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“God Is Not a Magician with a Magic Wand”

He Is God with Powers beyond Human Understanding!

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I read, and read again with considerable interest, part of an alleged statement by Pope Francis, as reported in the newspapers. The report purportedly stems from a comment the Pope is said to have made speaking at the Pontifical Academy of Sciences. What prompts me to write on this is the newspaper reporter's own opening comment, suggesting the concern and confusion the Pope's statement had caused among believers and non-believers alike. He may well be right in making such an assumption. As a disclaimer, let me make it clear that I, a lay person and a sinner, am not trying to take on anyone, let alone the Pope, but am simply trying to argue the matter, admittedly within my own limitations. I am a firm believer that everyone has a theology. I have mine, and it forms the basis of my writing on this complex topic.

We have read of many famous scientists who believed in God, and understood that only a Creator such as God could have made everything as it is, humankind included. It would be worth looking into the life and study of Nicholas Copernicus (1473-1543), Sir Francis Bacon (1561-1626), Johannes Kepler (1571-1630), Galileo Galilei (1564-1642), René Descartes (1596-1650), Blaise Pascal (1623-1662), Isaac Newton (1642-1727), Robert Boyle (1627-1691), Michael Faraday (1791-1867), Gregor Mendel (1822-1884), William Thomson Kelvin (1824-1907), Max Planck (1858-1947), and Albert Einstein (1879-1955), all of whom, in some form or other, acknowledged God, and the fact that only God could have made everything as it is. Einstein encapsulated his own theology thus: "Science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind." Isaac Newton acknowledged God by stating that "This most beautiful system of the sun, planets, and comets could only proceed from the counsel and dominion of an intelligent and powerful Being."

I am unable to reconcile why a person as theologically trained and

experienced as the Pope would make statements that cast doubt in the minds of believers. Not that the Pope made any statement directly denouncing God — he did not. He spoke also of evolution and the Big Bang, matters the world is still coming to terms with, in the same breath as God, and he acknowledged, in no uncertain terms, the existence of God. That has been my own understanding of what has been reported as his statement. If that is so, one may wonder why I am taking the trouble of writing this. Let me explain.

The Pope has not made his understanding of evolution clear, in stating that God "created human beings and let them develop according to the internal laws that he gave to each one so they would reach their fulfilment." If he had in mind Darwin's theory of evolution, which holds that all life is related and has descended from a common ancestor — or, put simply, that man became what he is today after millions of years of evolution — the immediate question that comes to my mind is: at what point in the process did the first sin occur, and what was its nature? However, if what the Pope meant was that, having created everything so meticulously and mysteriously, God allowed nature and man to evolve as was pleasing to Him, I have no difficulty with that statement. Had that not been the case, we should still be living in caves, without television, mobile telephones, the internet, motor cars, or washing machines — the list is endless.

The Pope's clubbing together of evolution and the Big Bang theory makes his statement about evolution suspect. I am content with the Big Bang theory: if that was the method God adopted, it stands to reason that Creation happened within the time frame the Bible tells us it did. As a child, when I first heard the story of Creation, and of Adam and Eve, it was simply a story. When I read Genesis, it never occurred to me to sit and work out how a piece of fruit could contain elements that would make man equal to God, or why God should become so angry that sin became second nature to man. Nor did it occur to me that God had a magic wand, and in one sweep created everything. There remain matters that continue to be a mystery, to be revealed to us when God thinks it the right time for us to know them. A similar figure of speech to the Pope's "magic wand" is heard in political circles, when promises made to the people during an election campaign go unmet. The Pope might well have avoided such a statement, unless that is indeed how Creation was perceived by some of his hearers.

We know that the Bible contains Scripture written as inspired by God. We also know that divinely inspired writing is not the same as a log book of events, or a work of history. Moses wrote the first five books of the Old Testament, which include the book of Genesis. Moses came

almost face to face with God, when God spoke to him and gave him the Ten Commandments. I have no difficulty in believing that when he wrote Genesis, perhaps many years later, the central theme, or essence, of Genesis was written as inspired by God, even though its setting may have been shaped, to some extent, by his own knowledge and experience of nature. I refuse to believe that the Pope's account of evolution, the Big Bang, and the Bible together amounts to an "inspired" statement, in the manner of that of Moses.

If we assume that the Pope was inspired by God to say what he is alleged to have said, then Jesus died a needless death, as did all the Apostles who were martyred, and one might well ask what we are doing in our churches, and what Christianity is about at all. The original sin, the redemption won by Jesus through His death upon the Cross, His Resurrection, His Ascension, and the hope of His New Creation, are facts that fit well with the state of the present world. So long as we understand the difference between writing inspired by God and the generic statements of men, we may set the latter aside. All we need do is to persevere in our faith. Let Jesus be our Shepherd.

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