

# GOD AND US

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The Church's starting-point is already religious: the Catechism begins with the statement that *The desire for God is written in the human heart*.

Throughout history...people have given expression to their quest for God in their religious beliefs and behaviour: in their prayers, sacrifices, rituals, meditations, and so forth. These forms...despite the ambiguities they often bring with them, are so universal that one may well call man a religious being.

But this intimate and vital bond of man to God can be forgotten, overlooked, or even explicitly rejected by man. Such attitudes can have different causes: revolt against evil in the world, religious ignorance or indifference, the cares and riches of this world, the scandal of bad example on the part of believers, currents of thought hostile to religion - finally, that attitude of sinful man which makes him hide from God out of fear and flee his call.

Clearly the Catechism is arguing from the presence of *desire* for God to the reality of the search for God, and thence to the God who is the end of that search. This contrasts with the sort of statement sociologists might make, assuming that religion is basically a reality generated by a complex of needs and tendencies within human nature, and explaining it "away". The Church continues to relate its belief in God to the way the world is, seeing a kind of close fit between *what we need to be true* and *what actually is the case*. This is not to say, with Voltaire, that if God didn't exist he would be worth inventing; rather that the decision to believe in a Creator can lead on to a reading of the Creation as a kind of message from and about him.

The following so-called "five ways" of arguing towards the existence of God were collected by St Thomas in his *Summa Theologiae*.

1 From the *change (motus)* we observe in the world, it seems clear that nothing moves without being moved. But if this is true, it implies that at the beginning of the series - and also *now* - there must be a First Mover who is not himself moved - otherwise nothing would ever be moved.

2 Similarly in the context of *causes*: everything that comes about demands a preceding cause, otherwise things would have to cause themselves - and *precede themselves* - which is nonsense. So the fact of things existing now demands the presence of an uncaused cause.

3 *Necessity of being* provides a third way. Some things come into existence and pass out of it; *they can be* but *needn't*. However, not *everything* can be like that. Because a thing which *needn't* be, once was not; if *everything* need not be, once upon a time there was nothing; but if there was nothing, nothing could be brought into being. Since we see that things have been brought into being, we must suppose that there is

something which is *absolutely necessary*, to which or whom existence absolutely belongs. This *necessary Being* is God, and God's unique relationship to being itself makes him the source of being in others (the Creator).

4 We see limited *grades of perfection* - truth, beauty, etcetera - in things around us. From the gradation we observe in things, we can presume the existence of something that is the truest, and best, and most excellent, who relates to all lesser manifestations of his excellent qualities.

5 The teleological argument: *order* in the universe presupposes an ordering Mind. David Hume and Immanuel Kant didn't like it, and Darwinism temporarily rocked it with the theory of the survival of the fittest; but recent advances in astronomy, biology, physics and other sciences have shown how massive and far-reaching is the order in a universe - which has apparently existed for a relatively short time. The odds against such an astonishing order emerging by mere chance give a new plausibility to the argument for an intelligent designer.