

The “Five Ways” and Aquinas’s *De Deo Uno*¹

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Reflecting on the knowledge of God in the Old and the New Covenant offers us a new way to address the theological status of the philosophical proofs for the existence of God. In the treatise *De Deo Uno* of the *Summa*, Aquinas discusses how the intellect experiences its natural capacity to know God. The “five ways” are inseparable from one another. In the prologue to the *Lectura* on Saint John, Aquinas’s last Gospel commentary, the *Doctor Angelicus* praises the depth of the evangelist’s contemplation by comparison with pagan philosophical knowledge of God, relating it to Isaiah’s vision of God in the Temple in Jerusalem (Is 6).

“I saw the Lord on an elevated throne” . . . Saint John’s vision focuses on the authority and power of the Word: “I saw the Lord,” on his eternity: “the Lord was seated;” on the excellence and nobility of his nature: “I saw the Lord seated on a throne;” on his incomprehensible truth: “an elevated throne.”²

Bringing to light the unity of the knowledge of God in the Old and the New Covenant, Aquinas continues: “It is through these ideas that the ancient philosophies rose to knowledge of God.” Thus pagan philosophies become connected with the Evangelist and with the Prophets. Indeed one can recognize in the fourfold articulation of the contemplation of the Prophet and the Evangelist the central axis of the “four ways” by which “several philosophies arrived at knowledge of God;” God as the intelligence governing nature (power); as the unchangeable principle of all motion (eternity); as supreme cause of being (excellence); as intelligence and infinite truth (truth). Aquinas briefly develops each of these ways and concludes with a line of Scripture taken from Isaiah, a psalm, or the New Testament. He then adds: “Such was the contemplation of

¹This paper has been translated into English by my friend Robert McKeon, Roman Catholic deacon and Professor Emeritus of Philosophy, Babson College. A French version of this article was published (after the English paper was delivered at the 2006 Mount Allison conference) in Antoine Guggenheim, *Les preuves de l'existence de Dieu* (Paris: École Cathédrale, Parole et Silence, 2008), 92-135.

² Aquinas, *Super Evangelium sancti Ioannis* (Rome and Turin: Marietti, 1952), n. 1-8 passim.

John who because he had seen the Word in its regulatory authority, its eternity, its excellence, and its incomprehensibility, wanted in his Gospel to transmit to us something about his contemplation.”³

Here, unlike in the commentary on Hebrews 11: 6,⁴ where Aquinas accents the difference between philosophical knowledge of God and faith, Aquinas emphasizes the unity of the motion of the intellect seeking God, whether it is philosophical or theological. These two ways of emphasis do not contradict each other. The natural knowledge which a human being has of God receives confirmation and fulfilment in the revelation given to the prophets and to the apostles in the Old and the New Covenant. The fulfilment of the knowledge of God by philosophers transforms their “proofs” of God’s existence by witnessing to the motion by which the human intellect is naturally drawn toward God its creator. For natural knowledge of God, the intellect leads itself to the conclusions (*manuductio*) and, in a certain way, “walks forward” to encounter faith (*praeambula fidei*). Divine revelation transforms the “proofs” into “ways” to Him, who in reality manifests Himself by drawing to Himself the intellect through the infinite action by which he creates it. This natural motion is so important for Aquinas that in the prologue he suggests that the readers of his biblical commentary verify it for themselves. May we not consider that the “five ways” of Question 2 of the *Summa Theologica*, the hinge between the definition of *sacra doctrina* and the treatise *De Deo Uno*, play a similar role of theological self-verification?

The Structure of the “Five Ways” and the Theological Assertion of God’s Existence

Aquinas holds it his responsibility as a “doctor of the Catholic faith” to show his readers, in as convincing a way as possible, the capacity they have to rationally assert the existence of God. For this purpose he chooses and develops the most solid and most accessible philosophical arguments of his time. “Thomas Aquinas does not pretend to fix definitively one proof or the other, but he offers different ways to discover the creative activity and presence of God.”⁵ He brings together in the “five ways” diverse philosophic elements, only some of which are taken from Aristotle and others from Plato or from Pseudo-Denis the Areopagite. The overall Aristotelian character forms the axis of the argument: each of the proofs rests on the metaphysical principle of sensible effects.⁶ Aquinas integrates these elements into a theological process in which they no longer have the same meaning. The “reason” of the “five ways” does not arise from their philosophical rigor, which is a necessary prerequisite, but from the theological intentions of the

³ Ibid.

⁴ Cf. *In He.*, 11, 6, n. 576-577 in *Super Epistolam ad Hebraeos* (Rome and Turin: Marietti, 1953).

⁵ Pierre Piret, *L’affirmation de Dieu dans la tradition philosophique* (Bruxelles: Lessius, 1998),

⁶ Cf. Étienne Gilson, *Le thomisme: Introduction à la philosophie de Saint Thomas D’Aquin* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1965), 92-93. See the *retractatio* of Gilson in note 80 on the first “way.”

author.

The structure of each argument renders this manifest. Five times, Aquinas solicits his reader to climb from ordinary sense experience to the assertion that a metaphysical principle exists. Philosophical reasoning brings to light the metaphysical principles which suppose (1) motion and immobility; (2) contingency and necessity; (3) effect and efficient cause; (4) perfection and the perfect; (5) natural order and its intelligent principle. Each time, the theologian concludes, “and this is what we call God.” No more than we say, “love is God,” but “God is love,” or “being is God,” but “I am who is,” Aquinas does not maintain that “the primary immobile mover,” “necessity itself,” “the first efficient cause,” “the cause of all perfection,” or “the governing intelligence” “is God.” Rather, “God is the primary immobile mover,” etc. He does not assert that the metaphysical condition of the sensible world, which is discovered by reason, is God, thereby capturing God into the web of a human concept. Such is often the destiny of a proof for God in philosophy: it is used to positively or negatively justify a system, whether that of Aristotle, Descartes, Hegel or Feuerbach.

Aquinas leaves a space between the reasoning that rises from sensible facts to their metaphysical principle and the communal recognition of the presence of God in his Name: “and we call this . . . God.”⁷ Both of these acts belong to reason although differently. The necessary movement of reasoning, the first step in each way, translates the ascending dialectic of the intellect (*amor*) into the “scientific” language of philosophy. It echoes the loving search for truth in scrutinizing and in going beyond every finite reality towards “that than which nothing greater can be conceived,” according to the name that Saint Anselm gives to God.⁸ The reversal of the second moment of each way can be understood from the name of God given in the *Proslogion*. Man cannot grasp He who is “greater than can be conceived”⁹ because He gives Himself to be known in that movement of the intellect that He solicits from the beginning, like the presence of the intellect to itself. By recognizing and naming God, the intellect adheres to the divine action, i.e., to charity (*caritas*). Thus man finds himself and in doing so, as Pascal writes, finds “his order” and his proper “place”:

It would have been useless for our Lord Jesus Christ to come like a king, in order to shine forth in His kingdom of holiness. But He came there appropriately in the glory of His own order. . . . From all bodies together, we cannot obtain one little thought; this is impossible, and of another order. From all bodies and minds, we cannot produce a feeling of true charity; this is impossible, and of another and supernatural order.¹⁰

⁷ Aquinas, *Sum. theol.*, 1a, q. 2, a. 3.

⁸ Anselm, *Proslogion*, in *St. Anselm Basic Writings*, trans. S.N. Deaner (Chicago and La Salle, Illinois, 1962), ch. 2, p. 54.

⁹ Anselm, *Proslogion*, ch. 15, 267.

¹⁰ Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, trans. W.F. Trotter (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1908), para. 792. Cf. para. 460: “God must reign over all, and all men must be brought back to Him.”

The dialectic of love and of charity enlarges our understanding of the “five ways.”¹¹ By showing the gap between the first motion of the intellect and the second, Aquinas leaves place for other “ways” of asserting God’s existence, beyond “scientific” demonstration, even if he does not explore them here. One thinks of possible affirmations of God from alternative metaphysics, Stoicism, or Hegelianism, or from other philosophical perspectives, existentialism, phenomenology, or hermeneutics, or ways other than philosophy: art, morals, prayer, life, etc. The “five ways” are relevant for many kinds of witnessing to God, which may be more convincing today for those who are repelled by Aristotelian necessity.

The Assertion of God’s Existence and the Criterion for the Correct Relationship Between Theology and Philosophy

By qualifying each of the proofs at a decisive moment with the claim, “this is what all call God,” Aquinas de-centres the intellect’s effort, maintaining the excess of divine reality over man, without, however, separating the spirit of man from the spirit of God. Pierre Piret notes, “The four moments in the argumentation of the ways . . . denote the movement of analogy. . . . The argument implies, indeed, our observation of things (assertion) and knowledge that they are so by the cause (relative negation), by the first Cause itself uncaused (absolute negation) that we call God (preeminent).”¹² In other words, Aquinas, like Maimonides, interprets metaphysical principles as names of God. “The foundation and pillar of wisdom consist in knowing that the name exists and that it is the primary being.”¹³ According to the Talmud “The name of God would always be a proper noun in the Scriptures. The word God would be lacking in the Hebrew language. A wonderful consequence of monotheism in which there does not exist a divine species or a generic name designating the species.”¹⁴ Nonetheless, Aquinas disagrees with “Rabbi Moyses” on the capacity of divine names to positively signify his essence,¹⁵ while agreeing that “one cannot define God,” for he cannot be placed in a genus.¹⁶ “Not only is He his essence, but He is also His being (*esse*).”¹⁷ This is the “sublime truth thoroughly taught to Moses”

¹¹ Cf. The encyclical, *God is Love*, n. 6-8 and the presentation that Benedict XVI himself gives in the light of the theology and philosophy of Dante (Paris, 2006), 27-33, and 95-99.

¹² Pierre Piret, *L’Affirmation de Dieu dans la tradition philosophique* (Bruxelles: Lessius, 1998), p.

122. See also p. 119: “Thomas of Aquinas does not argue for a separation between things . . . and God,” but for a “theonomy,” a participation of the creature in its real composition of essence and existence.

¹³ *Livre de la connaissance*, 1, 1, cited in Emmanuel Levinas, “Le Nom de Dieu d’après quelques textes talmudiques,” in *L’analyse du langage théologique. Le Nom de Dieu* (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1969), 158-159. One could tighten up the translation of the Hebrew: the Name is not preceded by a definite article in Maimonides’s text.

¹⁴ *Livre de la connaissance*, 1, 1.

¹⁵ Aquinas, *Sum. theol.*, 1a, q. 13, a. 2, c.

¹⁶ Cf. Aquinas, *C. Gentiles*, 1, 25; *De pot.*, q. 7, a. 3 and a. 5.

¹⁷ *Sum. theol.*, 1a, q. 3, a. 4, c.

which provoked “the admiration” of Aquinas.¹⁸ To signify Him means to designate Him and to name Him, to think Him means to speak to Him. So in this way I express, simply and not as a proof, the content of Saint Anselm’s ontological argument. Whether one is a theologian or a philosopher, God is such that we cannot think of Him without listening to Him and speaking to Him. The Tetragrammaton, the Word revealed to Moses (Ex 3: 13-14) consequently states “the most proper name for God (*maxime proprium nomen Dei*).”¹⁹ Strictly speaking, it remains “incommunicable” because it signifies God “as subject,” “his incommunicable and, if I may say so, singular (*singularem*) substance.”²⁰

In making explicit the covenantal name of God given by four Hebrew consonants, the Greek and Hebrew Bibles use the expressions “I am” or “He who is,”²¹ and even “kyrios” in the Greek translation. However, as André Néher remarks, in these expressions God’s name remains hidden in his literal ineffability; in itself the name of God stands “at the origin of the thesis of the unknowableness of God.”²² Aquinas recognizes in the incommunicable Tetragrammaton a precedence for his biblical transcription, “He who is.” He knows that one finds in the Hebrew Bible in the place of Dominus (*Kyrios*), “the Tetragrammaton that certainly can only be said of God alone.”²³ The metaphysical explanation of the name, far from engendering an onto-theology that would include God and the world in a third genus, that of being, which we would master, reveals that “we know what God isn’t and what he is remains fully (*penitus*) unknown to us.”²⁴ At the same time, by uniting knowledge and love, the metaphysical name upholds the link between theology and philosophy vital for the biblical plan of the fulfilment of man created in the image and likeness of God. In Latin, French and English, the expression that designates the fruit of knowledge, “concept” (*conceptus*), evokes birth, a giving of life. From the “Mystical Theology of Denis” (Chapter 2), Aquinas borrows the following commentary on Exodus 20-21: just as “Moses entered into the cloud where God was” so “we are united with God in a certain way [*quasi*] unknown.”²⁵

By an inversion within the “five ways,” Aquinas, therefore, does not betray the philosophic path, but rather, on the basis of his responsibility as a theologian who listens to the initiatives of the Divine Word, he secures the quest for truth and liberty. He warns against a “definition” of God that would turn the philosophical quest on itself and risk enslaving the human intellect to a concept. “Little children; keep yourselves from idols” (1 John 1: 21).

¹⁸ *C. Gentiles*, 1, 22, 10.

¹⁹ *Sum. theol.*, 1a, q. 13, a. 11.

²⁰ *Sum. theol.*, 1a, q. 13, a. 9, c. and a. 11, ad 1.

²¹ *The Book of Revelation* (attributed to Saint John) attests to an ancient amplification of this Name, which directly opens to the triple temporal signification of the Hebrew text: “He who is and who was and who is to come” (Rev 1: 4).

²² A. Néher, *La philosophie hébraïque et juive dans l’antiquité, dans Histoire de la philosophie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990), part 1, 80.

²³ *C. Gentiles*, 4, 7, 7. Here it is a case of a refutation of Arius’s assertion.

²⁴ *C. Gentiles*, 3, 49, 8.

²⁵ *C. Gentiles*, 3, 49, 8.

When the theologian prevents the human intellect from drifting into idolatry by seeking to represent the absolute, does he not, in such a case, become the shepherd of philosophy? This service given to philosophy (*theologia ancilla philosophiae*) that Clement of Alexandria would call “true philosophy,” also benefits theology. Starting from ordinary sense experience, the “ways” of rationally asserting God’s existence end up in a common intellectual testimony: “it is what all name,” “understand,” or “assert” “God exists.” How can a sense experience inaugurate or even already contain implicitly a metaphysical assertion? Doubtlessly being (*esse*) is reached by intelligence, not by the senses. But intelligence reaches being precisely in the presence and action of the most humble sensible realities. The sensible „gives“ being and intellection because it itself is the given.

Through “five different ways,” the reader of Aquinas recognizes and asserts the existence of God in agreement with all those who affirm that such is God. “Metaphysical reflection is accomplished by an appeal to the memory, to the human tradition. The name of God is universally used. It brings together philosophical denominations. . . . Finally, it signifies the personal identity of Absolute Being asserted in various ways by human reason and by Him who revealed Himself, to his people Israel, as the Father of Jesus Christ our Lord.”²⁶

The structure of the argument leads us to the “truth,” which Étienne Gilson held “without losing courage”: “the essential point lies in recalling that the two *Summa* and the *Compendium* are theological writings and that the arguments for the proof of the existence of God, which we borrow from them, are the work of a theologian following a theological end.”²⁷ “Aquinas follows a well defined end: find a certain intelligence for faith.”²⁸ If he explicitly teaches that the existence of God is demonstrable by the light of natural reason, “he adds that the number of those who can understand the proofs is not very high. . . . What is the purpose, some say, of proving this truth, if, indeed, most are unable to understand the philosophical proofs that one gives?”²⁹

The Finality of the “Ways” for Asserting God’s Existence

To answer the question about the finality of the “five ways,” we must recall their context in the *Summa*. Aquinas starts by reflecting on the “non-evidence” of the being (*esse*) of God for the human intellect in its present state. The existence of God is not “evident in itself (*per se notum*)” because “one can think the opposite

²⁶ Piret, *L'affirmation de Dieu*, 122.

²⁷ Étienne Gilson, *Le thomisme*, 90.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 95.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 89. Gilson adds: “Quand on rappelle sa position sur ce point, on est aujourd’hui suspect de fidéisme ou de semi-fidéisme.” In a letter to Jacques Maritain, Gilson writes: “Je serai à Princeton le 5 mars, pour une Thomas Aquinas Lecture qui va me faire tomber le Concile du Vatican [I] sur la tête. Je l’ai déjà reçu deux fois: à Louvain et à Chicago. La proposition à condamner est la suivante: tout ce qui est dans la somme de théologie est de la théologie.” Letter of 29 January 1953, in *E. Gilson—J. Maritain, Correspondance 1923-1971*, ed. G. Prouvost (Paris: Vrin, 1991), 185.

(*cogitari autem potest oppositum ejus*): “there is no God (*non est Deus*).”³⁰ But Holy Scripture assures that knowledge of God’s existence can be attained by the intellect that contemplates creation (Romans 1: 20). A certain kind of proof can be adduced from creatures. The theologian can, therefore, take possession of the question, “Does God exist?”³¹ Following his usual method Aquinas considers first the contrary assertion and the reasons for it. May the theologian avoid doing likewise? “Can it be right for thought to directly state the assertion rather than questioning it or examining it?”³²

In his commentary on the Psalms, his final work (contemporary with the *Tertia Pars*, and like it, unfinished), Aquinas comes across the prayer that starts with these words: “Fools say in their hearts, there is no God” (Ps 14: 1). He interprets it as a lamentation of David pursued by Saul, namely as “a persecution that prefigures Christ persecuted by the priests.”³³ Following Saint Augustine, he looks for the causes and the moral and spiritual consequences of negating God.³⁴ “Not to keep God in one’s heart constitutes the principle of wickedness and explains why the psalmist says: „Fools say in their hearts, there is no God.”³⁵ Aquinas, however, intends to explore the content of such a negation.

But can one say it? To say it “in the heart” means to think, but can one think that God is not? Anselm asserts that no one can do so.³⁶ Likewise John Damascene: “Knowledge of God is naturally given to us; [since it is] knowledge naturally installed, no one can think that it is not.”³⁷ But one should recognize that one can speak of two ways of knowing God, i.e., one in itself and one with respect to us. In the first case, one cannot think that it is not, for a proposition in which the predicate forms part of the subject’s definition cannot be considered false with respect to its nature. But, as we should remark, in God being [*esse*] is other than in creatures because the being [*esse*] of God is his substance. Therefore, he who says God in himself, says likewise his being [*esse*]. This

³⁰ *Sum. theol.*, 1a, q. 2, a. 1, sed contra.

³¹ *Sum. theol.*, 1a, q. 2, a. 1-3.

³² Piret, *L’affirmation de Dieu*, 261.

³³ See the prologue to the commentary of Psalm 11 in *Commentaire sur les Psaumes*, introduction, traduction, notes et tables par J.-E. Stroobant de Saint-Eloi (Paris: Cerf, 1996), 142. “In the second decade (of the Psalter), as is shown by some of the titles of the psalms, the persecution that David suffered at the hands of Saul predominates and prefigures that of Christ at the hands of the priests.”

³⁴ Cf. Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 13, P.L. 36, c. 141.

³⁵ The Psalm as a whole is interpreted in light of the first verse. He who takes his heart away from God loses “the natural warmth of the soul, which is the love of God.” Lust enters as an “exterior warmth,” entailing its “corruption.” This is why the unbeliever is “foolish”: he has lost wisdom and does not taste spiritual realities. But, as the Psalm continues, “The Lord looks down from heaven,” i.e., with the tenderness of his heart by sending his Son.” For “he wants to find in us, by virtue of his antecedent will, that all may be saved, this characterizes salvation, i.e., that we know God by intelligence, that we love him by affectivity, and that we desire him.” *Commentaire sur les Psaumes*, 157.

³⁶ Anselm, *Proslogion*, 4.

³⁷ John Damascene, *De fide orthodoxa*, 1, c. 1 and 3.

explains why in himself he cannot be thought not to be [*essē*].³⁸

This knowledge of God naturally given to all, of which Saint John Damascene and Saint Anselm speak, identifies itself with the intellect in its self-presence and its vocation.³⁹ Sales argues, “intellect naturally asserts God is by the simple fact of its existence, of its activity, and of its consistency.” The idea of God “in us is the real presence of an anxiety or a desire, which find their source and their conclusion outside of us in a Being incommensurable to man as to all of creation.”⁴⁰ The idea of God remains present to the intellect even when it denies it. It does not form a “proof” of his existence in the sense of Aristotle’s philosophy, but the condition of the possibility of every affirmation and negation. This knowledge, however, remains “undetermined,” not like “the knowledge received by faith,” remarks Aquinas. If the idea of God abides in the intellect like “undetermined” knowledge, what is the objective content of the thought of the one who says: “God does not exist?” Aquinas answers that it depends on one’s language and on what one objectifies in the name of God: “In Greek the word *Theos* names God and it comes from *thein*, „to provide for” or „take care with solicitude” of all things; or from *aithein*, which signifies „to burn,” for our God is fire that consumes all wickedness. Therefore when someone says God does not exist, he believes that he is not all-powerful and that he does not concern himself with human realities.”⁴¹

A lack of faith in providence characterizes atheism. Is it not also a kind of idolatry, absolutism of the intellect even when claiming its immanence and weakness? From the perspective of the unbeliever, what should be thought? The act of asserting “God does not exist” is in itself contradictory, even if no one perceives the evidence for this. The claim that God exists only appears in the intellect’s light with all its objectivity under the form of a testimony that includes the rational approach of the “five ways.” It is both natural to the intellect and objectifiable whether recognized as such or not. But through the process of testimony and of objectification, the assertion of God’s existence can also become the object of an idolatrous deviation. It also questions the unbeliever’s intellect as well as that of the believer. “In a sense, the stirring of the intellects and the hearts of human beings integral to agnosticism remains inherent to faith itself.”⁴² Therefore one should distinguish between “closed or dogmatic

³⁸ Ps 13: 1, in *Commentaire sur les Psaumes*, 155. This verse of the Psalm (the same as Ps 52: 1) is cited in the *sed contra* of *Sum. theol.*, 1a, q. 2, a. 1; the question whether the being (*essē*) of God is self-evident.

³⁹ Cf. Henri de Lubac, *Sur les chemins de Dieu* (Paris: Aubier, 1966), especially chapter 3, “De la preuve de Dieu,” and M. Sales, *L’être humain et la connaissance naturelle qu’il a de Dieu. Essai sur la structure anthropothéologique fondamentale de la Révélation dans la pensée du P. Henri de Lubac* (Paris: École Cathédrale, Parole et Silence, 2003), especially chapters 1 and 2.

⁴⁰ Sales, *L’être humain*, 25 and 41. The author meditates further: “La différence qualitative infinie entre le désir de l’homme et sa Fin” (ch. II/3), then the “Convenance anthropologique de l’inefficacité du désir de surnaturel” (ch. II/4), 44-50.

⁴¹ Aquinas gives a christological interpretation of this verse: “Fools say in their hearts, there is no God (*non est Deus*).” He attaches the “there” to Christ and calls the foolish, “some Jews.” See *Commentaire sur les Psaumes*, 155.

⁴² Sales, *L’être humain*, 96.

agnosticism and open agnosticism. The rationality of dogmatic agnosticism is more apparent than real, for, in reality, it hangs fully onto the irrationality of the decision to will not to know, which leaves intact the problem of God. But an open agnosticism stands ready to welcome as an inestimable gift the smallest portion of truth, because it “desires to know, and waits for God.”⁴³ Neither the believer nor the unbeliever can escape the intellect’s questioning.

“If the atheist is often no more than idolater who, as Origen says, prefers „to attribute to anything else rather than to God his indestructible notion of God,” the believer does no less when he confuses his idea of God with God himself and presumes abusively to impose on others the idea of a God that he misunderstands or disfigures.”⁴⁴ Since we do not know what God is, and do not see his “essence” in this life, the proposition “God exists,” evident in itself, is not as such for us. As it can be denied, therefore, it needs to be proved. The theologian should confront the principal objections of unbelievers. Those given by Aquinas retain their relevance: “If God exists, no evil should be found,” or, all the “phenomena of the world (*omnia quae apparent in mundo*)” would lead back to nature or to man, as their principle without any need for additional explanation.⁴⁵ In the *Summa contra Gentiles*, he gives the objection in its most radical formulation, already known in ancient Christianity (Boethius): “If God exists, where does evil come from?” and inverts it (*e contrario arguendum*): “If evil exists, God exists. But evil would not exist if the order of the good were abolished because evil is a privation of goodness. Then the order of the good would not exist, if God did not exist.”⁴⁶ This affirmation questions divine providence by raising a problem taken up by Aquinas as well as by Maimonides and Job: that of the suffering of the just. Retrospectively, Job raises it with unique vigour within faith. One can, then, complete this rigorous metaphysical reasoning by a more phenomenological reflection. Does our distress before the suffering of the innocent not echo a perception of the manifestation of the order of the good in a „broken” creation and in the Covenant which restores it? With respect to the autonomy of nature, as manifested in its laws, and the freedom of man, the existence of God does not contradict it, but rather supports it.⁴⁷ That the affective value of these objections was not taken into better account reflects doubtlessly the grace and limits of an age or a literary genre which supposed that man lived in harmonious peace acquired by a certain self mastery.

Indeed the structure of the question shows that Aquinas proceeds somewhat differently than we would. He takes up the objections with all the seriousness they imply and he does not answer them before giving in the “corpus” of the article the “ways” that allow us to assert rationally the existence of God. The ways, therefore, propose exercises for the believer and the

⁴³ Ibid., 94.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 95. Cf. Origen, *Contre Celsus*, livre 2, n. 40, “Sources Chrétiennes” 132 (Paris: Cerf, 1967), 379.

⁴⁵ *Sum. theol.* 1a, q. 2, a. 3, obj. 1-2.

⁴⁶ *C. Gentiles*, 3, 71, 10.

⁴⁷ *Sum. theol.*, 1a, q. 2, a. 3, ad. 1-2.

unbeliever to attest to and, if possible, to experience the rationality of maintaining that God exists. They are the grounds that support the answers to objections. They pay tribute to the rationality of the objections and guide the search for an answer to them. Finally, for the believer, they open access to *sacra doctrina*. Along the way, a full theological exposition reinforces the conviction engendered by the ways. Such is the sense of Aquinas's expression for them: "*praeambula ad articulos*," i.e., that which "walks before" the call of faith itself. Asserting by "natural reason" the existence of God does not prove an "article of faith" at the expense of the freedom to believe, but it suggests a natural preamble for the intellect. "Faith presupposes natural knowledge such as grace, nature, and perfection, the perfectible."⁴⁸ One should understand by this famous formula that faith, grace, and perfection are given as the fulfilment of knowledge, nature, and being. The reader of the *Summa* begins to experience a strengthening of the intellect.

Faith and Reason in Modernity

One can pray to God saying: "if you exist . . . listen to me!" But one cannot believe in Him unless one asserts that He exists. The assertion of God's existence becomes fully achieved by faith. To fail to affirm the existence of God is to neglect or oppose natural knowledge and destroy the act of faith. On the other hand, if the assertion does not raise and answer a question that involves the whole being and its relationship to the real, faith loses its essential significance as the fulfilment of man. The search for the *praeambula fidei* expresses the natural quest for God. It prepares the intellect for receiving revelation and attaining knowledge of God (Jer 31: 31-34). He who quests for truth can reply to God who reveals himself. God reveals himself to make whole him whom He created. "Without this [natural] capacity [to know and to love Him], man would not be able to welcome God's revelation. Man has this capacity because he is created „in the image of God."⁴⁹ Faith presupposes an intellect able to know and to love God naturally, not as an independent and antecedent condition, but because it makes him whole through a personal union with his Creator.

So it is not a question of asking *what* of God is accessible by virtue of natural light and human reason, but *who* is accessible by this light; we have to recognize that human reason is open to a personal, unique, and true God. Like faith, human knowledge of God does not refer to a collection of truths, surely connected but multiple: its object is essentially one, for it is the motion by which man reaches God Himself.⁵⁰ With Gabriel Marcel, we can say that reason and faith enter into the mystery that they probe: "Revelation has no meaning for me unless beforehand I give a certain meaning to God. . . . It is impossible for me to

⁴⁸ *Sum. theol.*, 1a, q. 2, a. 2, ad 1.

⁴⁹ Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (New York: Doubleday, 1995), n. 36. Text in square brackets added.

⁵⁰ J.M. Daul, "La connaissance naturelle de Dieu," in *La lettre de l'esprit. Mélanges offerts à Michel Sales* (Paris: École Cathédrale, Parole et Silence, 2005), 175.

accept revelation if in advance I cannot establish from human experience that a personal God exists.”⁵¹ However this anteriority is not chronological but reciprocal. Therefore it concerns an ontological interiority. The sense I give to God and the assertion of his existence are the first motions that He impresses in me. Henri Bouillard compares the natural knowledge of God to a “rational infra-structure of faith.”⁵² The quest for truth follows along the path to God in response to God’s call. One should therefore interpret the natural motion of the intellect or of reason, which seek to know all, not as a promethean attitude or self affirmation of the creature at the expense of God, but as an initial and fully natural

recognition of the Creator by the creature in the activity of reason that He gave him.⁵³

Christ is “the light of the world” (Jn 9: 5), a light that the world does not know without Him (Jn 1: 5), but not a light that comes from without (Jn 1: 9), because He is its creator (Jn 1: 3). For this reason, the believer follows with the unbeliever the path of truth. The believer’s quest for truth receives strength from knowing God who reveals Himself and gives Himself to be loved in this world. But this is such that the mystery of Advent teaches the believer the cost of fraternity among men. God’s existence is not concluded by proof but is the object of testimony. In human relations, faith opens us up to a direct experience of interpersonal relationships. Theological faith, a free act, goes beyond the indirect worldly knowledge of God to welcome the personal God with confidence and love. What value is there in an enigmatic and contestable testimony? The act of faith does not in any way alienate the human intellect or place limits on God, but it illuminates and rejoices the intellect and heart by the union of the Covenant. For as Feuerbach puts it: “The so called fear experienced by religion before the curtailment of God by specific predicates, is only the desire not to want to know more about God, the desire to drive Him from the intellect.”⁵⁴ By witnessing to God’s revelation in the Covenant, the believer confirms the natural aptitude the human intellect has to seek and to know the Word of God that nothing can contain and is “the life of men” (Jn 1: 4).

Surely “even more as proof is felt as proof, the more it makes us conscious of the misery that obliges us to construct a proof.”⁵⁵ The theologian who neglects the proofs weakens his work, enfeebles its fecundity, and shuts off access for his unbelieving brothers. When the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews writes that “every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God” (Heb 3: 4), does he not give his hearers the model and core of all the ways that allow the intellect to assert the existence of God? It matters little whether such a proof lacks a learned form and whether it should be tested by

⁵¹ Eduard Schillebeeckx, *Approches théologiques*, vol. 2, *Dieu et l’homme* (Bruxelles, 1965), 59-60, cited in Daul, “La connaissance naturelle de Dieu,” 177.

⁵² Cf. Henri Bouillard, *Connaissance de Dieu* (Paris: Aubier, 1967), 11-88, cited in Sales, *L’être humain*, 75.

⁵³ Ibid., 35. To ward off error, Sales recommends “attribuer à l’esprit la capacité et l’efficacité de résoudre seul le problème, ou plutôt le mystère, de sa vocation,” Sales, *L’être humain*, 36.

⁵⁴ Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, cited in Sales, *L’être humain*, 92.

⁵⁵ G. Fessard, *La méthode de réflexion chez Maine de Biran*, (Bloud et Gay, 1938), 54.

wickedness, for these do not take away its rational value. Those who deny all natural knowledge of God, who see it as idolatry, are vulnerable to Feuerbach's critique.⁵⁶

Evil and suffering call on us to move from an adherence to God motivated by reason alone to a deeper faith based on knowing God. More than the question about the existence of God, evil and suffering make unavoidable the question of his essence. Who is God? "Each one of us is so situated as to be able to recognize that his essence is a gift and not a given, that he himself exists as a gift, and that, in the final analysis, in no way, does he exist by himself."⁵⁷ Do not our contemporaries lack not so much rational "proof," which rightfully a philosopher such as Kojève demands,⁵⁸ but rather a "taste" for God?⁵⁹ Religious indifference would not have become a sociological phenomenon and would not prevail if it did not rest on the negation given by an established "cultural" atheism. Affirming God's existence appears as the act of thought that alienates itself because it makes the reality of Him whose existence is thought alienate man. On the contrary, we ought to say about God's existence what Henri de Lubac writes concerning the Anselmian argument: "It meditates on the strength and the limits and on the poverty and the grandeur, all brought together by the intellect. It does not prepare nor justify man's alienation, it shows him in the recognition of his limits, the only secret to overcome it."⁶⁰

"Speaking about God to a man resembles in no way speaking about colours to a blind person."⁶¹ Every one becomes integrally himself when he meets God. He who suggests to the intellect a path towards asserting and knowing the true and living God allows God to empower entirely human aptitudes, which He fashioned and which he brings to fulfilment. The question about the "ways" of asserting God's existence does not form an outdated theological subject: it belongs to theology, as a science, but even more as wisdom and as witness. The Jewish or Christian witness to God before modern man is only possible if it achieves "harmony between authority and charity" as only found "in the person itself of a saint, an apostle, or a prophet."⁶² In the fraternity of anxious hearts, i.e., those seeking God and salvation, we hear the echo of the call of the Patriarchs: "But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly

⁵⁶ Henri de Lubac, *La révélation divine* (1983), 134, cited in Daul, "La connaissance naturelle de Dieu," 178-179.

⁵⁷ Gabriel Marcel, *Le mystère de l'être*, part 2 (1951), 174, cited in Sales, *L'être humain*, 125.

⁵⁸ See Gabriel Marcel and Gaston Fessard. *Correspondance* (1934-1971), presentation and commentary by H. de Lubac, M. Rougier, M. Sales (Paris: Beauchesne, 1985), 510-511, for the unpublished review by Kojève of the two works by Père Gaston Fessard: *Pax nostra. Examen de conscience international* (Paris: Grasset, 1936), et *La main tendue? Le dialogue catholique-communiste est-il possible ?* (Paris: Grasset, 1937).

⁵⁹ De Lubac, *Sur les chemins de Dieu*, 107.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 107.

⁶¹ P. Jules Lebreton, *La connaissance de foi*, in *Études* 117 (1908), 735. Cited by de Lubac, *Sur les chemins de Dieu*, note 46, 96.

⁶² Rachel Bepaloff, letter to Boris de Schoelzer, 17 november 1946, in *Rachel Bepaloff-Gaston Fessard Correspondance (1941-1948)*, présentée et annotée par M. Sales, dans *Conférence* 21 (automne 2005): 632-633.

one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; indeed he has prepared a city for them” (Heb 11: 16).⁶³ “*Fecisti nos ad Te et inquietum est cor nostrum, donec requiescat in Te.*”⁶⁴

⁶³ Cf. *In He* 8, 7, n. 393.

⁶⁴ “Thou hast made us for Thyself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee.” Augustine, *Confessions*, 1, 1, 1.