

Editorial

The B.C. Catholic

Serving Catholics in
British Columbia since 1931

www.bccatholic.ca

The B.C. Catholic newspaper is published by, and is the official newspaper of, the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Vancouver.

Editor
Malin Jordan

Assistant Editor
Bernard Murphy

Reception
Crystal Wickey

Circulation
Cecilia Moonen

Reporters
Laureen McMahon
Malin Jordan

Production Coordinator
Marie Sarabia

Contacting us

By Mail
The B.C. Catholic,
150 Robson Street, Vancouver,
British Columbia, V6B 2A7

By Fax
604-683-8117

By Phone
604-683-0281

By E-Mail
bccatholic@rcav.org
Address changes:
cmoonen@rcav.org

Office Hours
9:00 am - 4:30 pm

Letters to the Editor

The B.C. Catholic invites readers to send letters to the Editor commenting on issues discussed in the community or within the pages of this publication. Letters must have an address and phone number for verification. Letters may be edited for style, clarity and length. Writers are encouraged to keep their letters to the point. Letters can be sent to us using the contact information above or using the on-line form at <http://bcc.rcav.org/letter.htm>

Delivery and subscription information

The B.C. Catholic is available in one year subscriptions mailed directly to your home and delivered by Canada Post.

One Year Subscription
\$35.00; USA \$50; Overseas \$65
Prices include GST

Payment
Payment can be made by Visa, Mastercard, or cheque.

Subscriptions can be sent to us using the contact info above.

Other info

Deadlines
Calendar items: Tuesday Noon;
Advertising: Call for info.

Membership
Member of the Catholic Press Association and Canadian Church Press. The B.C. Catholic is a subscriber to Catholic News Service and Canadian Catholic News.



Acknowledgments
We acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada through the Publications Assistance Program (PAP), toward our mailing costs.

Publications Mail
Agreement Number: 40007647
Registration Number: 09659

Fr. Spitzer is antidote to faulty logic

By C.S. Morrissey
Special to The B.C. Catholic

What does physics have to do with proving or disproving whether God exists? Lately the question has been keeping Father Robert J. Spitzer, SJ, very busy. Father Spitzer has mounted a highly visible challenge to physicist Stephen Hawking's claim that "we don't need God to explain why there is something rather than nothing or why the laws of nature are what they are."

Father Spitzer was on CNN's Larry King Live, right after Hawking, to debate physicist Leonard Mlodinow (Hawking's co-author of *The Grand Design*), post YouTube videos, and write essays for his Web site.

Hawking's book "has clearly not explained why there is something rather than nothing. He has only explained that something comes from something (i.e. the universe from physical laws such as the law of gravity)," writes Father Spitzer in a recent blog post.

As author of his own book, *New Proofs for the Existence of God: Contributions of Contemporary Physics and Philosophy* (released just this August), Father Spitzer is a rare sort of specialist, a Catholic priest highly skilled in both science and philosophy.

In his philosophical response to Hawking, Father Spitzer argues that "if the physical universe had a beginning (a point at which it came into existence) then prior to that point it was nothing. And if it was nothing then it could not have created itself (because only nothing can come from nothing). So what does that imply? The very reality that Dr. Hawking wants to avoid, namely, a transcendent power which can cause the universe to come into existence."

Father Spitzer shows that the way from physics to the metaphysical account of God's existence is a rational argument, not a leap of faith: "Why should we consider this power to be transcendent (that is, transcending the universe as a whole)?"

"Because if the universe was nothing prior to its beginning, then the reality which causes it to exist must be completely beyond it (independent of it)," and this independence is not something that can belong unconditionally to the laws of gravity and quantum theory (which Hawking mistakenly thinks can replace God as the only truly unconditioned reality).

The fact that scientists like Hawking (and not just metaphysical philosophers) are talking today about the universe coming "out of nothing" is revealing, argues Father Spitzer. It shows that physics today, as never before, has overwhelming evidence pointing to how the universe has a beginning.

"I think we are fortunate to have such an abundance of evidence," writes Father Spitzer in *New Proofs for the Existence of God*. The perfect antidote to Hawking's faulty presentation,



The Hubble Heritage Team / NASA, ESA / CNS

Father Robert J. Spitzer (inset) challenges Stephen Hawking's new book claiming gravity created the universe from nothingness. In the main image, from the Hubble Space Telescope, a nebula of glowing hydrogen expands out into the remains of a molecular cloud that collapsed to form massive stars.

Father Spitzer's book presents a more reliable account of recent developments in physics, especially those of the past decade which make the traditional philosophical arguments for God's existence understandable today in a surprisingly fresh way.

Contemporary cosmology clarifies how the universe requires a transcendent Creator to produce the Big Bang and the beginning of time, insists Father Spitzer. It also requires a Super-Intelligent Designer to precisely "fine tune" the inflationary expansion of the early universe so that it later supports life.

While these developments in physics do not by themselves constitute "new proofs" (and thus many leading scientists like Hawking may remain unconvinced), Father Spitzer nevertheless shows how they still contribute to "the strongest rational foundation for faith that has come to light in human history."

He argues that the new physics developments do not contradict but rather "complement traditional proofs for the existence of God" which distinguish creation (God's proper action) from a beginning in time (which physics mathematically models).

A great strength of his book is that Father Spitzer does not explicitly rehash the traditional proofs (the "Five Ways" of St. Thomas Aquinas in his *Summa Theologiae*). Instead, he indirectly defends the premises of these "old proofs" by simply showing how their "old" arguments now in fact make even more sense.

The brilliant originality of Father Spitzer's book lies in this new approach. It does not devote itself to translating the latest physics into the "old" philosophical jargon in order to defend the "old

proofs."

Instead, it boldly formulates fresh "new proofs" for a contemporary mind willing to be informed by the "new" language of the latest cosmology. If you are not already pre-disposed to swallow Hawking's philosophical mistakes, then it will stimulate you onto a path of rigorous thinking.

Father Spitzer's "new proofs" use knowledge gained by modern physics in order to speak about God as "unrestricted" and "absolutely simple" and "unconditioned Reality." Readers familiar with the traditional proofs, however, will recognize this as Father Spitzer's way of making the traditional terminology of "infinite" and "immutable" and "pure Act" more intelligible to minds familiar with modern cosmology.

Indeed, his book should reinvigorate and rekindle interest in (and appreciation of) the "old proofs." For me, Father Spitzer's "new proofs" are really the "old" ones, but updated, deepened, refreshed. The renovation of the old arguments, however, is so stunning that I shall not begrudge him the rhetorical claim to "new proofs."

I will point out, however, that his "new proofs" are five in number, as with Aquinas's "good old" Five Ways. Coincidence? No, and I will explore the correspondences to the "new proofs" in my Thomas Aquinas philosophy class at Redeemer Pacific College next semester.

Readers looking for rigorous, but accessible, explanations of the "good old" Five Ways themselves should consult two books by the Catholic philosopher Edward Feser: *Aquinas: A Beginner's Guide*, and his polemical firebomb, *The Last Superstition: A Refutation of the New Atheism*.

Feser demolishes the ignorant

and dishonest misrepresentations of Aquinas's arguments found not just in recently popular books promoting atheism but even among professional scholars.

Today the case for atheism has never been weaker. Father Spitzer and Feser, in highlighting the supreme rationality of the traditional proofs, suggest a coming renaissance of studies inspired by Thomas Aquinas. Father William A. Wallace, OP, wrote in 1968, "Thomists have been content to remain at a very general level, concentrating on metaphysics, and neglecting the specialized disciplines that have developed because of the needs of modern man. Without intending to do so, they have promoted a divorce between philosophy and science, and as a result, they have allowed their theology to be completely untouched by scientific progress."

Father Spitzer's magnificent *New Proofs for the Existence of God*, however, rectifies that sin of omission. Theologians, therefore, should take notice of this indispensable contribution to healing the divide between faith and reason in contemporary thought. Once again, the dawn breaks: physics meets metaphysics, and Aquinas is rising.

C.S. Morrissey is an assistant professor of philosophy at Redeemer Pacific College. More information about Father Spitzer's book, including free audio and video files about the new proofs, are available through his website, moreC.com. □

Msgr. Pedro Lopez-Gallo's column can be found on P. 10.