

23rd March 2021

Reaction

“Actioni contrarium semper et aequalem esse reactionem.”

“To every action there is always an equal reaction.”

Isaac Newton, Principia Mathematica

One of the things I've appreciated since I started offering a "Thought for the Day" is the reactions I get. People are kind enough to say thank you for a specific "thought" that's mattered to them. Some have added to my knowledge, offering me further information or details. Others have shared their sense of wonder that my piece seemed to be written just for them, on the anniversary of an event, for example. A few have corrected my grammar or spelling. And, from time to time, I have been gently chided.

This happened on what I called "Mother's Day". I say "called", for the comment was about the use of an "Americanism" – Mother's Day – instead of the traditional Mothering Sunday. I appreciated that. Not that I'm going to be drawn into the debate about "modernity" and American influences on our language, but I *am* saying that I valued the feedback.

On an annual retreat several decades ago, a group of us who were hospice chaplains invited a Rabbi to help us reflect on issues in end-of-life care. It was fascinating, for the Rabbi's style, fundamental to the Jewish approach to religion, was to relish the discussion, encourage the sharing of opinions and seek reaction to what was being said. At one point, he was asked about the concept of the "afterlife" in Judaism, and, specifically, how he would respond to someone who asked, "Is there a heaven?" He smiled and replied, "I would say, 'I do not know', for that is the truth. But *then* I would add, 'But let's talk about it and reason it out together.'"

In Isaiah 1:18, we find these words (in the Authorised Version):

*Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD:
though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow.*

God encourages our reaction, even if it isn't as "equal" as Newton's theorem. Indeed, God wants us to find time to "reason together" about life and faith. Reactions, looked for and valued, are good things if they lead to more time reasoning together with our God.

A prayer for today

Be patient with me, Lord, even when my reaction is not what you expect. Amen

An original reflection by © Tom Gordon

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