

Does God Exist?

And [God] made from one every nation of men to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their habitation, that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel after him and find him. Yet he is not far from each one of us, for "in him we live and move and have our being." ~ Acts 17:26-28

FOR ANYONE inquiring about the Catholic Church, the question of the

existence of God is fundamental. In the modern world, the possibility of a Supreme Being who governs the universe and claims certain rights over his creatures is continually brought into question. Aside from downright atheism, many live as if God does not exist, thinking perhaps that he is *indifferent* to the concrete situations of men and women on earth. Others think he is either sleeping or dead, making true believers the objects of ridicule. Whatever the case, it is certain that God's existence is no longer something everyone takes for granted.

"Faith in God's existence can be as certain as tomorrow's sunrise."

There are, however, ways of coming to know God and ways of speaking about him. These

ways are rooted in the very existence of the created world and especially in human beings. And, while God cannot be spread out on a table or examined beneath a microscope, faith in his existence can be as certain as tomorrow's sunrise. In other words, we are capable of knowing — *with real certainty* — something beyond what we see and hear. We know, with certainty, that love, anger, joy and beauty exist, even if we are unable to measure or weigh them. We know, with certainty, that we yearn for happiness and everlasting life, even without public-opin-



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ion surveys to tell us how many agree, how many disagree, and how many "don't know." And it takes a deliberate kind of blindness to look at the material universe in its wonderful order and power and at its glorious abundance of living things and somehow not see their Maker.

Every human person is created with a fundamental *capacity* for God that is matched by a fundamental *desire* for him. This desire is expressed in our ongoing quest for truth, beauty, and love, and prompts us to ask the basic questions:

"Who am I?" "Why am I here?" "Where am I going?" "What is the meaning of life?" Ultimately, these are profoundly *religious* questions and are so universal that we can be called *religious beings*.

With our capacity and desire for God, we can come to certain knowledge of his existence from the created world. In the world there is an order and beauty that is capable of being enjoyed by us. That is to say that the earth's majestic appeal, its natural glory, is not a cosmic coincidence. It was made to be cared for and governed by beings capable of taking delight in it (see Gn 1:27-30). St. Paul says: *"For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made"* (Rom 1:19-20). Many people today, especially those who think of themselves as "modern" and above "religious superstition," have made themselves a universe without God, where material things are, in effect, their own creators. People who think this way are not wise at all, but foolish, as Sacred Scripture says of their counterparts long ago: *"For all men who were ignorant of God were foolish by nature; and they were unable 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 water, 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. Yet these men are little to be blamed, for perhaps they go astray while seeking*

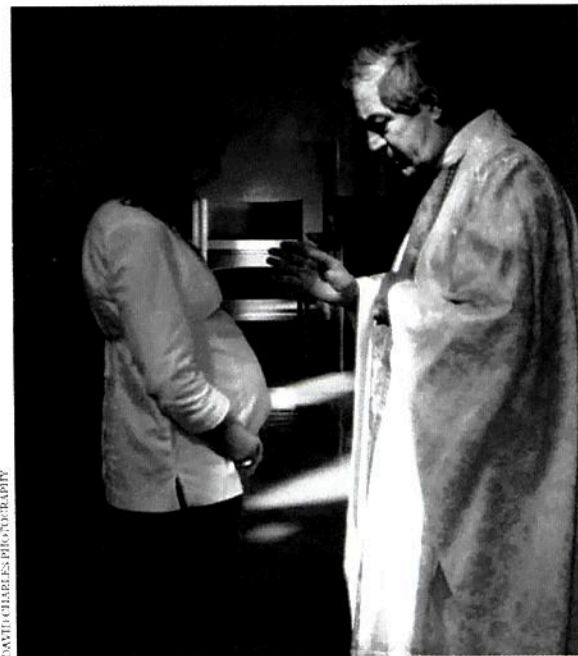
"With our capacity and desire for God, we can come to certain knowledge of his existence from the created world."

God and desiring to find him. For as they live among his works they keep searching, and they trust in what they see, because the things that are seen are beautiful. Yet again, not even they are to be excused; for if they had the power to know so much that they could investigate the world, how did they fail to find sooner the Lord of these things?" (Wis 13:1-9).

We can also arrive at knowledge of God by the natural light of human reason, and particularly through our *conscience*. Reason propels us toward God by continually prompting us to "make sense" out of everything. Through reason, we seek meaning for our lives and about the world in which we live. Human beings are seldom satisfied with "just getting by." We want to comprehend our

existence and the role we are to play in this vast universe which we did not create. Even more, our conscience, that persistent inner sense which enjoins us to do good and to avoid evil, reminds us continually of God's presence. In our pursuit of goodness, we know instinctively that there must be a Being who is goodness itself. By conscience, in a truly wonderful way, God's existence is made known to us. There, we are alone with him and can recognize his voice as it echoes in the depths of our being.

(CCC 27-45, 155-159, 222, 1776-1777)



A priest blesses a mother and her unborn child

God the Father

And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" ~ Galatians 4:6

WHO IS GOD THE FATHER? He is the first person of the Blessed Trinity. The term "Blessed Trinity" means that there is one almighty God who exists as three distinct Persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Not three gods, but rather one God who exists as three distinct Persons. This is the central mystery of Christianity.

Throughout the Holy Scriptures, God is revealed as the almighty God who is strong and protective of his people, Israel. He commands obedience and holiness of life. Yet he is also tender, compassionate, and forgiving. The Israelites certainly had an awareness of God as their Father who had formed them into a people (see Jer 51:9) and continually cared for them and their needs: *"Make his greatness known there, and exalt him in the presence of all the living; because he is our Lord and God, he is our Father for ever"* (Tb 13:4).

"God is the first and perfect Father, and all other fatherhood finds its ultimate origin in him."

Through the prophet Jeremiah, God expressed his intentions toward Israel: *"I thought how I would set you among my sons, and give you a pleasant land, a heritage most beautiful of all nations. And I thought you would call me, My Father, and would not turn from following me"* (Jer 3:19), yet Israel had to be reminded of his steadfast care: *"Is not he your father, who created you, who made you and established you?"* (Dt 32:6). To David, especially, God was Father (see 2 Sm 7:14-15; Ps 89:26). The prophet Isaiah acknowledged our debt to God's loving creation in a beautiful metaphor: *"O Lord, thou art our Father; we are the clay, and thou art our potter; we are all the work of thy hand"* (Is 64:8), and reminded Israel of God's promise of redemption: *"thou, O Lord, art our Father: our Redeemer from of old is thy name"* (Is 63:16).

However, it was not until the coming of Christ that the Father was fully revealed. Jesus said, *"He who has seen me has seen the Father"* (Jn 14:9). One of the primary things that Jesus came to do was to reveal God to us. And Jesus reveals that the first per-

son of the Trinity is our loving Father. He is the origin of all that exists and ever will exist. The second person of the Blessed Trinity comes forth from God the Father. He is the Son of God. He took our human nature, and we know him as Jesus. The Holy Spirit, the third person of the Blessed Trinity, comes forth from the Father and the Son. This dynamic action of love within the Trinity has occurred from all eternity and will always continue: there are three Persons, yet one God.

God and the Christian Family

God created human beings the way he did for a particular reason. Adam and Eve were made in the image and likeness of God. God created them as man and woman to reflect what God is like in himself (see Gn 1:27). God is not a man or a woman. As a completely spiritual being, God could not have such distinc-



Return of the Unborn, by Timothy Schmalz: God is the Father of all mercy and desires that all would be saved



“The Father deeply desires our happiness and peace.”

tions. He transcends them. However, human masculinity and femininity do reflect, in a limited way, things that are true of God. This is vitally important. When a man and woman marry and have a child, the fruitful family becomes an image of the Blessed Trinity. In other words, every human family provides a profound reflection of *the Family*, the Blessed Trinity.

When a family is living in accordance with God’s plan, it becomes a powerful reflection of God. In addition, and most importantly for our topic, the family provides our first experience of father and mother. God intends that our earthly father and mother, limited and imperfect as they are, reflect God to us. Once again, the fact that God is our Father does not mean that the first person of the Trinity is male, for he is above all such distinctions. But the human term “father,” though imperfect and limited, does accurately express personal qualities of God.

The Father of Jesus

God our Father is the origin of all that exists or ever will exist. All fatherhood takes its origin from him (see Eph 3:14-15). Some people think that in calling God “Father” we are simply projecting human concepts onto God. In other words, they think that calling God “Father” is our idea, rather than God’s idea. But the reverse is true. God is the first and perfect Father, and all other fatherhood finds its ultimate origin in him. He alone is the perfect Father. Human fathers are imperfect, limited, and faint reflections of our all-perfect, all-powerful, and all-loving Heavenly Father. Central to the mission and teaching of Jesus was the revelation of his heavenly Father.

The Father deeply desires our happiness and

peace. He longs for us to know him and to rest in him: *“The Lord is good to those who wait for him, to the soul that seeks him”* (Lam 3:25). So let us go to him with confidence. Let us bare our souls to him, that he may heal anything within us that hinders us from accepting and knowing him. Let us ask Jesus and the Holy Spirit to reveal the Father to us. Of all the teachings of Christ, the parable of the prodigal son best reveals the Father’s heart toward us:

And he said, “There was a man who had two sons; and the younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of property that falls to me.’ And he divided his living between them. Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took his journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in loose living. And when he had spent everything, a great famine arose in that country, and he began to be in want. So he went and joined himself to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would gladly have fed on the pods that the swine ate; and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have bread enough and to spare, but I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired servants.’” And he arose and came to his father. But while he was yet at a distance, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet; and bring the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and make merry: for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.’ And they began to make merry.

“Now his elder son was in the field; and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants and asked what this meant. And he said to him, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has received him safe and sound.’ But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, but he answered his father, ‘Lo, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command; yet you never gave me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends. But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your living with harlots, you killed for him the fatted calf!’ And he said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. It was fitting to make merry and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found’” (Lk 15:11-32).

(CCC 238-248, 270, 370, 2779-2780)

Attributes of God

*I will extol thee, my God and King, and bless thy name for ever and ever...
Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised, and his greatness is unsearchable...
The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
The Lord is good to all, and his compassion is over all that he has made...
Thy Kingdom is an everlasting Kingdom, and thy dominion endures throughout all
generations. The Lord is faithful in all his words, and gracious in all his deeds.
The Lord upholds all who are falling, and raises up all who are bowed down...
Thou openest thy hand, thou satisfiest the desire of every living thing. The Lord is
just in all his ways, and kind in all his doings. The Lord is near to all who call upon
him, to all who call upon him in truth. He fulfils the desire of all who fear him,
he also hears their cry, and saves them. ~ Psalm 145:1, 5, 8, 13-14, 16-19*

WHO IS GOD?
While this question may seem obvious

to some, after a phrase or two many of us begin scratching our heads and are at a loss for words. To know who someone is and to have a relationship with that person means knowing something about him or her. God is no different in this respect. In order to develop a relationship with him, we must learn who he is. Learning about his divine attributes certainly will not exhaust the mystery that he is, but it will open him up to us and allow for a deeper relationship with him as we grow in our understanding and faith. Faith in God is fundamental and at the foundation of reality.

God is One

God revealed himself to Israel as the one true God: "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your



Jesus rebukes the wind and sea, by Domenico Mastroragni, 1876-1962

soul, and with all your might" (Dt 6:4-5). Israel's weakness was their desire to be like the other nations and seek after their gods. God's Revelation to them pulled them out of the darkness of idolatry and into the light of the one true God. While our idols today take on different forms than those of the ancient world, they are no less dangerous and deceptive. Jesus warned that money can become for us an idol and keep us from God.

God is Eternal

A second attribute of God is that he has always existed: "Art thou not from everlasting, O Lord my God, my Holy One?" (Hb 1:12). There

never was a time when he was not, nor will there ever be a time when he is not. God is transcendent, which means he exists outside of time. In fact, time is part of creation and so God is the creator of time. God simply "is"; he has no future or past.

His timeless nature was revealed to Moses when

Moses asked him for his name. *"If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" God said to Moses, "I am who I AM... this is my name for ever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations" (Ex 3:13-15). "I Am who I am" in Hebrew is "Yahweh" and is a name that is revered by Jews and Christians alike. It reveals God has no beginning or end. When placed before this revelation, we realize our own insignificance and praise God for his greatness.*

Also, God's eternity means he does not change. He is outside time: *"O eternal God, [you] discern what is secret, [you] art aware of all things before they come to be" (Dn 15:42). When he created us, he knew that we would fall and that he would save us. His will to save us has been in his mind for all eternity. God is ever faithful to his promises even when we sin against him. His love for us does not falter. "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is thy faithfulness" (Lam 3:22-23).*

God is Almighty

God is the Lord over all things: *"Let all thy creatures serve thee, for thou didst speak, and they were made. Thou didst send forth thy Spirit, and it formed them; there is none that can resist thy voice" (Jdt 16:14). "In God, power, essence, will, intellect, wisdom, and justice are all identical"¹ (CCC 271). His power is infinite and cannot be diminished or conquered by the power of evil. However, because he created us with freedom, he has made it so that the execution of his power in this world depends in part on our actions. Nothing is impossible for God; yet, it seems that when we need him most, he is powerless to help us. The apparent weakness of God is at the heart of*

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The Ascension of Christ, 15th century cedar panel from Egypt

his plan to conquer evil. Christ was exposed to the powers of evil and *"humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross" (Phil 2:8). But his apparent weakness revealed the mystery of his power and conquered sin and death when he rose again on the third day. The power of God manifested in the weakness of Christ is not something that we can understand apart from faith. Only in faith can we follow Christ, believing that nothing is beyond God's power even when its perfection is found in weakness (see 2 Cor 12:10).*

God is Holy and Good

"Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty" (Rv 4:8) sing the angels in Heaven. "No one is good but God alone" (Mk 10:18), Jesus tells us. God is the source of all holiness and all goodness: "Righteousness belongs to the Lord our God" (Bar 2:6). Throughout the history of God's dealings with humankind, he gradually reveals his glory and goodness to us. When we seek to be holy, we seek to imitate God. Although evil abounds in the world, God is not the source of evil. Our human freedom, our freedom to do the good, can also choose to do evil: "He who does good is of God; he who does evil has not seen God" (3 Jn v 11). God permits evil, and brings good from it, but is not the source or cause of evil. "We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him" (Rom 8:28). Our belief in an all-good God requires our belief in Satan — as a fallen angelic being, not as a "force" — whose choice against God brought evil into existence (see handout on Angels).

God is Truth

The revelation of God's love is manifested not only in his goodness and mercy but also in his faithfulness

¹ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, 25, 5, ad 1

and truth. God keeps his promises: "[S]o shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and prosper in the thing for which I sent it" (Is 55:11). "God is light and in him is no darkness at all" (1 Jn 1:5). The truth is God's wisdom clothed in radiance and beauty. Because of God's goodness and purity, his truth pervades and penetrates all things and governs all his actions. Truth is beautiful and one of God's greatest treasures. In praise of wisdom we read in Scripture: *It is an unfailing treasure for men; those who get it obtain friendship with God, commended for the gifts that come from instruction.... [W]isdom is a reflection of eternal light, a spotless mirror of the working of God, and an image of his goodness* (Wis 7:14, 26).

God is Love

God declares to us: *"I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you"* (Jer 31:3). As a reflection of his love and goodness, he created all things good. He created us in his own image and *"show[ed] his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us"* (Rom 5:8). No one loves us more than God, and he will not be outdone by anyone in lavishing upon us his grace and mercy. In him we have nothing to fear because God is perfect love and *"perfect love casts out fear"* (1 Jn 4:18). Also, *"[w]e know that in everything God works for good with those who love him"* (Rom 8:28).

God loved us first and then created us; or to put it another way, we have been created out of love. As much as his love for us is as that of a father for his children, it is also that of a spouse for his beloved: *"And in that day, says the Lord, you will call me, 'My husband... And I will betroth you to me for ever; I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love, and in mercy. I will*

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betroth you to me in faithfulness, and you shall know the Lord" (Hos 2:16, 19-20). The power and intensity of God's love can be compared to that of the love shared between lovers whose hearts beat as one: *"I am my beloved's, and his desire is for me"* (Song 7:10).

Because he is love, he desires what is best for us. But his love does not stop there. The power of his love reaches beyond his desire for our happiness to the actual attainment of it: *"In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins"* (1 Jn 4:10). He has secured our happiness and lasting peace through the death of his Son. The only limitation to his power is our freedom. We can still refuse his love and the happiness he offers, but he never stops loving us. His love is forever, even for those in Hell whose anguish is the result of God's love beating on the hearts of those who have rejected him.

Faith in God

Believing in the one true God who is transcendent, almighty, gracious, merciful and loving has many consequences for our lives. Because of his almighty power and sovereignty, faith means we have to put him in the first place in our lives and serve him. Because of his truth, it means we have to walk in the light of truth, recognizing the beauty and fullness it brings to life. And lastly, because of his mercy and love, it means we have to trust in his providence even during times of suffering and trials. *"Rejoice"* says St. Paul, and *"again I will say, Rejoice.... Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus"* (Phil 4:4, 6-7).

(CCC 198-221, 268, 271-274, 385, 2465, 2809-2810)

