

Does God Exist?

And [God] made from one every nation of men to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their habitation, that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel after him and find him. Yet he is not far from each one of us, for "in him we live and move and have our being." ~ Acts 17:26-28

FOR ANYONE inquiring about the Catholic Church, the question of the

existence God is fundamental. In the modern world, the possibility of a Supreme Being who governs the universe and claims certain rights over his creatures is continually brought into question. Aside from downright atheism, many live as if God does not exist, thinking perhaps that he is *indifferent* to the concrete situations of men and women on earth. Others think he is either sleeping or dead, making true believers the objects of ridicule. Whatever the case, it is certain that God's existence is no longer something everyone takes for granted.

"Faith in God's existence can be as certain as tomorrow's sunrise."

There are, however, ways of coming to know God and ways of speaking about him. These

ways are rooted in the very existence of the created world and especially in human beings. And, while God cannot be spread out on a table or examined beneath a microscope, faith in his existence can be as certain as tomorrow's sunrise. In other words, we are capable of knowing — *with real certainty* — something beyond what we see and hear. We know, with certainty, that love, anger, joy and beauty exist, even if we are unable to measure or weigh them. We know, with certainty, that we yearn for happiness and everlasting life, even without public-opin-



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ion surveys to tell us how many agree, how many disagree, and how many "don't know." And it takes a deliberate kind of blindness to look at the material universe in its wonderful order and power and at its glorious abundance of living things and somehow not see their Maker.

Every human person is created with a fundamental capacity for God that is matched by a fundamental desire for him. This desire is expressed in our ongoing quest for truth, beauty, and love, and prompts us to ask the basic questions: "Who am I?" "Why am I here?" "Where am I going?" "What is the meaning of life?" Ultimately, these are profoundly religious questions and are so universal that we can be called *religious beings*.

With our capacity and desire for God, we can come to certain knowledge of his existence from the created world. In the world there is an order and beauty that is capable of being enjoyed by us. That is to say that the earth's majestic appeal, its natural glory, is not a cosmic coincidence. It was made to be cared for and governed by beings capable of taking delight in it (see Gn 1:27-30). St. Paul says: "For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made" (Rom 1:19-20). Many people today, especially those who think of themselves as "modern" and above "religious superstition," have made themselves a universe without God, where material things are, in effect, their own creators. People who think this way are not wise at all, but foolish, as Sacred Scripture says of their counterparts long ago: "For all men who were ignorant of God were foolish by nature; and they were unable from the good things that are seen to know him who exists, nor did they recognize the craftsman while paying heed to his works; but they supposed that either fire or wind or swift air, or the circle of the stars, or turbulent water, or the luminaries of heaven were the gods that rule the world. If through delight in the beauty of these things men assumed them to be gods, let them know how much better than these is their Lord, for the author of beauty created them. And if men were amazed at their power and working, let them perceive from them how much more powerful is he who formed them. For from the greatness and beauty of created things comes a corresponding perception of their Creator. Yet these men are little to be blamed, for perhaps they go astray while seeking

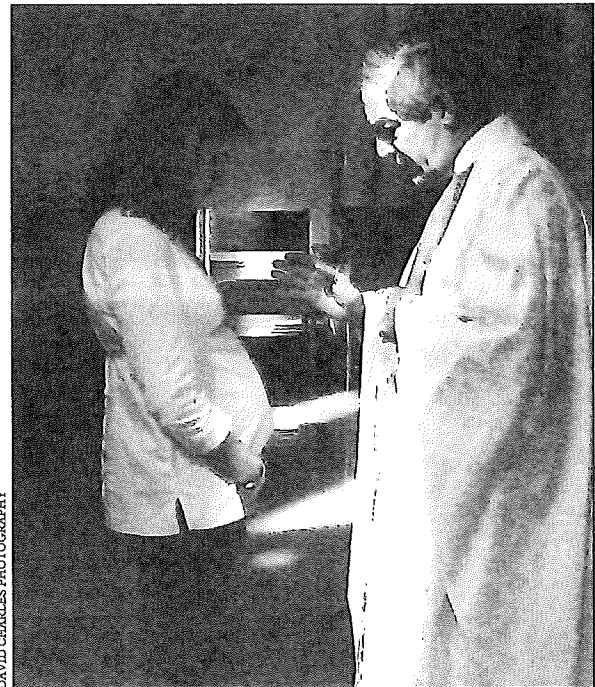
God and desiring to find him. For as they live among his works they keep searching, and they trust in what they see, because the things that are seen are beautiful. Yet again, not even they are to be excused; for if they had the power to know so much that they could investigate the world, how did they fail to find sooner the Lord of these things?" (Wis 13:1-9).

We can also arrive at knowledge of God by the natural light of human reason, and particularly through our *conscience*. Reason propels us toward God by continually prompting us to "make sense" out of everything. Through reason, we seek meaning for our lives and about the world in which we live. Human beings are seldom satisfied with "just getting by." We want to comprehend our

existence and the role we are to play in this vast universe which we did not create. Even more, our conscience, that persistent inner sense which enjoins us to do good and to avoid evil, reminds us continually of God's presence. In our pursuit of goodness, we know instinctively that there must be a Being who is goodness itself. By conscience, in a truly wonderful way, God's existence is made known to us. There, we are alone with him and can recognize his voice as it echoes in the depths of our being.

(CCC 27-43, 153-159, 222, 1776-1777)

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A priest blesses a mother and her unborn child