Eclipses and the Compatibility of Religion and Science

Although eclipses were known and considered warnings of terrible danger for centuries, it was the Babylonians who gave us the first timetable for their appearance. Many centuries later, in the time of Newton and Halley, scientists made more accurate measurements. The science of astronomy continued to progress until today astronomers are able to predict the occurrence of eclipses within minutes and precisely locate the path of the shadow they cast on our and other continents.

There are many who believe that science will explain all things, that God does not exist and religion is superfluous. They look upon eclipses as new experimental opportunities that will allow more measurements of the sun’s corona and lead to a greater understanding of the physics behind the sun’s power to sustain the life of every living thing on earth. May they continue in their work! Let us make all the measurements we can for the betterment of mankind, without harming ourselves or our planet.

It seems to me though that the order within the cosmos, revealed to us by rigorous observation, measurement and interpretation based on causality, speaks against the theory that all we see in our world and in the cosmos happened by chance. More likely to me is the belief that our world and cosmos, so beautifully ordered, speak clearly of a Supreme Being whose surpassing intelligence created the cosmos with such precision so that, the limited mind of man, enlightened by laborious scientific experimentation, might one day discover more about Him, His love for us and His desire that we find Him in all things.

It is my belief that a generous and loving God, having given us inquiring minds, encourages us to explore in greater depth the world around us. The more we know, the more we recognize His glory and goodness, and our wonder and praise of His goodness mounts higher.

Are there limits to what science can tell us about the world we live in? We do not yet know what these limits may be. There are hints that there are limits to what experimental science can tell us. Heseinberg’s Uncertainty Principle states that there is a limit to what we can know about quantum particles; for example, one can never measure precisely both velocity and position of a quantum particle. The more we know about one the less accurate, even faulty, is our knowledge of the other.

Science has and will continue to give us much. Jesus gives us so much more. Not with measurement and experimentation but with faith, which can move mountains, hope and charity. He gave us an understanding of God in three persons, a loving creator who invites us to be His adopted sons and daughters. He created us joyfully; He joyfully encourages us to proceed to know Him more deeply, through science yes, but more directly through prayer and service to all living creatures and the planet on which all live.