

CAN WE KNOW THAT GOD IS?

By Bill Irby

Are there good reasons to affirm the existence of God? Yes. Are there some less effective and perhaps unsound reasons to affirm the existence of God? Yes. Here are some suggested by Hugo McCord: mother, the Bible, experiences, the idea that "Everybody believes in God," intuition, and something called Pascal's Wager. Mother may teach and train, but each individual must have his own faith. The Bible does not seek to prove that God is, it assumes that God is.

We all know that our experiences can be unreliable. Everybody most assuredly does not believe in God. Intuition is but the sum of one's experiences; if the experiences are faulty, so is the intuition. Blaise Pascal said that it is a good bet to believe in God. It does no harm and may accrue substantial benefits. He was correct but his method comes short of knowledge. The Greek word "noew" (noeo) is found in Matthew 15:17, 16:9 & 11, 24:15; John 12:40; Ephesians 3:4 & 20; 1 Timothy 1:7; 2 Timothy 2:7; and Hebrews 11:3.

These passages teach us that man can perceive or understand by means of experiencing the reality of the world or by other means of evidence transmission, such as reading truth. Romans 1:18-20 shows the relationship between an event (things made) and a perception (understanding). God has left adequate evidence of Himself in the world so that we may know He exists. For specific information concerning Him we must look to the Bible (Romans 10:17).

Let's think for a moment about what we know. We claim to know certain things: individual bodies (things like baseball and a fellow named Brent Peek) and universals (the game of baseball and cabinet makers). We also claim to know our own minds (we know that we are self-conscious) and historical events.

How do we move from this "claim" to attainable certainty? We do so by relying on the "principle of intelligibility." We hold that the knowledge of reality (the ability to know anything or something) cannot be questioned successfully. Our senses tell us that a certain thing exists. To deny the reality of the world's existence and our perception of it is nonsense and irrational.

The knowledge of the world gives rise to the question of its origin. Theists (people who take the position that God is) realize that this problem drives man to the idea of God. Even if other explanations of the origin of the world are offered (natural evolution, Big Bang, eternity, men from Mars, etc.) this is so done in response to the idea of God. As we try to understand general things about the world, we do so by reference to other specific things we know about. This process leads to the discovery of the principle of cause and effect. A baseball is covered (or used to be) with horsehide, which presupposed the existence of a horse. Ultimately, we begin to look for a cause "behind it all." The various "causes" possible for the existence of the world and all that is in it must be examined in light of the available evidence. This knowledge must be contemplated until a rational explanation becomes apparent. Therefore to help us along we will consider the various arguments for the existence of God.

There is the Cosmological Argument or “The Argument From Cause.” Thomas Aquinas was a Catholic theologian who lived from 1225-1274. He is generally thought of in connection with this argument. We have already made use of this line of reasoning in connection with the question of the origin of the world.

One way to summarize the argument is by going through these steps:

- (1) the world exists.
- (2) All effects have a cause.
- (3) The world must have had a cause.
- (4) That cause could not have had a cause
- (5) that uncaused cause is God, Who is the first cause.

There is an expression: “ex nihilo, nihil fit” which is Latin for “of nothing comes nothing.” The logic of the argument from cause is irrefutable.

But some people have tried to argue against it. The two primary objections are the principle of eternity of reality and motion and the idea that there exist an infinite number of contingent things (from David Hume). Eternity does not work because the universe is like a clock winding down and thus does not manifest eternity. Hume’s idea has the weakness of infinite improbability.

Another argument is the Teleological Argument for the existence of God. This is the argument from design and order. The classic expression of it is “If there is a watch, there must have been a watchmaker.” This may be the best argument for most people because it is most easily understood.

There is also the Moral argument for the existence of God. This may be the weakest argument, not because a “sense of ought” does not exist, but because it is difficult to argue for innate ideas (Think of Locke’s *tabula rasa*). If we argue that a perfect moral code exists which was revealed by God, then we have something by which we can benefit.

Last, there is Anselm’s Ontological Argument for the existence of God. This fellow was Archbishop of Canterbury, and lived from 1033 to 1109. The argument is a tricky thing. He held that God is proved because such a perfect being, greater than which cannot be conceived, can be conceived of by the human mind. He said, Therefore, if that, than which nothing greater can be conceived, exists in the understanding alone, the very being, than which nothing greater can be conceived, is one, than which a greater can be conceived. But obviously this is impossible. Hence there is no doubt that there exists a being, than which nothing greater can be conceived, and it exists both in the understanding and in reality. Anselm saw this to be proof of God’s existence. Because it is an argument made altogether within a person’s mind, it might not be the best approach for most people.

We ought to give attention to how we know God exists. Why? Because a surprising number of people lose faith in Christianity because they become unsure of the reality of God. We can know that God is. For he that cometh to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him (Hebrews 11:6).