

EXISTENCE OF GOD

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February 7, 2014

Can man come to know that God exists? Yes, man can come to know that God exists through Faith in Divine Revelation and through reason. This paper will focus primarily on man's capacity to know that God exists through the use of man's reason.



The question of how created beings can know their Creator, is an age old question that has been pondered and sought to be answered by created beings since their inception. Since man has inscribed in his soul a longing for the infinite and for happiness, this question of God's existence has been around as long as man has existed.¹ Man can discern that he participates in Being, but that he is neither the beginning nor the end of this reality, and therefore He participates in something that is greater than himself.² De Lubac sheds further light: "God is the Being who is the source of my being and who is more I than myself."³ This is because the Creator, in His plan of love toward His creatures, has created beings with a longing to know truth, love and goodness, which means, therefore, to know Him. Furthermore, because man is made in the Image and likeness of God, and because God loves man and ultimately wants man to discover Him, He has inscribed in man the capacity to come to know that He exists.

"God, infinitely perfect and blessed in himself, in a plan of sheer goodness freely created man to make him share in his own blessed life. For this reason, at every time and in every place, God draws close to man. He calls man to seek him, to know him, to love him with all his strength."⁴

God, who loves us so much, draws so close to man that he actually came to reveal himself to us, in His Son Jesus Christ. Thus, we can know God and his existence through Faith in His Divine Revelation.

Yet, as we delve into Divine Revelation, and specifically the book of Romans, we can see that even Divine Revelation itself also makes it clear that there is yet another way to come to know that God exists, and that is through man's reason. For even prior to Christ's coming to reveal God to man, human beings were also able to know the existence of God through natural reason. Let us look at St Paul's Letter to the Romans:

"For all men who were ignorant of God were foolish by nature; and they were unable to from the good things that are seen to know him who exists, nor did they recognize the craftsman while paying heed to his works; but they supposed that either fire or wind or swift air, or the circle of the stars, or turbulent waters or the luminaries of heaven were the gods that rule the world. If through delight in the beauty of these things men assumed them to be gods, let them know how much better than these is their Lord, for the author of beauty created them. And if men were amazed at their power and working, let them perceive from them how much more powerful is he who formed them. For from the greatness and beauty of created things comes a corresponding perception of their Creator..."⁵

We can see that even the gift of Faith in Divine Revelation affirms for us that man, by using his reason, is able to discern the existence of God.

"This Classic passage is one of the bases for the conviction that was laid down as dogma- that is to say, as an explicit doctrine of the Church- by the First Vatican Council: that by the light of human reason we can come to know that there is a Creator who is guiding the world."⁶

As well, the First Vatican Council declared, "The same Holy Mother Church holds and teaches that God, the

beginning and end of all things, can be known with certitude by the natural light of human reason from created things."⁷ Here the Church states that it is possible to know God with certitude by human reason.

Though man's reasoning faculties make him capable of knowing the existence of God, it is not something easy to do, especially because man's sinful nature clouds our natural vision of God.⁸ To affirm that God exists may cause demands on my person that I prefer not to have. De Lubac illustrates this common aversion to demands on my person:

"So in the matter of God, whatever certain people may be tempted to think, it is never the proof which is lacking. What is lacking is taste for God. The most distressing diagnosis that can be made of the present age, and the most alarming, is that to all appearances at least it has lost the taste for God. Man prefers himself to God. And so he deflects the movement which leads to God; or since he is unable to alter its direction, he persists in interpreting it falsely. He imagines he has liquidated the proofs. He concentrates on the critique of the proofs and never gets beyond them. He turns away from that which convinces him. If the taste returned, we may be sure that the proofs would soon be restored in everybody's eyes, and would seem—what they really are if one considers the kernel of them—clearer than day."⁹

So how is it possible then for a fallen human nature be able to grasp the existence of God? To begin, the Catechism assures us that the perfections of creatures - "their truth, their goodness, their beauty" - are a mirror to God's perfections. "For from the greatness and beauty of created things comes a corresponding perception of their Creator."¹⁰ Studying the creature, however, does not allow us to fully grasp the fullness of the mystery of God, since the Creator transcends all creatures; He is more than his creation.¹¹ Yet the "perfections of his creatures are still likenesses of the infinitely perfect God."¹²

Beyond what can be known of God in creation, we can also look to philosophy and reason to help affirm God's existence. In this section, we will consider the five proofs laid forth by St. Thomas Aquinas. The first proof is known as the 'unmoved mover' or the 'prime mover.' Simply stated he asserts that because we are certain that there is motion in the universe, it must have been put to motion by something besides itself; it is obvious that in order to elicit change in one thing, another thing must be involved. "*Nothing can give itself what it does not have, and the changing thing cannot have now, already, what it will come to have then. The result of change cannot actually exist before the change.*"¹³ Whichever change occurred was put into motion from another moving-thing, and before that, still another motion previous to that, until eventually we will end up with what was or is the 'unmoved mover' that began all motion in the universe without itself needing a cause; this prime mover is God. Some argue for an infinite regression, but regardless of how far back in time one goes, it still requires a beginning, which in itself contains 'eternal motion.'

The second proof is called the chain of causation, from the nature of the efficient cause. In the universe there is a chain of effecting causes. Things in the world are produced by their cause, and these things are in turn produced by their causes. St. Thomas says, "*There is no case known (neither is it, indeed, possible) in which a thing is found to be the efficient cause of itself; for so it would be prior to itself, which is impossible*"¹⁴ Since no cause can be its own efficient cause all causes are traced back to the original cause the first and uncaused cause, which is God. As was the case with motion, this 'efficient cause' not only causes all effects after it, but needs no cause to cause itself: hence the term 'uncaused cause.'

The Third proof is based on 'contingency'. The universe is full of contingent things that do not necessarily have to be. These things come into being, change and then pass away. Contingent things must rely upon something else that is not contingent, that does not pass away, and that must necessarily exist-this is God. For in order for there to be existence there had to be beings in existence. "*Let us consider a self-evident principle: from nothing, nothing can come. If there ever were a time in which absolutely nothing existed, then nothing could ever come into being out of that absolute nothingness. Therefore, being—some sort of being at least—always existed for all of eternity.*"¹⁵ St. Thomas reasons, "*Therefore we cannot but postulate the existence of some being having of itself its own necessity, and not receiving it from another, but rather causing in others their necessity. This all men speak of as God.*"

For example, all things in the cosmos come into being, change and then pass away. Humans, animals, rocks, even the mountains - there was a time when these things were not, and there was a time when these things came into being, and there will be a time when these things cease to be, even if it takes a millennia. Since time is infinite, if we look back there was a time when none of these things existed. Since nothingness

cannot create something, then there must have been something that always existed, that is itself eternal. This eternal being is God.

The fourth proof of the existence of God is from the different degrees of perfection. In the world there are different degrees of perfection. There are degrees of goodness, and of beauty, and of nobleness. If there is the good, the more good, the better, there must be also the best. If there are those different degrees, it must be based on some standard that judges them so. This standard must itself be the best, the perfect. Hence, there must ultimately be absolute perfection in order for there to be the different degrees among things in the universe - otherwise, how can things receive their rating? This absolute perfection is God.

The fifth proof of the existence of God is known as the 'design argument' or 'the order and government of things in the world.' Things in the universe have a specific order or finality in which they act. They act according to their many-fold specific ends for which they were designed. Furthermore, they continue in existence according to how they are governed. For example,(it would be good to give a concrete example of this here). If things continue in existence according to how they are governed, and if there is a specific end or goal for which things are designed, and if there is a force governing them, then there must first be a designer that makes them act according to their specific nature and one that governs them according to their nature. Hence, there must be a first designer and governor - this is God. Furthermore, this first designer and governor must have absolute intelligence if it designs and governs things according to their specific goal or nature. This perfect intelligence that designs and governs all is God.

In conclusion, God can be known both by Divine Relation, and through natural reason. Through both of these methods and means, one can come to know God who is always seeking us and drawing near to us.

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¹cf. CCC, 33

²cf. CCC, 34

³De Lubac, Henri, *The Discovery of God*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI, 1996, p. 58

⁴Catechism of the Catholic Church, #7, Second Edition, St. Paul's, 1994

⁵Romans 1:19-20, *The Holy Bible, Revised Standard Version*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 2006.

⁶Schonborn, Christopher, Cardinal, *Chance or Purpose? Creation, Evolution, and Rational Faith*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 2007, p. 19

⁷Vatican Council I, *Dei Filius*, 2 DS 3004, 1785.

⁸CCC, 37

⁹De Lubac, p. 83

¹⁰CCC, 41

¹¹"The world of living things is full of "beauty that has no purpose, perfection that has no practical value, existence of a particular kind offering itself without any value for selection—inexplicable, and thus

meaningless (and thereby a scandal) for the well-ordered world of the mechanistic interpretation of reality". This beauty without purpose, the instances of marvelous perfection that are never seen, that have no practical purpose, but are simply manifestations of beauty, "unselfishly" pouring themselves out—we only begin to understand their significance when we look at the goal of creation, which is to praise God."

Schonborn, pp.67

¹²CCC, 48

¹³Kreeft, Peter and Tacelli, Ronald, Handbook of Catholic Apologetics, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 2009, p. 54

¹⁴ST I, q. 2, a. 3,

¹⁵Fiengold, Lawrence, The Natural Desire to See God, Sapientia Press of Ave Maria University, 2010

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