

APOLOGETICS 101

Proofs for God: Part 2

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In this series, the author lays out a common sense approach to understanding and defending the Catholic Faith.

We began our journey into apologetics by seeing that truth does exist. We then proceeded to look at the truth about God and concluded that faith and reason do indeed work together. Recently, we looked at several arguments for God: Aquinas' ways to God (Everything in motion requires a mover. The universe is in motion. Therefore the universe has a mover) and the argument for design (Everything that has design needs a designer. The universe has design. Therefore the universe has a designer). This article continues looking at the evidence for God.

Does anyone have food? I'm hungry!

C.S. Lewis, perhaps the greatest modern Christian apologist, once commented on the relationship between food and God. He noted how the innate desires of the body correspond to real objects. For example, it is 4 p.m. and you are consumed with work on the latest project. All of a sudden you notice that you have a painful empty feeling in your stomach and that your mid-section is making noise! Of course, you realize that you forgot to eat breakfast and now it is way past lunch. You are hungry. You need food. Food must exist! If there was no such thing as food – and I am not talking about being in a situation of starvation – then why would your body hunger for it? You are hungry; therefore there must be food. The great thinker St. Augustine wrote in his *Confessions* “Our heart is restless until it rests in God.” If there were no God, we would not desire him, we would not be restless without Him. But we do desire God or for that matter, the attributes associated with God: perfect love, perfect justice, perfect beauty. Therefore these things must exist.

Life just isn't like that!

Have you ever met anybody who totally despaired of life? Someone who thought that life had no meaning, no purpose? Someone who honestly thought that there was no difference between good or evil, between right and wrong, between love and hatred? Even if it is possible to imagine a person in this situation, in reality, no one in their right mind really lives this way. Deep down we all somehow know that things matter and that the line between good and evil for example, is a very real one. If there were no God and no immortality then life would be meaningless. There would be no ultimate purpose, no motive to do the right thing, no reason to strive for goodness, truth and beauty. If we all die in the end and rot in the ground and that is the end of us, why try to be good? Why try to do the right thing? What difference does it make in the end? But, no one lives this way. Life just isn't like that! There must be a God.

Historical arguments

Historical arguments for God are not the type of argument that we have looked at thus far. They are based more in fact and less in logic, but they are powerful nonetheless, as people are convinced more with facts and less with logic. There are a number of different historical arguments that are worth examining. In looking at history, one thing that becomes evident is that

it is meaningful. A look at the past reveals a story line, a purpose. It is not just a random and meaningless sequence of events, but a story. Every story has a storyteller and in this case, a divine being tells the story. Even the very name “history” implies that we are in “His-story”. Further, this story has a moral design. Good things tend to happen to good people and societies and bad things to bad people and societies. That this happens isn’t by pure chance, for it is consistent throughout history. This points to a moral cause – God. A look at the workings of providence in history – those events like the crossing of the Red Sea in the Exodus, or the feeding of the Jewish people on the manna and quail – no matter how people attempt to trivialize them or explain them away, point to something great at work. We are not just talking about “co-incidences”, but “Godincidents”. Miracles and the lives of the saints are a powerful testimony towards the existence of God. They show the direct power of God at work in our human reality. They are unavoidable and uncomfortable as they shake us out of merely horizontal plane of existence. They add that vertical dimension, making a cross, the cross through which we are reunited to the miracle maker, the joy of all the saints. You cannot explain the historical fact of miracles or saints without the God that causes them. Finally, the person of Christ himself is a historical argument. If Jesus is not who he claims to be, then there must be another explanation. There are only four other alternatives. In rationally looking at these, it is possible to come to a firm conclusion regarding him. If he is who he claims to be then God is real. (More on this in the next article)

Wagering with Pascal

The French thinker Pascal gives us what he sees as the “coup-de-grace” argument in his work *Pensées*. Living in a time of skepticism, he points out that even if one denies all the arguments for God, one still has to either live like there is a God, or live like there is no God. Either God is, or he is not. There is no middle ground and you have to choose one or the other. Pascal argues that it makes more sense to believe in God. Imagine that you develop a severe pain in your head after reading this article. It may be the quality of writing or it may be something else. The pain continues to worsen and you go to see a doctor. The diagnosis is not good. You have a rare form of cancer to which there is apparently no treatment and you have a week to live. A day later a specialist from another country who has been working on just your type of cancer and tells you of an experimental new cure that has a 50% absolute cure rate. If it doesn’t work, there are no harmful side effects. They will fly you out and pay for everything. What is your decision? Of course, you go! You have nothing to lose as you are already dying and everything to gain, as you may be cured.

“Our heart is restless until it rests in God”

St. Augustine

Pascal argues that betting on God is very similar. You have nothing to lose and everything to gain. If there is a God and you bet on him, you gain heaven. If you don’t bet on him you get hell. If there is no God and you bet on him, Pascal argues you will end up a more happy person in the end. If there is no God and you don’t bet on him, you lose nothing. So, wager with Pascal on God! For the agnostic who argues that the better thing is not to wager at all until one is sure, Pascal argues that one must wager. Your life is like a ship out at sea moving over the waters of life. The wind is blowing (time) and at some point you need to turn into homeport (heaven). If you wait too long, you will be blown past and it will be too late (death). The agnostic response to

stay at sea until one is sure doesn't work because you are already moving and you cannot stop that. The wager refutes agnosticism because of death, the one surety of life.

At the end, a rope

In short, when looking at all the arguments for God with a rational and open mind, it is very hard to remain a strict atheist. Each individual argument for God is like the strand of a rope. By itself, each strand may seem insignificant or even breakable, but when they are woven together they form an unbreakable rope. Each argument may seem inconsequential or even "breakable" (although they are not), but when they are all taken together they form that unbreakable rope that reaches from earth up into eternity and heaven, our true home. Or, perhaps better put, a rope reaching down from heaven with our Heavenly Father holding strong with both hands pulling us up back up to Him. I am often as excited as my high school theology students when we talk about these proofs for God. These compelling arguments truly demonstrate in simple yet profound ways the truth of God's existence. Simplicity that a child grasps and yet depth, that the scholar of many years, still tries to probe. My students intuitively understand the powerful tools that they are being given to go out and make a difference in the lives of those who walk in confusion. The fact that I remind them that true conversion is wrought in the heart by prayer, fasting and the grace of God, and not by apologetics alone, does little to temper their newfound excitement of sharing their faith and the new ways of articulating it with others. May we be inspired by their example and by the examples of our beloved Saints of times past, to be courageous in living out our faith, always ready to give an explanation for the hope that lies within.

Next issue: "Jesus: The Real Deal"

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