles at the end of the first century concerning the Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes. These two Hebrew texts only survived by the narrowest of margins in the Jewish Bible. In the opinion of some of the most influential rabbis of the late 1st century they were believed to ‘soil the hands of the reader’.

I am working towards a conclusion which should open a new discussion between Catholic and Protestant Christians concerning the use and interpretation of the Bible. On the grounds of the foregoing what should actually constitute the Bible and in what language is it most reliable?

Fr Kevin Robinson,
Knaveish priest and Popish Reverend Jan 2007

THE ONTOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

Over the past century or so the traditional arguments for the existence of God, sometimes known as the “Five Ways” of St Thomas Aquinas, have become less compelling. The need for a “Great Designer” to explain the apparent order and design in nature, for example, was undermined by the theory of Natural Selection, while the need for an uncaused “First Cause” presupposes the impossibility of an infinite regress.

There is one argument, however, which predates Aquinas (and was rejected by him), which has recurred in various forms throughout the centuries, which has never been convincingly refuted, and which, short of being a “proof”, I believe to be immensely powerful. This is the so-called *Ontological Argument*, first formulated by St Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury 1093–1109. Unlike the other arguments this starts not from an observation of nature or from cause-and-effect but from the very concept of God. It involves some highly abstract thought and so is not easy to conceptualise.

According to Anselm, God is “that than which nothing greater can be conceived”. We can conceive of something with all possible forms of greatness but, if it did not possess existence, we could conceive of something even greater, namely that which possesses existence, and this we call God. This was objected to by a contemporary of Anselm, called Gaunilo, basically on the grounds that existence is not an attribute. The same objection was made centuries later in a different form by the Protestant philosopher Kant. However another great philosopher, Descartes, a Catholic, supported Anselm, on the grounds that existence is essential to the idea of God as “perfect being”, and we are unable to conceive of God as lacking it.

During the 20th century there was a revival of interest among philosophers in the *Ontological Argument*, and the names of Norman Malcolm and Charles Hartshorne are worth looking up in this regard. A particularly interesting variant of the argument was proposed by the American philosopher and Protestant theologian Alvin Plantinga (one of whose many books has the same title as this article). He used the concept of “possible worlds” (where “world” is used in the sense of “everything there is” or, if you like, “universe”). There is an infinite number of possible worlds, one of which is the “actual world” which we know. But at least one of these possible worlds must include God, who must therefore be the author of *all* possible worlds, including the actual one.

The version of the *Ontological Argument* which I find most compelling derives from the truth that, if God exists, His existence must be necessary rather than contingent; He could not possibly *not* exist. This is because, if His existence were merely contingent, it would be dependent on something else, and so it could not be the omnipotent God. If, therefore, the “contingency” of God’s existence must be ruled out, so must the “contingency” of His *non*-existence; if He did not exist, this non-existence would also be necessary rather than contingent. It is incumbent on any atheist, therefore, to demonstrate not that God just *happens* not to exist, but that He *could not possibly* exist. Even Richard Dawkins does not quite go that far, which suggests that he has a false idea of God.

The above remarks are admittedly highly abstract, and I do not claim them as any kind of “proof” of God’s existence. But I believe we do well to remind ourselves that God, as Supreme Being, does not just *happen* to exist, as something which could be discovered by scientific or other investigation; this would limit Him to some kind of finite being. His existence is absolutely necessary.

Alan Pavelin

All in the Church must preserve unity in essentials. But let all, according to the gifts they have received enjoy a proper freedom, in their various forms of spiritual life and discipline, in their different liturgical rites, and even in their theological elaborations of revealed truth. In all things let charity prevail. If they are true to this course of action, they will be giving ever better expression to the authentic catholicity and apostolicity of the Church.

DECREE ON ECUMENISM n4



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EDITOR:

Rev. Michael Baldry

E-mail: togetherinchrist@hotmail.co.uk

Material for publication and correspondence to the above address.

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