

## There is one God. Bethesda Coffee Morning. 27 June 2012.

This is the second talk in our new series about what we – the Christians at Bethesda – believe. This morning the title of my talk is 'We believe in one God'. And I really need to cover two points briefly.

First, that we believe in God ... and why.

For my own part, I see convincing evidence for God's existence in His work of creation.

Last Thursday, Linda and I visited our daughter Debra and her family ... living near Bristol. Our eleven year-old grandson Matthew is very interested in history – mainly in military history. He told me that one of his great heroes was Napoleon.

Personally, I enjoy an anecdote of Napoleon which I came across some time ago ... recorded by Napoleon's Private Secretary in his memoirs of the French Emperor. Napoleon's Private Secretary wrote, 'I recollect that one fine night [on a voyage to Egypt<sup>1</sup>], ... he was on deck with some [scholarly<sup>2</sup>] persons who were arguing in favour of materialism [that there could be no God<sup>3</sup>] ... Bonaparte raised his hand to heaven and, pointing to the stars, said, "You may talk as long as you please, gentlemen, but who made all that?"<sup>4</sup>

Which is the self-same point made by an Old Testament prophet some 2,500 years before ... 'Lift up your eyes on high, and see!', Isaiah said, 'Who has created these things, bringing out their host by number? He calls them all by name'.<sup>5</sup>

'Lift up your eyes on high, and see!' ... and, as you no doubt realise, the human eye is itself a marvel and is enormously complicated.<sup>6</sup> I understand that the retina alone has approximately 137 million special cells which translate what I see into electric pulses which are sent to my brain through the optic nerve. Together, these cells capture and deliver up to 1,500 million messages every second!<sup>7</sup> Mind-blowing, isn't it.

I guess you all know something at least of the classic novel 'Robinson Crusoe'. I think of the words which the author put into the mouth of the shipwrecked Crusoe<sup>8</sup> ... 'It happened, one day, about noon, going towards my boat, that I was exceedingly surprised with the print of a man's naked foot ... in the sand. I stood like one thunderstruck ... I listened, I looked around me, I could hear nothing, nor see anything ... I came home to my fortification ... looking behind me at every two or three steps ... fancying every stump at a distance to be a man'.<sup>9</sup>

When Robinson Crusoe saw the footprint in the sand it immediately convinced him that he was not alone on the island – which is why he was ever on the lookout for another man. And, to put it reverently, God has left His footprints in the sand all over His creation.

Speaking of sand, let me quote you the words of a professor from Oxford University (who spent much of his life here in Cardiff), 'We have only to see a few letters of the alphabet spelling our name in the sand to recognize at once the work of an intelligent agent. How much more likely, then is the existence of an intelligent Creator behind human DNA, the colossal ... database that contains no fewer than three billion 'letters' - the longest 'word' yet discovered?<sup>10</sup> (end quote). And I confess to you that I know very little of DNA except that it contains the instructions used in the development and functioning of all living things, and is passed on from parent to child ... which is why on the 29<sup>th</sup> of February our daughter in Nairobi gave birth to a baby *boy* and not to a baby *giraffe* or a baby *elephant*. Just think of the food bill ... and the nappies.

But you get the point ... that a few letters of the alphabet spelling our name in the sand tell us that they were written by some intelligent person. So how much more likely then is the existence of an intelligent Creator behind the DNA found in *every one* of a human body's 75 trillion living cells.

The most common version of the Big Bang theory says that the universe was formed about fourteen billion years ago from a speck of high energy intensity which exploded in a split second, and hurled space, matter and energy in all directions. Over a period of approximately 10 billion years, the theory runs, these evolved into stars, galaxies and planets, including our earth.<sup>11</sup>

Personally, I'll stick with the opening words of my Bible, 'In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth' ... if for no other reason than if people want to believe that everything evolved from a speck of 'high energy density' (or whatever), they are still left having to explain where that came from.

I enjoy the story told of a conversation between God and an evolutionist. It began when God said that He had made man from the dust of the ground. The evolutionist replied that, with advancements in technology and with the unlocking of the genetic code, scientists had now unravelled the mystery of how man was made. He claimed that, armed with all this knowledge, he too could make man from the dust. The evolutionist then began to collect

some dust with which to begin his experiment. But God stopped him, and said, 'Now, wait a moment. You make your own dust!'

The apostle Paul said it all when he wrote that, 'ever since the creation of the world', God's 'invisible attributes, namely, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen through the things that are made'.<sup>12</sup>

Yes, we believe in God ... but, as I said just now, we believe in *one* God – and in only one. From beginning to end, the Bible is very clear on this. Take just one example from the prophet Isaiah, 'Thus says the Lord ... I am the first and I am the last; besides me *there is no god*'.<sup>13</sup> He has no competition.

In Bible days, the pagan nations suffered from a glut of supposed gods of all kinds ... gods which came in all colours, shapes and sizes. By example only, Egypt had its Ra and Osiris, Canaan had its Ba'al and Dagan, Greece had its Zeus and Apollo, and Rome had its Mercury and Neptune. There were so-called gods for just about everything. For instance, the Romans even had a goddess for bread-making.<sup>14</sup> And the Greeks even had a god for silence<sup>15</sup> ... I don't need to tell you that Doreen would never have worshipped *that* god!

But as the apostle Paul once wrote, 'We know that an idol is nothing at all in the world and that there is no God but one'.<sup>16</sup> Again, in another of his letters, he wrote to some Christians, who, he said, had 'turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God'.<sup>17</sup> And those words 'the living and true God' remind me that, when on earth, our Lord Jesus once prayed, 'This is eternal life, that they may know you, *the only true God*, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent'.<sup>18</sup> Yes, there is *only one 'true' God*.

In our day you sometimes hear people say, 'Well, the Hindus have their gods, the Sikhs have their god, the Muslims have their god, and the Christians have their God. It really doesn't matter which god you believe in, as long as you believe in some god'. But it *does* matter. For, by definition, there is – and can be – only one 'true' God.

I leave you with what the Bible says ... 'God our Saviour ... desires all to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is *one God*, and there is *one mediator between God and men*, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all'.<sup>19</sup>

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## Footnotes

- <sup>1</sup> See ... <http://carlyleletters.dukejournals.org/cgi/content/full/14/1/lt-18420405-TC-TE-01>. Either on board the 'Orient' or the 'Muiron'.
- <sup>2</sup> 'Savans': see the footnote to ... <http://carlyleletters.dukejournals.org/cgi/content/full/14/1/lt-18420405-TC-TE-01>
- <sup>3</sup> Thomas Carlyle, 'Heroes and Hero Worship', chapter 6. See ... <http://www.online-literature.com/thomas-carlyle/heroes-and-hero-worship/6/> ... and the footnote to ... <http://carlyleletters.dukejournals.org/cgi/content/full/14/1/lt-18420405-TC-TE-01>
- <sup>4</sup> 'Memoirs of Napoleon Bonaparte', Volume 4, (towards the end of) Chapter XXVIII. By Louis Antoine Fauvelet De Bourrienne, his Private Secretary. See <http://www.fullbooks.com/Memoirs-of-Napoleon-Bonaparte-v41.html>.
- <sup>5</sup> Isa. 40. 26.
- <sup>6</sup> In point of fact, it consists of some 40 subsystems.
- <sup>7</sup> A special section of the brain called the visual cortex interprets the pulses to colour, contrast, depth, etc., which allows us to see 'pictures' of our world. See ... <http://www.allaboutthejourney.org/human-eye.htm>
- <sup>8</sup> Technically, it was into his (fictional) autobiography.
- <sup>9</sup> 'Robinson Crusoe', by Daniel Defoe, Chapter XVIII — 'I Find the Print of a Man's Naked Foot'. Early critics, such as Robert Louis Stevenson admired it saying that the footprint scene in Crusoe was one of the four greatest in English literature and most unforgettable.
- <sup>10</sup> 'God and Stephen Hawking: Whose Design Is It Anyway?' by John Lennox, page 75. 'The set of chromosomes in a cell makes up its genome; the human genome has approximately 3 billion base pairs of DNA arranged into 46 chromosomes', Venter J; Adams, MD; Myers, EW; Li, PW; Mural, RJ; Sutton, GG; Smith, HO; Yandell, M et al. (2001). "The sequence of the human genome". Science 291 (5507): 1304–51. Nearly every cell in a person's body has the same DNA. 'Human DNA consists of about 3 billion bases, and more than 99 per cent of those bases are the same in all people. The order, or sequence, of these bases determines the information available for building and maintaining an organism, similar to the way in which letters of the alphabet appear in a certain order to form words and sentences', <http://ghr.nlm.nih.gov/handbook/basics/dna>.
- <sup>11</sup> <http://www.allaboutthejourney.org/origin-of-the-universe.htm>.
- <sup>12</sup> Rom. 1. 20.
- <sup>13</sup> Isa. 44. 6.
- <sup>14</sup> Fornax.
- <sup>15</sup> Harpocrates.
- <sup>16</sup> 1 Cor. 8. 6.
- <sup>17</sup> 1 Thess. 1. 9.
- <sup>18</sup> John 17. 3.
- <sup>19</sup> 1 Tim. 2. 3-6.