

and is the creative principle of religion, as the moral sense is the principle of ethics." [Newman, *Grammar of Assent*, Chap. 5, Sec. 1]

1. **The Argument from Universal Belief.** Like the argument from conscience, this proof is not conclusive. Rather the existence of a practically universal belief in the existence of God strongly corroborates the conclusion that God exists. It is generally true that every people or tribe of men has had some kind of belief in a supreme being. human race as a whole has manifested God, despite wide variances in those beliefs. prevailing among men of all times and accepted by men of all degrees of ignorance or knowledge, cannot reasonably be accounted for except on the supposition that such a belief is a right conclusion of human reason. The universality of this belief cannot be explained as merely a result of fear, desire or fraud. Rather, its universality among men is evidence of its reasonableness.

Too often, we tend to assume that our religion is an exercise in witchcraft and that those who deny God are the reasonable people. In fact, as a full consideration of the proofs from reason for the existence of God will indicate, belief in God is fully reasonable. Even more, it is wholly unreasonable not to believe in God. One who denies the existence of God must be

prepared to say that an endless chain of movers a prime mover; that an infinite chain of causes without an uncaused first cause; that something can come from absolutely nothing; that there is no ultimate and absolute standard of perfection; that the marvelous workings brain, for example, can occur through blind chance without intelligent design; and that the universal testimony of human conscience is of little or no account.

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#### Pamphlet 229

## Can we prove that God exists?

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As a full consideration of the proofs from reason for the existence of God will indicate, belief in God is fully reasonable. Even more, it is wholly unreasonable not to believe in God.

Can we know anything about God?

Of course, through the gift of faith we know that God exists. But is that merely a blind faith unsupported by reason? Obviously, our reason cannot of itself provide us with complete knowledge of God; if it could we would ourselves be God. Nevertheless, through our reason we are able to gain some certain knowledge of God.

St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) spelled out five proofs from reason for the existence of God. Briefly summarized, they are:

1. **Motion.** What is in motion must be put in motion by another and that by another again. This cannot go on to infinity. Therefore, there must be at the head of the series of movers, a being that is itself unmoved and that is the source of all movement. This prime mover is God.
2. **Causation.** This proof depends on the self-evident principles that nothing can exist without a sufficient

reason for its existence and that every effect must have a cause. It is impossible for a thing to be the efficient cause of itself for, if it were, it would be prior to itself which is impossible. Since every effect must have a cause, that cause in turn must be the effect of another cause, and so on. But the process cannot go on to infinity. There must be a first cause that is not caused by anything else and that contains in itself the sufficient reason for its existence. That first cause is God.

3. **Necessity or contingency.** This proof, too, depends on the self-evident principle of sufficient reason, that is, that whatever exists must have a sufficient reason for its existence.

If there was ever a time when there was nothing, there could never be anything. From nothing, nothing can come. To explain the existence of beings that are unnecessary, that at one time did not exist, there must have always existed a necessary being, from whom beings that began to be received their existence. The existence of all other beings is contingent on the existence of this necessary being. This necessary being is God.

4. **Perfection.** When we perceive objects or people, we judge that they are more or less good, beautiful,

kind, just, etc. But this presupposes an absolute standard of perfection with which the less perfect are compared. This absolute standard of perfection is God.

5. **Design.** Whatever exhibits marks of design must be the work of an intelligent being. Nobody could possibly believe that his wrist watch just "fell together." On the contrary, it was obviously designed by an intelligent designer. How much more so with the human body, the world and the universe. They all give evidence of an intelligent designer. The order of the universe, the workings of the human eye, etc., cannot be the product of chance or of some blind necessity in the nature of things. Their intelligent designer is God.

These are the five proofs advanced by St. Thomas Aquinas to prove the existence of God. Two other proofs for the existence of God should be mentioned:

2. **The Argument from Conscience.** The most notable statement of this argument was written by John Henry Cardinal Newman:

"If, as is the case, we feel responsibility, are ashamed, are frightened, at transgressing the voice of conscience, this implies that there is one to whom we are responsible, before whom we are ashamed, whose claims upon us we fear.

If, on doing wrong, we feel the same tearful, broken-hearted sorrow which overwhelms us in hurting a mother; if, on doing right, we enjoy the same sunny serenity of mind, the same soothing satisfactory delight which follows our receiving praise from a father, we certainly have within us the image of some person, to whom our love.. and veneration look, in whose smile we find our happiness, for whom we yearn, towards whom we direct our pleadings, in whose anger we are troubled and waste away. These feelings in us are such as require for their exciting cause an intelligent being; we are not affectionate towards a stone; we do not feel shame before a horse or dog; we have no remorse or compunction on breaking merely human law; yet so it is, conscience excites all these painful emotions: confusion, foreboding, self-condemnation; and on the other hand it sheds upon us a deep peace, a sense of security, a resignation and a hope, which there is no sensible, no earthly, object to elicit. "The wicked flees when no man pursueth." Then why does he flee? Whence his terror? Who is it that he sees in solitude, in darkness, in the hidden chambers of his heart? If the cause of these emotions does not belong to this visible world, the object towards which his perception is directed must be supernatural and divine; and thus the phenomena of conscience avail to impress the imagination with the picture of a supreme governor, a judge, holy, just, powerful, all-seeing, retributive,