

# THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

Nearly everyone, at one time or another, has an incredible experience that profoundly alters his or her life's journey. At such times, most of us turn to the divine—to God—and wonder about the hidden presence we have sensed in our hearts. Such experiences force us to ask questions about the meaning of life and the mystery of death.

## ***1. Does God exist?***

CCC 31–32; 34–35; 47

St. Paul and the Church assert that humans are able to discover the hidden God through rational thought because “ever since the creation of the world, the invisible existence of God and his everlasting power have been clearly seen by the mind’s understanding of created things” (Rom 1:20). Belief in God is not unreasonable.

## ***2. What does personal experience tell us about God?***

CCC 27–30; 33; 46

Experience can guide us to God. Our feelings of dependency; our sense of wonder, awe, and joy; our openness to

truth and beauty; and our feelings of being invited to do greater things than we are doing all speak of a God who has made us to discover and love him. Traditional arguments for God's existence include the following:

- *An unquenchable thirst for happiness.* Did a creator make us with a hunger for happiness that nothing can completely satisfy? Might it be that God implanted in us a kind of homing device causing restlessness until we find him? This yearning for total happiness points to a God who made us this way.
- *A sense of justice.* We have a fundamental sense of moral goodness, a feeling that things will be reversed someday, that there is a power that will right all wrongs, if not in this life, then in the next.
- *The existence of love.* Love is a spiritual reality that is not explained by materiality. It must come from somewhere, ultimately from Love itself, the being we call God.

### ***3. What does human history tell us about God?***

CCC 51–53

Human history is a powerful argument for the existence of God. There seems to be intelligence behind our evolving history. From the earliest times, human beings have testified to the existence of God. An overwhelming majority of cultures have believed in some being who is greater than any of its members. We know *someone* is there, but God's true identity is not clear. We need divine help to know God as God really is.

#### ***4. What do demonstrations based on reason tell us about God?***

CCC 31–32; 46

St. Thomas Aquinas, the great medieval theologian, summed up five so-called proofs for the existence of God. A key proof is the logical conclusion that all creatures must ultimately come from a cause that itself was not caused. This “Uncaused Cause” is God. Besides philosophical arguments, our own personal reflection on creation’s beauty, immensity, and power can give us an awareness of a God who made all things and keeps them in existence.

#### ***5. Does God communicate with us?***

CCC 51

God not only exists but also freely chooses to communicate himself and the divine plan for salvation to us. The Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) taught:

In His goodness and wisdom, God chose to reveal Himself and to make known to us the hidden purpose of His will by which through Christ, the Word made flesh, man has access to the Father in the Holy Spirit and comes to share in the divine nature.

*(Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, 2)*

#### ***6. What is divine revelation?***

CCC 50–54

Christians believe God freely chose to communicate himself and the divine plan of salvation to us. God did this gradually

by deeds and words inherently connected to each other. This gift of God's self-communication is known as *supernatural* or *divine revelation*. God's self-disclosure and invitation to a deeper life of love are purely gifts on God's part.

At many moments in the past and by many means, God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets; but in our own time, the final days, he has spoken to us in the person of his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things and through whom he made the ages.

(Hebrews 1:1–2)

The story of God's self-disclosure, God's saving action in history, is known as *salvation history*. Salvation history reached its high point in the coming of Jesus, the fullness of God's revelation. Jesus is the Word of God made flesh; he is the Son of God who lived among us, taught us in human words and deeds about his Father, and completed the Father's work of salvation.

### ***7. What is the Bible's role in salvation history?***

CCC 74–87; 101–114; 121–125; 134–141

The story of salvation history continues in our encounter with the Bible and in the sacred tradition of the Church. The Old Testament records God's teaching to the Jewish people and God's interactions in their history. The New Testament chronicles the life and teachings of Jesus and announces the Good News of God's plan of salvation for all people.

### ***8. How does God help us respond to revelation?***

CCC 25; 91–100; 142–144; 1813

We need to respond to God's self-communication and the revelation of God's plan for us. This response is known as *faith*. Faith, like revelation, is a gift from God that gives us the conviction, commitment, and trust to believe in realities that we can neither see nor clearly prove.

Through this unearned gift of faith received at Baptism, we join a community of believers in the Lord Jesus who lives in our midst. Faith, hope, and charity make up the theological virtues:

- *Faith*, cooperating with divine grace, enables us to know God and believe what God reveals through the teaching of the Church. Through faith, we commit our whole person—intellect, will, words, and actions—to the God who reveals.
- *Hope* creates in us a desire for God. It enables us to trust firmly in God's loving plan for our salvation and that God will give us all that we need to attain it.
- *Charity* is God's own grace-filled life in us. It beckons us to live Christ's life of caring concern and service for others.

### **Reflection**

The whole earth is a living icon of the face of God.

—St. John Damascene

Think about a particular time when your own human reason has revealed God's presence to you.



## 2.

# GOD: OUR LOVING CREATOR

**I**n the Creed we profess belief in one Almighty God, Creator of all. God is Father, the first person of the Blessed Trinity. The Bible reveals that the very nature of God is love. God asks us to love in return as the way to happiness.

### ***9. What does God reveal?***

CCC 105–107; 121–123; 134–138

A primary way of listening to God is by reading and reflecting on the Bible. Catholics believe that the writings of the Old and New Testament are God's self-communication in human words:

Through all the words of Sacred Scripture, God speaks only one single Word, his one utterance in whom he expresses himself completely.

*(Catechism of the Catholic Church, 102)*

The Bible, which literally means “the book,” is more properly understood as a collection of books. This collection contains different kinds of literature such as poetry, history, religious myth or story, hymns, and proverbs. We

believe that all the books of the Bible are inspired by God. By this we mean that through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the biblical writers accurately recorded what God wanted to communicate.

Catholics recognize forty-six books in the Old Testament. These officially accepted books comprise the *canon* (definitive list) of books in the Old Testament. The following points summarize some of the essential truths about God that these books reveal:

*There is only one God.* CCC 199–204; 210–211

When God chose to reveal himself to humans, he began with Abraham, whose descendants would become the Israelites. The Israelites came to be known as the Chosen People. Their history is one of *covenant* with God because they defined themselves in light of the solemn commitment God made with them. In return for God's great blessings and constant faithfulness, the Israelites (later known as the Jewish people) were to obey God's law as summarized in the Ten Commandments. The most important aspect of the Israelites' response was to worship God and to testify that he is the one true God, the source of all being, the one who keeps everything in existence. All other gods were false and thus powerless.

*God is a mystery.* CCC 212–217; 268–271

God is totally other than creation. He is above and beyond it. God is eternal, unique, infinite, all-powerful, unchanging, supremely holy, and utterly simple—a pure spirit. Yet God is also present to and intimately joined with creation. For example, God formed and sustained the Chosen People,



befriended prophets who spoke on his behalf, and promised a Messiah.

*God is the Creator.* CCC 279–308; 315–323; 337–349; 355–373; 380–384

God made all things out of nothing; creation is freely, generously, and wisely made to manifest and share God's glory. In the divine wisdom, God both sustains and rules the world. God created humanity in the divine image, able to think, choose, and love. Our human nature unites both the spiritual and material worlds. Created "male and female" in God's friendship, humans possess fundamental dignity. God created everything for man, but man in turn was created to serve and love God and to offer all creation back to him (CCC 358).

*Evil exists because of our sin.* CCC 374–379; 386–390; 396–412; 415–421

Because God created free beings and not mere puppets, humans had a chance to either accept or reject God's love from the beginning. Original sin is the unhappy result of Adam and Eve's having chosen to reject God. Their sin brought about disunity between God and humanity. The book of Genesis tells us that this fractured relationship resulted in a corresponding disharmony between humans and the rest of creation, and our alienation from one another. This *condition of human frailty* is what we call *original sin*.

*God is loving, faithful, and true.* CCC 214–221

The major theme of salvation history is God's loving faithfulness to his unfaithful creatures. God's love is manifested

through deeds as well as words. God's deeds reflect a saving God—one who rescues the Israelites from the bondage of slavery in Egypt, one who sustains them in the desert, one who gives them a land and a king, one who keeps them alive in captivity, and one who returns them to their land.

The high point of God's loving concern is the promise to send a Messiah, a savior, who will restore humanity's proper relationship with God. In fulfillment of this promise, God sent Jesus Christ, his only Son.

***10. If God knows all, how can we have free will?***

CCC 311

God's knowledge does not force us to do anything. God gave us freedom and respects that freedom, even if it leads us away from God's love.

***11. If God is good, why is there evil?***

CCC 272–274; 309–314; 324

God does not create evil; evil is the absence of good. Rather, God permits evil. Evil enters the picture when free, intelligent creatures turn from God's love. We also believe that some evil in the universe results from fallen angels (devils) at odds with their Creator.

**Reflection**

It is better to be a child of God than king of the whole world.

—St. Aloysius Gonzaga

What do you find mysterious about God's nature as Creator?