

2CH Sunday at 7.30

Talks from the NSW Council of Churches

I think too much

Presented by Harry Goodhew

INTRODUCTION

I LISTENED RECENTLY TO AN INTERVIEW WITH A WONDERFUL AUSTRALIAN WOMAN. SHE HAS BEEN A GREAT BENEFACTRESS OF NUMEROUS WORTHY CAUSES OVER MANY YEARS.

HER INTERVIEWER, SEEKING TO PROBE HER MOTIVATION FOR DOING SO MUCH GOOD OVER SO MANY YEARS, ASKED IF SHE HAD A FAITH IN GOD.

HER REPLY WAS NOT AN UNCOMMON RESPONSE TO SUCH A QUESTION.

SHE SAID SHE THOUGHT THAT THERE WAS PERHAPS “SOMETHING” THERE BEHIND IT ALL, BUT SHE DID NOT BELIEVE IN A PERSONAL GOD OR IN THINGS LIKE HEAVEN

THEN, IN A VERY GRACIOUS WAY SHE OFFERED A REASON FOR HER NON-BELIEF IN A PERSONAL GOD. IT WAS HER REASON THAT REALLY CAUGHT MY ATTENTION AND MADE ME A LITTLE SAD

I’D LIKE TO SHARE THAT REASON WITH YOU AND SAY ONE OF TWO THINGS ABOUT IT

MUSIC TRACK

SEGMENT 1

WELL NOW, WHAT WAS THIS OUTSTANDING WOMAN’S REASON FOR NOT BELIEVING IN A PERSONAL GOD?

HER RESPONSE WAS QUIET AND REFLECTIVE BUT SHE SAID “I THINK, THAT I THINK TOO MUCH”

THAT'S NOT THE FIRST TIME I HAVE HEARD THAT SORT OF REASON OFFERED FOR NON-BELIEF: THE IMPLICATION IS THAT IF YOU THINK DEEPLY ABOUT LIFE AND ITS ASSOCIATED ISSUES, UNBELIF IS THE ALMOST INEVITABLE OUTCOME.

A CONTRAST IMMEDIATELY JUMPED TO MY MIND

A COUPLE OF YEAR BACK I WAS BROWSING IN AN OVERSEAS BOOKSHOP - ONE TITLE AND ITS AUTHOUR CAUGHT MY ATTENTION

THE BOOK WAS INGENIOUSLY TITLED. IT READ "THERE IS NO GOD" BUT, THE "NO" WAS SCRATCHED OUT, AND THE LETTER "A" WAS SCRAWLED ON TOP OF IT, SO, IT READ "THERE IS A GOD"

BUT, MORE THAN ANYTHING ELSE, IT WAS THE NAME OF THE AUTHOUR OF A BOOK WITH SUCH AN AMENDED TITLE THAT DREW ME TO IT.

ANTONY FLEW WAS, AND IS, A BRITISH PHILOSPHER OF GREAT PROMINENCE - A REALLY GREAT ONE IN THOSE CIRCLES.

HERE IS WHAT ANOTHER EMINENT AND RESPECTED MODERN SCIENTIST WROTE ABOUT HIM.

"IN HIS YOUTH, ATHIEST ANTONY FLEW COMMITTED TO THE SOCRATIC PRINCIPLE OF 'FOLLOWING THE EVIDENCE WHEREVER IT MAY LEAD'. AFTER A LIFETIME OF PROBING PHILOSOPHICAL ENQUIRY, THIS TOWERING AND COURAGEOUS INTELLECT HAS NOW CONCLUDED THE EVIDENCE LEADS CONCLUSIVELY TO GOD. HIS COLLEGUES IN THE CHURCH OF FUNDAMENTALIST ATHEISM WILL BE SCANDALIZED BY HIS STORY, BUT BELIEVERS WILL BE GREATLY ENCOURAGED, AND EARNEST SEEKERS WILL FIND MUCH IN FLEW'S JOURNEY TO ILLUMINATE THEIR OWN PATH TOWARDS TRUTH"

I MENTION THIS, NOT TO SAY THAT PEOPLE WHO THINK MUST INEVITABLY COME TO FAITH IN GOD - THERE ARE SO MANY OTHER FACTORS THAT COME INTO PLAY, BUT. I MENTION FLEW AND HIS BOOK TO INDICATE THAT DEEP THOUGHT, TRULY DEEP AND SUSTAINED THOUGHT, IS NO ENEMY TO A BELIF IN GOD.

DO YOU LIKE THINKING?

THEN LET ME SHARE SOME OF FLEW'S THOUGHTS WITH YOU

MUSIC TRACK

SEGMENT 2

PART II OF HIS BOOK IS CALLED “MY DISCOVERY OF THE DIVINE”. IT OPENS WITH A CHAPTER CALLED “A PILGRIMAGE OF REASON” AND CLOSES WITH THESE WORDS, “MY DISCOVERY OF THE DIVINE HAS BEEN A PILGRIMAGE OF REASON AND NOT OF FAITH”

WELL, WHAT SORTS OF THOUGHTS WERE INVOLVED IN HIS “PILGRIMAGE OF REASON”?

HE ASKS: “WHO WROTE THE LAWS OF NATURE?”

THAT THERE ARE “LAWS OF NATURE”, THAT IS REGULARITIES UPON WHICH WE RELY FOR THINKING AND ACTING, IS SOMETHING ACCEPTED BY EVERYONE – BELIEVERS AND UNBELIEVERS.

PAUL DAVIES ONE OF THE FOREMOST EXPOSITORS OF MODERN SCIENCE SAYS: “EVEN THE MOST ATHEISTIC SCIENTIST ACCEPTS AS AN ACT OF FAITH THE EXISTENCE OF A LAWLIKE ORDER IN NATURE THAT IS AT LEAST COMPREHENDIBLE TO US”.

WHAT ARE THESE LAWS? WELL, THINGS LIKE “NOTHING MOVES UNLESS SOMETHING MOVES IT” – LIKE A TEENAGER ASKED TO TIDY HIS ROOM! OR, “OBJECTS KEEP MOVING UNLESS SOMETHING STOPS THEM” – LIKE YOUR CAR RUNNING DOWN HILL.

BUT WHAT IS THE ORIGIN OF THESE LAWS? DID WE CREATE THEM OR DO WE SIMPLY DISCOVER AND DESCRIBE THEM? SURELY THE LATTER

OXFORD PHILOSOPHER JOHN FOSTER MAINTAINS “THAT REGULARITIES IN NATURE, HOWEVER YOU DESCRIBE THEM, CAN BEST BE EXPLAINED BY A DIVINE MIND”

A FURTHER QUESTION HE POSES IS “DID THE UNIVERSE KNOW WE WERE COMING?”

HE DESCRIBES SOMEONE BOOKING INTO A HOTEL ROOM, AND TO HIS AMAZEMENT, FINDING EVERYTHING, ABSOLUTELY EVERYTHING, FROM THE TOOTHBRUSH TO THE PYJAMAS, FROM THE MUSIC BEING PLAYED TO THE CONTENTS OF THE LITTLE FRIG IN THE ROOM, FROM THE BOOK BESIDE HIS BED TO THE TELEVISION TUNED TO HIS FAVOURITE SHOW, BEING THERE AS IF IT WAS SPECIFICALLY CHOSEN WITH HIM IN MIND.

“CHANCES ARE” SAYS FLEW, THAT, “WITH EACH NEW DISCOVERY ... YOU WOULD BE LESS INCLINED TO THINK IT WAS ALL MERE COINCIDENCE.”

SO THE PHYSICIST FREEMAN DYSON SAYS, “THE MORE I EXAMINE THE UNIVERSE AND STUDY THE DETAILS OF ITS ARCHITECTURE THE MORE EVIDENCE I FIND THAT THE UNIVERSE IN SOME SENSE KNEW WE WERE COMING”

OUR UNIVERSE SEEMS TO BE “FINELY TUNED; “TO HAVE BEEN CRAFTED SO AS TO MOVE IT [THE UNIVERSE] TOWARD THE EMERGENCE AND SUSTENANCE OF LIFE”

FLEW CONCLUDES THAT “THE ONLY VIABLE EXPLANATION HERE IS THE DIVINE MIND”

SO, WHERE TO FROM HERE? LET’S THINK ABOUT THAT

MUSIC TRACK

SEGMENT 3

ANTONY FLEW FINISHES HIS BOOK WITH THESE WORDS: “THE DISCOVERY OF PHENOMENA LIKE THE LAWS ON NATURE ...HAS LED SCIENTISTS, PHILOSOPHERS, AND OTHERS TO ACCEPT THE EXISTENCE OF AN INFINITELY INTELLIGENT MIND. SOME CLAIM TO HAVE MADE CONTACT WITH THIS MIND. I HAVE NOT – YET. BUT WHO KNOWS WHAT COULD HAPPEN NEXT?

SOMEDAY I MIGHT HEAR A VOICE THAT SAYS, “CAN YOU HEAR ME NOW?

PERHAPS THAT PUTS HIM IN THE SAME BALL PARK AS THE LADY OF WHOM I SPOKE EARLIER; THOUGH, I THINK IT MAY BE FAIR TO SAY THAT HE IS PROBABLY A MORE COMMITTED SEEKER AFTER ANSWERS THAN SHE MAY BE.

WHY SAY THIS? WELL, IN PURSUIT OF THAT VOICE THAT MIGHT YET CALL TO HIM, HE INVITED TWO PEOPLE TO WRITE AN APPENDIX EACH TO BE INCLUDED IN HIS BOOK.

ONE IS BY A WELL-KNOWN ENGLISH THEOLOGIAN.

ABOUT THIS CONTRIBUTION, ANTONY FLEW SAYS “ [THIS APPENDIX] CONCERNS THE CLAIM THAT THERE IS A SELF-REVELATION OF GOD IN HUMAN HISTORY IN THE PERSON

OF JESUS CHRIST .. IN MY VIEW, WRIGHT’S RESPONSES TO MY PREVIOUS CRITQUES OF DIVINE SELF-REVELATION, BOTH IN THIS PRESENT VOLUME AND IN HIS BOOKS, COMPRISE THE MOST POWERFUL CASE FOR CHRISTIANITY THAT I HAVE EVER SEEN.”

BISHOP TOM WRIGHT’S CASE PRESENTED IN THIS BOOK IS JUST A LITTLE TOO LONG FOR ME TO REPRODUCE HERE, BUT I WOULD LIKE TO READ YOU SOMETHING ELSE WHICH ALSO EXPRESSES VERY POWERFULLY THE CASE FOR SEEING IN JESUS THE EXPRESSION OF THAT DIVINE MIND THAT LIES BEHIND EVERYTHING.

THEY TOO ARE THE WORDS OF ANOTHER ATHEIST WHO CHANGED HIS MIND.

“THERE WAS A MAN BORN AMONG THE [SE] JEWS WHO CLAIMED TO BE, OR TO BE THE SON OF, OR TO BE “ONE WITH”, THE SOMETHING WHICH IS AT ONCE THE AWFUL HAUNTER OF NATURE AND THE GIVER OF THE MORAL LAW. THE CLAIM IS SO SHOCKING – A PARADOX, AND EVEN A HORROR, WHICH WE MAY EASILY BE LULLED INTO TAKING TOO LIGHTLY – THAT ONLY TWO VIEWS OF THIS MAN ARE POSSIBLE. EITHER HE WAS A RAVING LUNATIC OF AN UNUSUALLY ABOMINABLE TYPE, OR ELSE HE WAS, AND IS, PRECISELY WHAT HE SAID.

THERE IS NO MIDDLE WAY.

IF THE RECORDS MAKE THE FIRST THOUGHT [HYPOTHESIS] UNACCEPTABLE, YOU MUST SUBMIT TO THE SECOND. AND IF YOU DO THAT, ALL ELSE THAT IS CLAIMED BY CHRISTIANS BECOMES CREDIBLE ...”

SO WHERE DOES THAT TAKE US. LET’S LOOK AT THAT IN A MOMENT

MUSIC TRACK

CLOSER

SO, WHAT ABOUT THINKING? “CAN YOU THINK TOO MUCH?”

MY ANSWER IS FIRST “NO”, AND THEN “YES”

I FIRST SAY “NO” BECAUSE GOD MADE US TO THINK, AND HE HAS GIVEN US THE WHEREWITHALL TO THINK, AND A LOT OF FASCINATING THINGS ABOUT WHICH TO THINK,

SOMEONE LIKE ANTONY FLEW, AND A HOST OF OTHERS, OFFER US EXAMPLES OF THE FACT THAT THOUGHT, DEEP THOUGHT, IS NOT NECESSARILY A RECIPE FOR UNBELIEF, OFTEN IT IS THE DOORWAY TO BELIEF.

BUT THEN I WOULD SAY "YES". PERHAPS IT IS POSSIBLE TO THINK TOO MUCH. WHY SO? - BECAUSE THINKING IS NOT SIMPLY FOR THE SAKE OF THINKING. WE THINK SO THAT WE CAN REACH CONCLUSIONS THAT LEAD TO ACTIONS. THIS IS ESPECIALLY TRUE WHEN IT COMES TO GOD. GOD WOULD HAVE US USE OUR MINDS NOT ONLY TO THINK ABOUT HIM BUT ULTIMATELY TO ENGAGED WITH HIM

SO, GOOD THINKING AND GOD BLESS YOU.