

Spiritual Reflection for Easter 2009 (was published in May 2009 Catholic People newspaper)

Happy Easter! A few weeks ago, our Church once again celebrated the Resurrection of the Lord by telling the great story which begins with the creation – “evening came, and morning came: the first day!” – continues with the Israelites passing through the Sea, and which reaches its climax with the Empty Tomb and Risen Lord. Another year was consecrated to Christ and our Paschal Candle marked with "2009".

Meanwhile, the world around us is marking 2009 in another way, as a triple anniversary for the world of science. It's 400 years since Galileo first pointed a telescope to the night sky; 200 years since a certain Charles Darwin was born in Shrewsbury; and 150 years ago Darwin published a revolutionary book, "The Origin of Species". Opponents of religion have seized the opportunity to broadcast messages on the sides of buses, that there's probably no God and we should stop worrying!

I'm not worried. Why should I be? I fell in love with astronomy at the age of 7, and God became real in my life when I was 11. So as I tried to understand what God was saying through the Bible, I knew the right interpretation would be the one which fitted with the world we lived in. I'd first read the Genesis creation stories when I was in primary school – and yes, I do mean stories, plural – read Genesis 1-3 carefully! When my newfound faith caused me to take a closer look at Genesis, I couldn't see any problems. Christians through the centuries (notably Origen, who died in the year 254) had loved and respected the beginning of the Bible as rich symbolic stories whose main message was that the physical world was something good in itself and loved by God.

We know that when a story in English begins with the words "Once upon a time..." it is senseless to ask which century the hero lived in, or on what continent the princess was born. Scholars of the ancient world assure us in the same way that Genesis is not meant to be read as a blow-by-blow account of how God actually made the world; it was only in the light of the 16th Century Reformation that both Protestant and Catholic Christians started trying to read it that way.

Sometimes our emotional reactions to the universe lead us astray, too. A friend recently pointed out the famous Hubble Space Telescope picture of "God's eye" (the [Helix Nebula](#)) in a newspaper. For her, its beauty and the resemblance to a human eye suggested that God must be behind it. I find it beautiful too - but I don't need God's intervention to explain why it looks that way. An exploding star will ALWAYS put out a circular rim of debris with beautiful wispy dust inside, and I've seen plenty of other space clouds that look not unlike this one.

My faith in God exists alongside my appreciation of the universe we live in. Nothing in the beauty of nature *proves* to me that there's a God – indeed, as a professional scientist, my job was to look at nature and ask, “How much of this can we explain with logic and reason alone?” Rather, my faith in God is because of the loving Someone who was there when I first prayed out of the depth of my neediness, and who I discovered had entered into History in Jesus of Nazareth: the same Jesus whose triumph over death we celebrated this Easter, and at every Easter, and every time we celebrate Mass. My faith in Scripture tells me that Jesus, the Word of God, was intimately involved in the making of all things that exist. My training in science allows me to marvel at how wonderfully nature takes its course to result in our beautiful world, of which Jesus Christ is Lord, yesterday, today and forever. Maranatha! Come, Lord Jesus!

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