The Traditional Approach To God And The Modern Approach: A Comparison And Synthesis

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THE TRADITIONAL APPROACH TO GOD
AND THE MODERN APPROACH:
A COMPARISON AND SYNTHESIS

by
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This thesis for the A.B. Degree has been approved for the Department of Philosophy by

Rev. T. R. Flynn

Date May 3, 1965
In memory of my good friend Mike Murphy, I would like to dedicate this paper. I would also like to acknowledge and sincerely thank Rev. Thomas Flynn for his guidance and advice, Mr. Curtis Chisholm and Mrs. Ann Sheriff for their invaluable assistance in preparing this manuscript.
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THE PROBLEM

The problem to be reviewed herein is of concern both to the philosopher and to anyone seeking to discover the meaning of human existence.

The question "Does God exist?" is a subject of debate as old as rational man himself. History attests to the fact that man has violently discussed and has been vastly influenced by the problem of the existence of God. Some men claim that they can finally solve this problem. These men are the philosophers, concerned with certain knowledge of ultimate causes and principles, who set out to show that the ultimate principle of the universe, God, exists because they can prove it by reason, experience, feeling, etc.

The purpose of this thesis will be to determine a few of the main kinds of traditional and modern philosophical approaches toward God and their respective merits.

The theme of God's existence in philosophy is of no minor importance but is integral to most of the great systems of thought. Thus, to more fully understand the contemporary views, which are direct reactions and effects of earlier positions, we will begin with a survey of the main traditional arguments for God's existence.

In this short work we will view only a few important Christian approaches to the existence of God: the ontological approach, the approach of St. Thomas
Aquinas; and lastly some modern theories on the existence of God.
CHAPTER I

THE TRADITIONAL APPROACH TO GOD

Lord, I am not trying to invade and pry into Your Majesty, for I do not liken my knowledge to It in the least. But I long for a glimpse of the truth that is believed and loved by my heart.

St. Anselm
PART ONE: THE ONTOLOGICAL ARGUMENT AND CRITICISM

Probably every man who has ever lived has asked himself the question "Does God exist?" For each man the answer to this question will vitally affect his life as well as the lives of those around him. And when a belief is to play such a vital role in our lives, then it is natural for man to enquire into the rational grounds for his belief.¹

The history of our natural knowledge of God has been strongly marked and influenced by Greek rational theories.² The young Augustine (354-430) was the first to make contact between Greek philosophical speculation and Christian religious belief³ and his attempt to prove the existence of God is felt even today.

In the *Enneas* of Plotinus Augustine found Platonic ideas that were easily "baptizable" into Christian concepts, but yet there remained the fundamental problem: how to approach the supreme principle and pure act of existence—the God whose true name is "He Who is." Gilson sees the problem as man having a "borrowed" existence trying to


reach the Pure Act of Existence:

How can man, who out of himself is not, living in a world of things which out of themselves are not, reach, by reason alone, "Him Who is"?\(^1\)

Realizing the problem of reaching the pure act of existence of a transcendent God by reason alone, Augustine sets out with a devout mind and the philosophical technique of Plato. Recalling Plato's famous proof that learning is remembering ideas known in a previous life, Augustine writes:

We ought rather to believe that the nature of the intellectual mind was so made that...it sees these truths in a certain incorporeal light of a unique kind, just as the eye of the body sees the things all around it in this corporeal light.\(^2\)

For Augustine, these truths which we see in an incorporeal light are existing in our mind as essential and immutable truth; for example, the fact that seven plus three equals ten. This quality of immutable truth does not come from the ten existing units because they are contingent and mutable, nor does this immutable truth come from our mind because it is also contingent and mutable. Therefore, for Augustine, this immutable truth which is illumining our mind must be caused by Immutable Truth Itself, which is God.\(^3\)

\(^1\)Ibid., p. 52.


The God of Augustine is the true Christian God, the God who "is"; but when Augustine undertakes to describe existence in philosophical terms, he at once falls back into the Platonic identification of existence or being with immutability, unity, and intelligibility.¹

The suppositions latent in Augustinism and more remotely, Platonism, become patent in the famous ontological argument formulated by St. Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109). It has been propounded by many thinkers, including Bonaventure (1221-1274), Descartes (1596-1650), and Leibniz (1646-1716). The ontological argument (argument from the concept of being) argues that God is that than which a greater cannot be thought; but that than which a greater cannot be thought exists; for if it did not exist, it could be thought to be greater, namely, by way of thinking of it as existing; therefore God exists.²

In other words, for Anselm "God" means "the perfect Being," and since "Being" is "more perfect" when it exists, then God necessarily exists. In effect, Anselm is saying that the existence of God is self-evident.³

This argument has had a perennial fascination for philosophers, especially those who were also mathematicians. It not only purports to bridge the gap between the realm

¹Gilson, op. cit., p. 60.
²Smith, op. cit., p. 60.
³Mac Gregor, op. cit., p. 96.
of mathematical truth and factual truth but also purports to share in the strict certainty of logic and mathematics.\footnote{Wallace I. Matson, The Existence of God (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1965), p. 44.}

In the fifteenth century, Rene Descartes, a mathematician, presented this same ontological argument in another guise. He likewise adopted the "interior route" of Augustine and Anselm to the knowledge of real being, which knowledge he identified with strict mathematical knowledge.

Drawing an example from his field of mathematics, Descartes considers a triangle that never really existed in fact, but exists only in his imagination. But, he points out, we must notice a curious fact about this imaginary triangle: while it depends on the imagination to exist, it has certain qualities that do not depend on the imagination at all. For example, having the property that the sum of its angles is equal to two right angles. Then Descartes goes on to suggest that, just as having the sum of its angles equal to two right angles is an implicate of the very idea of a triangle, so existence is involved in the very idea of an infinitely perfect being.\footnote{Mac Gregor, op. cit., p. 99.}

Thus an infinitely perfect being by necessity is one whose nature it is to exist, because whatever we clearly and distinctly understand to pertain to the nature of something can be affirmed of that thing with mathematical cer-
titude. It is then, for Descartes, the very nature of God to exist, therefore it can be truly affirmed of God that He exists.\(^1\) This ontological "innatism" so influences Descartes that he affirmatively answers the question "Does God exist?" "...because I can think of no other cause of the presence of the notion of "perfect" in my mind."\(^2\)

Criticism of the Ontological Argument

There are many more variants of the ontological argument. The essential flaw in all of them is that they confuse the order of thought with the order of existence. For example, it is certain that two unicorns and two unicorns make four unicorns, but one cannot infer from this that there are really any unicorns at all.

To Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) the ontological argument seemed to be at the very heart of the whole dogmatic tradition he sought to criticize. In a famous passage, Kant claims that one hundred dollars in my mind is not at all the same as one hundred dollars in my pocket.\(^3\)

Kant says that the concept of real existence is never contained in the concept of anything whatsoever;\(^4\)

\(^1\)Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 61.


\(^3\)Mac Gregor, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

which means that existence cannot be made a predicate. For example, when we say that "God is good," we predicate goodness of God, that is, we assert that God has the property of being good. The ontologists assume that in a similar way, when we say "God is real," we ascribe a property, reality to God.¹

A contemporary English philosopher presents his criticism to the ontological argument in this linguistic analytic fashion:

For the ontological argument equates God with all real existence and then goes on to affirm that all that really exists really exists. And this is pure tautology, a vain statement that by a futile repetition merely affirms the identity of the subject with itself.²

Thus the only legitimate conclusion to the ontological argument should be that we think of God as necessarily existing. But this conclusion leaves the problem of His real existence unsolved.

This "mental castle" mode of thinking proper to the ontological argument is not always so foreign to the ordinary man to-day as some philosophers might think. The ordinary man who happens to be disposed to take a theistic attitude often thinks along such lines, that the fact that we must conceive something to be so is the best possible reason for concluding that it is so.

¹Matson, op. cit., p. 47.

Kant was not the only, nor the first, to see the fallacy of the ontological argument. His objections were fundamentally in line with those of St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) who recognized the ontological attempt to demonstrate the existence of God without any appeal at all to real "outside the mind" existence, and that:

...from the definition or idea of a being whose existence is not previously admitted we can deduce properties befitting the being so defined, but these properties, having been deduced from a mere idea, will be mere ideas themselves.

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Whereas Augustine had begun the whole controversy by accepting the Platonic theory of knowledge and the Platonic notion of being, St. Thomas Aquinas adopts but considerably changes the Aristotelian notion of being and our knowledge of it. Thomas emphatically states that true knowledge, although it is of our making, must be knowledge of being, that is, of things that really exist outside the mind.

Aristotle (384-322 B.C.) had presented an argument for the existence of God based on the world of ordinary experiences, but still his "god" was but a pure Act of a Thought, thus remaining on the level of essences. With the dawn of Thomistic metaphysics, though, natural theology takes a giant stride forward ("a climax," Gilson calls it) when the problem of the existence of God is placed in the context of an existential metaphysics.

"Being" for Thomas means an act, the very act of existence by which a thing exists, by which everything exists. Whereas other early philosophers got lost in the world of ideas and essences, Thomas seems to have fully realized the

1Smith, op. cit., p. 44.
2Mac Gregor, op. cit., p. 102.
3Gilson, op. cit., p. 67.
4Ibid.
5Maurer, op. cit., p. 190.
place of primacy which being, that is, existence holds in the proof.

Thus, for Thomas, God is Ipsum Esse, the perfect act of being. "God is being itself, of itself subsistent. Consequently He must contain within Himself the whole perfection of being..."¹

With the basis for his proof anchored securely in the metaphysics of existence, Thomas begins his demonstration of the existence of God. These philosophical proofs are a development on the level of "scientific" or "perfect" rational knowledge of that natural knowledge we have of God.²

There are, Thomas writes, two ways of demonstration: one takes the cause as its starting point and argues to effects; this is called demonstration propter quid. The other kind of demonstration takes the effect as its starting point and argues for the existence of its cause; this is called demonstration quia. And from every effect the existence of its proper cause can be demonstrated because since every effect depends upon its cause, if the effect exists, the cause must pre-exist. Hence the existence of God, insofar as it is not self evident to us, can be demonstrated from those of His effects which are known to us.³

³Basic Writings of St. Thomas Aquinas, p. 20.
To grasp Thomas' proof, we must admit these starting points: the proof must begin with empirical or observable facts of reality, and secondly the proof must show that only God can suffice as the explanation for these unexplained realities.¹

The experienced facts of this world which cannot be accounted for except by positing God as their ultimate explanation are motion, efficient causality, contingency, grades of perfection, and order in the universe. (Consequently, the "proofs" are an explanation of the world, not of God.²) Every one of these experienced facts is an unquestionable part of the experienced world; but each exists in nature in a mode which is not self-explanatory. To explain them adequately as existents we must take recourse to God as their cause.

"The existence of God can be proved in five ways." Thus Thomas begins his famous Quinque Viae. Each way differs from each other in their immediate starting points, but all the ways are the same in that they move from their starting point in sensible reality to a terminus which is outside any kind or category of being, that terminus whose essence it is to exist.³

Let us look at Thomas' "Third Way"--the argument that from the existence of contingent beings there must

¹Benignus, op. cit., p. 466.
²Ibid., p. 467
³Smith, op. cit., p. 86.
exist a necessary being.

Some beings experienced in reality come into existence and pass away; in other words, it is possible for them to be or not to be. Now that is possible cannot account for the fact that it exists. Indeed, if all beings were merely possible, nothing would actually exist. The fact that some possible beings exist points to the existence of a necessary being as their cause. And since there cannot be an infinite series of necessary beings, there must be a being that is necessary in itself and whose necessity is uncaused. This everyone calls God.¹

We see, then, that beings exist but are not necessary in their very "to be"—their act of existing, and thus this radical composition of essence/existence shows us that they must be caused to exist by the pure act of existing, "Him Who is." Therefore a thing which does not have the reason for its existence in itself and yet is, must find its ground in something other than itself; it must be under the influence of something else, it must be caused.

Here we see that the Thomistic notion of proof does not remain on the physical level of contingent beings but argues from the contingency of being to Being itself. The Thomistic proofs have only one foundation, and this foundation is metaphysical.²

¹Basic Writings of St. Thomas Aquinas, p. 20.
²Luijpen, op. cit., p. 71.
The "Third Way" thus shows us what "necessary" means for Thomas—that which must exist, which cannot not-be. If there were not in fact such a thing, then nothing at all could possibly exist. What we are here interested in is not the existence of any one contingent being but the very existence of existence itself.¹

From mutability we argue back to a First Mover, from dependence to an Efficient Cause, from contingency to a Necessary Being, from graded perfections to a Perfect Being, and from ordered complexity to a Supreme Intelligence. These "names" of God are found to be all combined in the Author of existence in the following Question of the Summa where it is established that the First Being is purely simple and that in Him essence and existence are identical.²

We can say, therefore, that all the Thomistic proofs for the existence of God amount to a search beyond existences which are not self-sufficient to an existence which is self-sufficient, and because it is self-sufficient, can be the cause of all other existences. "Herein lies the true meaning of all the proofs for the existence of God: we come to Him Who Is by starting with those objects of which it can be said that they are."³


The philosophical argument of Thomas represents the peak achievement of the human intellect in its upward striving to the Supreme Being who described Himself to man as simply I AM WHO AM.

Criticism of the Thomistic Proof

It is now generally admitted, at any rate by philosophers, that the existence of a being having the attributes which define the god of any religion cannot be demonstratively proved.¹

It is generally conceded that the traditional proofs for the existence of God are of no value.²

What has happened to the philosophically sound proofs offered by Thomas? Have they not stood the "test of time?" No! claim the advocates of the "modern approaches" to the existence of God, because: (1) the strictly rational approach does not adequately explain the facts in man's approach to God; (2) the traditional proofs are insufficient to convert anyone to theism; (3) the approach of St. Thomas is really the ontological argument in disguise.

Let us now consider these criticisms, so unknowing of what they are criticizing. In the following chapter we will see the proponents of these criticisms develop their particular approaches to God as a reaction against the rationally-sound, metaphysically-based approach of St. Thomas.


²Sheen, op. cit., p. 37.
1. The strictly rational approach does not adequately explain the facts in man's approach to God:

The great Pascal felt the need for this non-traditional approach:

The heart has its reasons, which reason knows not, as we see in a thousand instances...It is the heart that is conscious of God, and not the reason.  

Ildy Trethowan, a Benedictine monk, exclaims:

We must indeed be logical and rational. But logic and reason are not enough, for without vision, the people perish.  

The German mystical theologian, Rudolph Otto, recognizes great importance in the non-rational approach:

This non-rational aspect of consciousness serves to protect religion itself from being rationalized away.  

William James, the great American pragmatist, frankly admits:

The unreasoned and immediate assurance is the deep thing in us; the reasoned argument is but a surface exhibition. Instinct leads; intelligence does but follow.  


4Sheen, op. cit., p. 38.
The conclusion which contemporary thought reaches is that the intelligence does not understand life. Henri Bergson exclaims: "Intelligence gives only dead conceptual symbols instead of living realities...Reasoning is inadequate for life."  

Metaphysics, purportedly reared on these "dead conceptual symbols" is thought of as "...the science of giving bad reasons for what we believe on instinct."  

2. The traditional proofs are insufficient to convert one to theism:  

Theists say that the proof does not conclude to the reality that God is for the religious man. The proof concludes only to the real existence of an impersonal transcendent Being, but not to God as He really is for the one who prays.  

A contemporary philosopher comments:  

...they are insufficient to communicate conviction to minds that are not already convinced. They lack assent-compelling force.  

A contemporary theologian, Father Joly:  

All seeking for God...apart from prayer is in principle atheistic.  

Illtyd Trethowan is also concerned with "the man of faith:"  

The importance of resisting syllogistic proofs of God's existence should be obvious  

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1Sheen, op. cit., p. 16.  
2Ibid., op. cit., p. 20.  
3Luijpen, op. cit., p. 78.  
4Mac Gregor, op. cit., p. 112.  
5Trethowan, op. cit., p. 135.
enough in a general way. Bad arguments are very effective in turning people away from religion.  

Gustave Weigel, author of The Modern God, asserts:

> The God of faith, just because he is acknowledged in the act of faith which rests on evidence, can neither be proved nor yet refuted. Proof and refutation both demand evidence.*

T. Alec Burkill, suffering under a Kantian epistemology:

> The theist should therefore renounce the hope of ever being able to present coercive demonstration of God's existence.3

3. The approach of St. Thomas is really the ontological argument in disguise:

The cosmological proof (as Kant called all the proofs of Thomas which begin with experience of the cosmos) according to Kant is a masterpiece of dialectical skill by which reason involves man in a transcendental illusion and thus deceives him.

The "absolutely necessary Being," which through the cosmological argument experience prompts us to accept, can only be affirmed as an idea of reason and not as an existing reality, asserts Kant.4

Limited by his theory of knowledge, Kant accuses

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1Ibid., p. 127


3Burkill, op. cit., p. 177.

4Luijpen, op. cit., p. 35.
the cosmological argument of the same invalidity as the ontological argument:

What, however, happens to the cosmological proof for God's existence? To prove that the absolutely necessary Being is God, the argument appeals to the concept "absolute Perfection." It is claimed that only the concept of "absolute Perfection" can adequately express the concept of "necessary Being." But we have here once more the same kind of play with concepts as in the ontological proof for God's existence. The cosmological proof uses this experience only for a single step in the argument, namely, to conclude to a necessary Being. What properties this being may have, the empirical premise cannot tell us. Reason therefore abandons experience altogether, and endeavors to discover from such concepts what properties an absolutely necessary being must have.

In order to make his thought perfectly clear, Kant expresses his objection in a strictly logical form:

If the proposition "Every absolutely necessary being is absolute perfection" is true, we should be allowed to convert it per accidens so that it would read "Some absolute perfections are absolutely necessary." Now, since absolute perfections cannot differ from one another in any respect, we can likewise say, "Every absolute perfection is a necessary being." It is to this conclusion that the cosmological proof of God's existence leads us in its first stage. But here we have exactly the same combination of concepts as in the ontological proof of God's existence, and hence it proves nothing regarding God's existence.

Contemporary philosophers also take up the critique offered by Kant and pre-supposed by his theory of knowledge:

While the cosmological argument contains a factual premise, to wit, something exists, it contains only this non-controversial reference to matter-of-fact. All the rest of the edifice is

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1Luijpen, op. cit., p. 35.
2Ibid.
constructed of and by pure reason.¹

The Kantian theory of knowledge has claimed yet another victim:

Thus the modern philosopher can never cogently prove the existence of God beyond this world, either through logical or moral arguments...How should he be able to do so, since human reason is only the formal faculty of clarifying a given and clearly perceptible content and of reducing it to general abstract ideas?

But if human reason tries to transcend the limits of the perceptible world...its thinking is bound to be entangled in contradictions.²

Thus we see that the "reasoned approach" to God has not been widely accepted, especially in our own time. Let us now examine the modern approaches to God which have developed as reactions to the traditional proofs.

¹Matson, op. cit., p. 56.

CHAPTER II

THE MODERN APPROACH TO GOD

There is just not one way to God, as there is to an oasis across the desert or to a new mathematical idea across the breadth of the science of number. For man there are as many ways of approach to God as there are wanderings on the earth or paths to his own heart.

Jacques Maritain
It is of ultimate importance today to note that modern philosophy has ushered in a new notion of God and of our approach to Him. Decadent rationalistic systems, increased awareness in the philosophy of progress, emphasis on voluntarism and pragmatism, and the general precarious condition of the world today have each contributed its share in giving birth to this new approach.

Witnessed as part and parcel of this new notion and approach to God has been the modern attack on the intelligence as being able to rationally approach God. Thus a philosophy without rational proofs is what is wanted today by some "men of action" who "propose something and do not want to be restrained by the necessity of giving reasons for it."1

This refutation of traditional proofs, so common to the modern mode of thinking, opens the door to "new methods of proof," among which the most popular is religious experience.2 Many indeed now think that there is no need to prove God's existence because we experience Him in some sense or another.3 The validity of this approach passes almost unquestioned nowadays: the precise method itself is not definite, but it is decidedly non-intellectual.

But the traditional approach to God is not all that

1Sheen, op. cit., p. 17.
2Ibid., p. 24.
3Smith, op. cit., p. 63.
is refuted. Some modern philosophers, especially those who are not Christians, would like to change the very idea of God Himself to fit our present times. May Sinclair, in The New Realism, says:

The worst God of all is the God of older Christian theology: God the Father...who in His all-power and all-knowledge deliberately plans a cruel universe bristling with traps for His creatures. The older theology thought of God as spending every moment of His eternity in eavesdropping and spying on immoral man, haunting every bedroom and listening to every obscene story, and equally observant of the murderer with his bloody chopper and the child with its fingers in the jam.¹

In his Next Step In Religion, Professor Sellers also shows this tendency to "modernize" God: "Paul's God was an Oriental monarch; to the modern he is a cad."²

It should be pointed out here that just because many Christian theists (Pascal, Newman, de Lubac, etc.) do hold to a so-called "modern approach," that does not necessarily mean that they advocate any theory contrary to Christian dogma. They know the true God; their proofs for His existence are not strict rational proofs as were Thomas', but yet they have their reasons for believing, be those reasons of experience, intuition, feeling, etc. These approaches help show, then, that belief in God is a reasonable act, even if it is not formulated as such. The fact that a theist does not formulate a strict rational proof for the

¹Ibid., p. 47.
²Ibid., p. 45.
existence of God does not in the least falsify his belief.

Also seen to be characteristic of the modern approach is the cry that the traditional approach fails to take account of our own selves. The aim of the approach from experience is not so much to attain God as He is in Himself, but as He is related to us.¹ Thus religious experience can be any moment of life that urges me to see the reality of God. The Kingdom of God is within us; we do not need to intellectually prove Him. He is not to be found in objective nature, but is to be distilled from the very intimacies of our experience.

Religious experience, thus characterized by a retreat from intelligence, subjectivism, and the extension of our idea of God, essentially means a feeling of "some reality" or a sense of objective presence:

The fact is, He is there, and He is there non-intellectually, and is just as real as the thrust of a sword or an embrace.²

As we look more closely into the "modern" approach, we can see that it strikingly resembles the approach of many ancient thinkers like Job, the Old Testament man, and many early Christian thinkers, of whom the great Augustine (whom we met above) is a prime example.

For Christian thinkers also reacted against the strict rationalization to which the "proofs" of God had

¹Ibid., p. 39.
²Ibid., p. 36.
fallen. In Augustine's time it was seen as a reaction against the Greek rationalists who claimed to be able to explain everything, even mysteries; in later times it was a reaction against the complex metaphysical systems of Leibniz and Hegel. The modern approach to God thus is looking for personal, not universal proof—it is looking for the lovable, not the strictly knowable God.

Man has an innate, natural tendency, Augustine says, that has nothing to do with cognition; it is prior to actual knowledge and it consists in a fundamental relation to God that persists even in sleep.

This radical ordination of the will towards God as man's beatitude remains as the core of authentic Augustinism.¹

For Augustine, God is directly known by "turning inward" into the very depths of our restless soul, where the drama of existence is so penetrating that Augustine says:

Be not foolish, my soul, nor let the ear of your heart be deafened with the clamor of your folly. Listen. The Work Himself calls to you to return, and with Him is the place of peace that shall not be broken...²

Augustine's world is no inhuman rational system, but is a warm and meaningful reflection of the one all-loving God. Deep emotion fills his words:


To all the things that stand around the doors of my flesh I said, "Tell me of my God! Although you are not he, tell me something of him!" With mighty voice they cried out, "He made us!"

Augustine, then, would ask us: Is not the beauty of this Truth, though perhaps obtained through a bitter soul struggle, evident to all men?

For Blaise Pascal, knowledge of God is likewise obtained through a non-intellectual faculty: he calls it "heart." He sets forth the romantic thesis that reason has nothing to do with the deep intimations of the worshipping soul:

"We feel it in a thousand things. I say that the heart naturally loves the Universal Being... This, then, is faith: God felt by the heart, not the reason."

The "heart" for Pascal is the organ of love. When God is in question, knowledge cannot suffice without love. Great is the distance between knowing God and loving Him. "To know God in a purely speculative manner without loving Him, is to know Him not."

Thus for Pascal, the heart denotes the most secret part of our being: it is not only the instrument of feeling and morality, but is also one of the instruments of our

2Burkill, op. cit., p. 186.
3Pascal, op. cit., p. 99.
knowledge. This "heart," a composition of feeling and reason, is likened to the eye of the mind that immediately intuits its object, providing us with the first principles from which all our knowledge proceeds.

Like Augustine, Pascal sees this restless instinct of "heart" dissatisfied until it finds its true resting place in the comfort of God.

John Henry Cardinal Newman also recognizes that "sense of God within us—the inward voice of that solemn Monitor, personal, peremptory, unargumentative..."  

I have already said I am not proposing here to prove the Being of a God; yet I have found it impossible to avoid saying where I look for the proof of it...by the same means as those by which I show how we apprehend Him, not merely as a notion but as a reality. I must start from some first principle...that we have by nature a conscience.

I shall attempt to show that in this special feeling, which follows on the commission of what we call right or wrong, lie the materials for the real apprehension of a Divine Sovereign and Judge.

This "special feeling" Newman calls the Illative Sense. It is a natural power of judging and concluding about truth which, unlike reason, never varies or changes.

...the sole and final judgment on the validity of any inference in concrete matter is committed to the personal action of the ratiocinative faculty,

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1Ibid., p. 30.


the perfection of virtue of which I have called the Illative Sense, a use of the word "sense" parallel to our use of "good sense," "common sense,"...1

The French Jesuit Henri de Lubac would concur with Augustine, Pascal, and to a certain extent with Newman, in that the authentic affirmation of God belongs to the deepest operation of the soul—a "divine instinct," neither purely mythical nor purely logical or conceptual. De Lubac sees the "logical proofs" of God's existence as only part of the rational apprehension of him and includes in this insight a multitude of experiences such as those of the mystic and poet which are neither outside of nor opposed to intellectual understanding.2 In this semi-intellectual Augustinian atmosphere, he compares the human mind to a plant:

The aim of the plant, in assimilating the elements which it draws from outside, is to live, to become itself. Its life is the possession of itself—and of all things—in that dependence upon God which illumines it.3

For de Lubac, then, the authentic affirmation of God belongs to the deepest mental operation which is neither "mythical" nor purely "logical," but a combination of the two in a "divine instinct." This divine instinct springs upon the human intelligence at the same time it reaches maturity. The emphasis here is clearly influenced by Augustinism, but is intimately related to the notion of Pascal's "heart." There exists in man, for these above-

3Ibid., p. 75.
mentioned philosophers, a natural inclination toward God which is neither rational nor yet non-rational, which is directed personally toward the living God. The idea of a living God becomes a proper theme for reasoning, de Lubac claims, because reasoning

...will be the source of an undying "anxiety" in the human mind, an anxiety which will always torment the soul...Far from corresponding to a phase in human dialectic, it will, on the contrary, pay the part of an intermediary which unfolds itself between a reality that has been perceived and a mystery that is felt, while in its movement it never loses the support of some Presence. ¹

Jacques Maritain also writes in this vein when he considers what he calls his "Primordial Approach"—the fundamental experience seen as "the basis which posits the intellectual thought of God." ² The foundation of Maritain's approach is non-intellectual but its explanation is decidedly intellectual; metaphysical knowledge only brings such "doubly natural" immediate knowledge to greater conceptual clearness. This knowledge of God is:

...prephilosophic and proceeds by the natural, or, so to speak, instinctive manner proper to the first apperceptions of the intellect prior to every philosophical or scientifically rationalized elaboration. ³

Maritain tells us that his whole approach depends on this "natural intuition of being:

¹Henri de Lubac, "Origin of Belief in God," Readings in Natural Theology, op. cit., p. 27.
³Maritain, op. cit., p. 18.
Let us rouse ourselves, let us stop living in dreams or in the magic of images and formulas, of words, of signs and practical symbols. Once a man has been awakened to the reality of existence and of his own existence, when he has really perceived that formidable, sometimes elating, sometimes sickening or maddening fact I exist, he is henceforth possessed by the intuition of being and the implications it bears with it.¹

This primordial intuition of being presents man with the fact that existence itself is stable, while my existence is subject to nothingness and death. Thus man realizes that existence itself is "irrefragable, completely free from nothingness and death." Sprinking immediately into view with this realization of absolute existence is a natural reasoning—"a reasoning without words, which cannot be expressed in articulate fashion without sacrificing its vital concentration..."²

It is interesting to note here that Maritain, in his Existence And The Existent, posits two fundamental "postures of the mind" which deal with all of man's knowledge. The first posture is that of "cause-seeking" and is characterized by speculative universality and detachment from ourselves for the purpose of knowing; the second posture is that of "saving my all" and is characterized by dramatic singularity of a supreme struggle for the salvation of the self. The "cause-seeking" posture is essentially

¹Ibid.
²Ibid., p. 20.
philosophical; the "saving my all" posture is essentially religious and deals with man's feeling of inadequacy and anguish in the primary intuition of being.¹

Thus this natural confrontation with Being itself causes Maritain to see that this absolute "Being-without-nothingness" transcends the totality of nature. "And there I am, confronted with the existence of God."²

Jean Mouroux also cites the need for an "experiential approach" to God as opposed to the stifling rationalistic approach.

The transformation of the material world, the control of life, the cynical grinding down of human material, the revolutionary artistic activity, the new efforts in all the realms of the spirit, violent, anarchic, perverted—all these things mean that we are plunged into a chaos of experiences.³

For Mouroux, man experiences a direct consciousness of a given reality. This is not a mere search for truth, but the experienced presence of a reality; not a journey, but a possession. "In short, it is in the first place an activity involving contact and, ultimately, communion."⁴

Mouroux stresses the point that religious experience is

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²Maritain, Approaches to God, op. cit., p. 20.


⁴Ibid., p. ix.
the most personal kind of experience because it concerns the spirit in its total reality; all the intricacies of the person are involved in the awareness of man's relationship with God.

The consciousness and acceptance of the fact of God unfold in a profound feeling of adoration, a sense of grace, supplication, inspiring humility, in a vibration of my whole being, which is penetrated to its inmost depths by the God who so infinitely transcends it.

So far in our discussion of religious experience, we have been dealing strictly with some modern Catholic approaches to God. But by no means is the field of religious experience entirely dominated by Catholics. Especially since the onslaught of Immanuel Kant's criticism of the rational proofs of God, most modern non-Catholic philosophers have had to substitute a new basis for their faith—and this basis, to a large extent, has taken the form of religious experience.

Religious experience for William James, who has done much to further this philosophy, means "any moment of life that brings the reality of spiritual things more home to me." James' non-rational approach is well seen in his Varieties of Religious Experience, where to the question "Can the existence of God be proven?" he answers:

No. The book of Job went over this whole matter once for all and definitely. Ratiocination is a relatively superficial and unreal path to the Diety. I will lay my hand upon my mouth, I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye seeth Thee.3

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1Ibid., p. 16.
2Sheen, op. cit., p. 25.
3Ibid., p. 21.
Thus the "element of feeling" in James is seen as the core of his approach to God, but one of the main factors contributing to this religious experience is based on our individual needs. The God of the intellectualist was the "God-proved-by-reason," but this God is far from our needs, James claims. The "God-I-feel-I-can-use" is of much greater value. "The gods we stand by are the gods we need and can use."¹

Toward the end of the last and the beginning of the present century, this same radical experiential knowledge of God attacked the traditional standpoint of the Catholic Church in a heresy called Modernism.² As an aim to adapt Catholicism to the times, Modernism stood firm on the Kantian theory that we are not able to transcend the knowledge of the senses and therefore, our intellects must abandon its search for supermundane realities.³

Faith in the supernatural must now find some other foundation than the intellect, and this new foundation is

¹Ibid., p. 38.

²The movement was quite widespread and exercised great influence, as is seen in Modernism by C. S. B., published by Sands and Co. in London in 1908, page 7.

A few months ago the word was scarcely known in England. Today it has assumed huge proportions. Within the past few weeks it has formed one of the staples of conversation in club smoking-rooms and drawing-rooms.

³Benignus, op. cit., p. 439.
"feeling"—man's feeling for God, and his inner aspiration for perfection.

If you look into your heart, you will find there a need, an aching need, of something that you cannot find in all nature. You will find there also, a sense that reaches out beyond the boundaries of science and history into the region of the Unknowable, into which the reason cannot penetrate, and unites itself to God. For He is present in the heart as the object of this special sense, and as the cause that brings it into being. You must rest there; for there your religious experience comes to an end...And though you may, perhaps, manage to make some fairly intelligible statements about Him, as He is in your experience, whatever you say will be not only inadequate, but in a sense false.¹

Thus religion for the Modernists would derive its whole approach from this special sentiment called the "need for God." It manifests itself as an impulse, and although it is innate in everyone, and is experienced by everyone, nevertheless it appears strongly only under particularly favorable circumstances and in particular individuals.²

God according to the Modernists is not the object of faith based on reason, but on feeling which gives birth to faith. The Catholic Church saw this view as a direct attack on man's ability to rationally approach God and thus condemned it.

But this was not the case with Protestantism. Contemporary Protestant theology has extensively developed its ideas on the non-rational approach to God. Thus we see

¹C.S.B., op. cit., p. 16.

a new theism—the theism of religious consciousness for which God is in some way immediately known.

Rudolph Otto (d. 1937), in his chief work, The Idea of The Holy, is concerned to show that the religious view of the world is indeed "reasonable," only because it is "reasonable" to recognize that experience brings us to confront the Supreme Reality. This Reality is not merely to be rationally apprehended, because it extends beyond the compass of any purely rational faculty, but is yet not outside experience altogether.¹

Thus instead of studying the concepts and ideas of God and religion, Otto undertook to analyze the religious experience itself. The "feelings" that Otto seeks to explore are decidedly non-rational, but he insists that they are not anti-rational. He sets out to analyze this "feeling" which remains where concepts fail us, where our reason cannot see the non-rational or supra-rational Subject of all our speculations. Yet, though the existence of God eludes our conceptual way of understanding, it must be some way within our grasp, "else absolutely nothing could be asserted of it."²

In his attempt to play down the one-sided intellectual and rationalist interpretation of our idea of God, Otto claims that it is worth our while to consider clearly the different

¹Otto, op. cit., p. 9.
²Ibid., p. 16.
"moments" or affective states of religion so that religion itself may become more manifest.¹

The distinctive category of the "holy" for Otto conveys quite a specific element or "moment" which sets it apart from the rational—it completely eludes apprehension by concepts. Discarding the general notion of "holy" as meaning "completely good," Otto assigns an overplus of meaning to the the "holy": that object of a unique original feeling-response which is comprised in a category above and beyond goodness—the category which he calls the "numinous."

The numinous presents itself to man as something "wholly other," something basically and totally different. It is like nothing else man has ever known; confronted with it, we sense our profound nothingness, and feel that we are only creatures, or, in the words in which Abraham addressed the Lord, are "but dust and ashes" (Genesis 18, 27).²

This mental state is perfectly sui generis and irreducible to any other; and therefore, like every absolutely primary and elementary datum, while it admits of being discussed, it cannot be strictly defined. There is only one way to help another to an understanding of it. He must be guided and led on by consideration and discussion of the matter through the ways of his own mind, until he reaches the point at which the "numinous" in him perforce begins to stir, to start into life and into consciousness...In other words our "X" cannot, strictly speaking, be taught, it can only be evoked, awakened in the mind...³

¹Ibid., p. 18.
³Otto, op. cit., p. 21.
Otto then invites his readers to direct their minds to a moment of deeply-felt religious consciousness of the hidden numinous object. This consciousness, which includes the element of dependence, is termed "creature consciousness," the emotion of a creature submerged and overwhelmed by its own nothingness in contrast to that which is supreme above all creatures. Here we see one of Otto's main points: this "creature consciousness" has a direct reference to an object outside the self, not as Schleiermacher had said, that religious experience is directly and primarily a sort of self-consciousness. The objective feeling of a numinous object is the primary datum of consciousness, and its consequence is a feeling of dependence in ourselves.

In this important point, namely, that the primary intuition of the numinous is directed outside one's self, we see Otto openly combating the ontological notion of God, which proposes that our knowledge of God begins subjectively, that is, within ourselves.

Otto was not the first to discuss this experiential knowledge of the numinous, the "totally other." As an historian of religions, he knew well that:

For the yogi and the Buddhist in his search for Nirvana, the goal of all his ascetism is the moment when he can see the numinous, the totally
Jean Mouroux, although influenced by Otto, has somewhat the same idea:

Religious experience is the experience of the Sacred. This word has not yet found any satisfactory definition in the language of philosophy. And not without reason. Apart from any philosophical categories to which it might be reduced, to me it signifies God regarded purely as God—that is to say, in the first place, in a mystery that can never be properly fathomed...God is entirely Other,...Only when this absolute nothingness is realized can religious experience take place.

But how does the numinous manifest itself to us? It grips or stirs the human mind, says Otto, with determinate affective states, in feelings of one sort or another. The numinous object confronting man which arouses these affective states or feelings is the awe-inspiring mystery, mysterium tremendum:

The feeling of it may at times come sweeping like a gentle tide, pervading the mind with a tranquil mood of deepest worship...It may burst in sudden eruption up from the depths of the soul with spasms and convulsions, or lead to the strangest excitements,...It may become the hushed, trembling, and speechless humility of the creature in the presence of whom or what? In the presence of that which is a mystery inexpressible and above all creatures.

Otto then goes on to analyze mysterium tremendum itself, pointing out that an analysis of the adjective tre-

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2Mouroux, op. cit., p. 17.

3Otto, op. cit., p. 27.
mendum yields the elements or affective states of awesomeness, overpoweringness, and energy. On the other hand, an analysis of mysterium yields the elements of the "Wholly Other" and fascination.

**Tremendum**, first of all, denotes a peculiar dread, an element of awesomeness in the face of the numinous. It first begins to stir in the feeling of "something uncanny, eerie, or weird." It is this feeling, Otto claims, emerging in the mind of primeval man, which forms the starting-point for the entire religious development in history. John W. Harvey, translator of the English version of Otto's *Das Heilige*, cites Coleridge's *Kubla Khan* as a prime example of this primitive expression of the numinous in English:

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A savage placet as holy and enchanted
As e'er beneath a waning moon...
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This primordial numinous emotion is later overborne by more highly developed forms of the numinous emotion, but never, says Otto, even in the highest level of worship of God, does it disappear. ("Holy, holy, holy...")

**Majestas**, or the second element of **tremendum**, adds the notion of absolute overpoweringness or awful majesty. This is the feeling of one's own submergence, of being "but dust and ashes" and nothingness. **Majestas** thus forms, says Otto, the numinous raw material for the feeling of religious humility, based on this self-depreciation.

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The third element comprising the analysis of tremendum is the element of "urgency" or "energy" of the numinous object. Here "energy" is the factor that has prompted the fiercest opposition to the "philosophic" God of mere rational speculation. Speculative philosophers, forgetting that these terms are used merely as analogies, accuse Otto of sheer anthropomorphism. The terms used stand for genuine aspects of the divine nature in its non-rational aspect— which serves, claims Otto, to protect religion from being rationalized away. "This 'energy' is a force that knows no stint nor stay, is urgent, active, compelling, and alive."¹

The total object of the numinous consciousness being mysterium tremendum, Otto now directs his inquiry into an analysis of mysterium.

The first mental reaction one undergoes when confronted with mysterium is one of blank wonder, dumb amazement, or stupor. Taken in the religious sense, that which is mysterious is the "wholly other," beyond the sphere of the usual, the intelligible, and the familiar. The fundamental fact of religious experience thus lies in this peculiar "moment" of consciousness, the stupor before something "wholly other," whether such an other be "named spirit"... or left without any name."²

Otto points out that in the experience of mystics,

¹Ibid., p. 38.
²Ibid., p. 41.
the "beyond" again is the strongest non-rational feeling. Realizing that this "beyond" lies outside the world of nature and "things" as we know them, mysticism concludes by contrasting this "other" with being itself, so that they speak of God as the "unutterable, ...nothing."

In further analyzing the "mysterious," Otto points out another element: the aspect that the numinous shows itself as something uniquely attractive and fascinating. In picturesque language Otto describes the "mystery" as not something merely to be wondered at, but something that entrances:

One feels a something that captivates and transports him with a strange ravishment, rising to the pitch of dizzy intoxication... Again it is stressed that reason can never explain how it is that the "numinous" is the object of search and desire for yearning:

Men can never explain this, not only in forms of "rational" religious worship but even in those queer "sacramental" observances of communion in which the human being seeks to get the numen into his possession.

Thus possession of and by the "numen" becomes an end in itself. From this we can see that the mysterium is essentially a lived experience, never proclaimed in speech nor conceived in thought. ("Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard..."

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1Ibid., p. 45.
2Ibid.
3Ibid., p. 46.
Consequently, above and beyond our rational being there lies the ultimate and highest part of our nature, which can find no satisfaction in the mere satisfying of our basis physical and intellectual needs. William James, the great exponent of experience in religion, fortifies Otto's stand that experience of this type cannot be expressed:

It is impossible to fully describe the experience. It was like the effect of some great orchestra, when all the separate notes have melted into one swelling harmony, that leaves the listener conscious of nothing save that his soul is being wafted upwards and almost bursting with its own emotion.  

The Idea of the Holy then proceeds to point out that the numinous has expressed itself to man in art, Luther's writings, and the New and Old Testaments. The "sublime" is the means of expressing the numinous in art in a direct way, but in an indirect way it is interesting to note that silence is a means of expressing the numinous.

It is the same with Tersteegen in his "God is present, let all of us be silent." With prophet and psalmist and poet we feel the necessity of silence from another and quite independent motive. It is a spontaneous reaction to the feeling of the actual numen preasens.

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1Ibid., p. 52.
2Ibid., p. 83.
3Ibid., p. 84.
In his work so far Otto has clearly shown the irrational element in religion but now speaks of the rational permeating the non-rational to lead to the deepening of our rational conception of God, in the complex category of the "holy." "The category of the holy, then, combines non-rational and rational elements to be complete."¹

But still Otto maintains that no intellectual dissection of justification of such an immediate intuition is possible, none indeed should any be attempted, "for the essence most peculiar to it would only be destroyed thereby."² The experience must come, not by demonstration, but by pure contemplation, through the mind submitting itself unreservedly to a pure "impression" of the numinous object. Thus Otto would have us believe that there is in man a natural religious instinct which is due to the presence of the numinous experience and to nothing else.³

Mircea Eliade, author of The Sacred and The Profane, takes somewhat the same view as Otto. He too is interested in the phenomenon of the Sacred or "wholly other" as felt by man but whereas Otto is concerned with

¹Ibid., p. 129.
²Ibid., p. 164.
³Ibid., p. 188.
the relation between the rational and non-rational elements of religion, Eliade is concerned to treat the Sacred in its entirety.¹

Man becomes aware of the Sacred, Eliade points out, because it shows itself as something wholly different from the profane. The expression of the Sacred (which Eliade terms "hierophany") may become manifested by any ordinary object, from a stone to a church to the incarnation of the Sacred in man, or Jesus Christ. In each case we are confronted by the same mysterious act, the manifestation of something of a wholly different order, a reality that does not belong to our world, in objects that are an integral part of our natural "profane" world.

It is impossible to overemphasize the paradox represented by every hierophany, even the most elementary. By manifesting the Sacred, any object becomes something else, yet it continues to remain itself, for it continues to participate in its surrounding milieu. A Sacred stone remains a stone... but for those to whom a stone reveals itself as Sacred, its immediate reality is transmuted into a supernatural reality.²

Eliade points out that in desiring the Sacred, man is really desiring to be, to participate in true reality, for the Sacred is the "really real." It is precisely this existential dimension of man that is lost by those irreligious men who propose a "de-sacralization" of the world. This existential "lived" dimension of man's approach to God is being emphasized more and more nowadays, especially

¹Eliade, op. cit., p. 10.
²Ibid., p. 12.
Veritable reality is lived through, not thought about; and what is lived through issues from the exercise of freedom, the power to make choices. Thus only the adventure of genuine self-commitment can reveal God as a living reality.¹

Abstract philosophical speculation is seen by the Existentialists to petrify and degenerate God Himself to a mere object, an "it," in no way the "Thou" of prayer and sacrifice. Gabriel Marcel, a Christian Existentialist, has rejected the Thomistic proofs, claiming that they are no more than logically expressed descriptions of an experience which is really beyond proof.² Religion, then, for the theistic Existentialist, is not understood as a theory but as a way of life.

It has been said above that the entire modern approach to God has been drastically influenced by Immanuel Kant. Kant inevitably limited himself, and consequently the modern Protestant mentality, in declaring that our intellects are only capable of knowing phenomena, not being able to approach supra-sensible realities. "I must abolish knowledge to make room for belief"³ says Kant as he sets the stage for the modern Protestant approach to God.

¹Burkill, op. cit., p. 189.
²Klocker, op. cit., p. 212.
³Immanuel Kant, Readings in Natural Theology, op. cit., p. 64.
Since intellecction had been laid low, the burden of providing the basis for religion fell on the practical sphere of man's life—morality. Thus, for Kant, to insure the workings of the moral law, there must be a Divine Rewarder and Punisher to act as a sanction for man's deeds. God for Kant, then, must be the necessary postulate if his theory of morality is to work.

This undue stress on "morality" is not unfelt in some modern approaches to God. Since ancient times it has been maintained by many that regardless of the objective truth of theism, belief in God must be conserved because without it, the foundations and sanctions of morality are swept away, and man is reduced to a state of mere anarchy.¹

During the present time we find movements afoot in America that are trying to promote belief in God because it nourishes moral integrity and good citizenship. This pragmatic bent is seen especially in the collegiate movement called Moral Re-Armament, begun in 1961:

Moral absolutism, its traditional standards of honesty, purity, unselfishness and love that spring from our Judaeo-Christian heritage, are the only answer to political absolutism and the absolute finality of atomic war. We need a revolution of the human heart based on absolute moral standards, embracing everyone everywhere...²

"Believe in God," they would say, "because it will

¹Matson, op. cit., p. 219.
change your life!" With God as a basis for man's actions, life could be lived in an optimistic vein, inspiring natural honesty and good will; the nation would have stronger moral fibers, its people would be more responsible, and honest business would flourish. It would lead to peace of mind, amiability, and confidence. This anthropocentric theism is presented across the nation at leaders' gatherings and prayer breakfasts; it is attested to by personal testimonies of how the Christian view changes individual lives.

Let us now conclude our survey of these few "modern approaches" to God. We have seen that these "moderns" believe in God for many reasons: because man has a deep unexplainable "drive" or "instinct" which seeks out the Divine Lord (Augustine, Pascal, Newman, deLubac, and Maritain); because of our non-intellectual experience of the Divinity (Mouroux and to a certain extent, the Modernists); because of the non-rational intuition of the numinous object, the "wholly other" (Otto and Eliade); and finally because belief in God nourishes moral integrity (Moral Re-Armament).
CRITICISM OF THE MODERN APPROACH TO GOD

"What is man?" Whatever answer one gives to this question will definitely and inevitably determine his approach to God. If man has a magnificent intellectual power capable of approaching all being, then his approach to God will be basically intellectual; if man is composed of the rational and yet a deeply mysterious and unexplainable "instinct," then his approach to God will be mysterious and intuitive; if man is limited in his knowledge to immediate sense reality, then his approach to God will be decidedly non-rational, and will usually depend on an experiential or emotional basis.

First of all, let us look at the assumption that the experience of God is a proof of His existence. In times of sorrow and death, when confronting the wonderful spectacle of nature, in dead silence yet in the shocking screams of the dying, there is in most of us a "feeling" or a tendency to realize that there is "something" which transcends this finite, inadequate world. To be sure, it would be strange indeed if God, who is dynamically interested in our lives, did not make Himself known to us from time to time in many ways. To one who has had such experiences, intellectual proof would seem dry and inadequate; demon-
stration certainly has less "feeling" and "emotion" than experience itself.

But the point here is whether these experiences really prove anything, and of course we must admit that they do not. They can be the starting points of proof, but they are mere experiential facts on the level with motion, causality, etc. ¹ Without denying, then, that God may be experienced and many times is experienced before He is rationally demonstrated to exist, we must deny that experience itself is a proof.

We have seen that the modern approach to God is anti-intellectual or at least non-rational; this is directly a result of man's attempts to secure religious truth from the cruel attacks of empirical science and skepticism. Instead of examining the attacks that were made on the traditional approaches to God, these men abandoned their old philosophy and hid themselves in blind faith, mystical experience, and pragmatism.

Bishop Fulton J. Sheen takes a bitter stand against these modern experiential approaches, especially against the approach of William James:

It is enough for us that our enemies have retreated from the territory of reason, on which they once claimed so many victories; and have fallen back upon the borderlands of myth and mysticism, like so many other barbarians with whom civilization is at war. ²

¹ Smith, op. cit., p. 64.
² Sheen, op. cit., p. ix.
Sheen goes on to recognize that James' experiential approach is immensely lacking in this one respect: that James, who wrote the most about religious experience, had never experienced it himself.¹

As a matter of fact, in James' experiential knowledge, we let our passion or emotional nature decide our belief; in other words, we believe what we want to believe.² And worse yet, for James it is "reasonable" to believe what we want to believe. We are now clearly in pragmatic waters; no longer is truth the object of belief, but the object becomes that which is life-furthering, life-preserving. We have seen this pragmatic motive for belief in Moral Re-Armament; its lack of rational basis for belief not only hurts itself, but also throws the true religious commitment into jeopardy in the public eye.

Besides the fact that the non-rational approaches to God are laboring under a misconceived idea of man's ability to transcend sense reality, their "personal" approach leaves much to be desired. The affections of each man being deeply personal and incommunicable, the idea of God will vary from philosopher to philosopher.

God will vary with our sorrows, our laughs and our tears, our fortunes and our misfortunes...There will be as many Gods as there are "varieties of religious experience"...³

¹Ibid., p. 217.
²Matson, op. cit., p. 203.
³Sheen, op. cit., p. 196.
But if we would only make the foundation of our belief in God intellectual, we would immediately be removed from the fluctuations and vissicitudes of "emotional" life. God then would become something more than a variant—He is the constant which is known by many experiences, always One and the Same, not changing to suit the whims of man. This is Thomas' position:

It is not instinct that makes us religious; it is we who give religious significance and value to instinct. And this requires clear, honest, and strenuous thinking.¹

Thus man as man, that is, the thinking man, must enter the religious dimension and this entrance must be rationally justified if it is to be a human entrance into religion.²

Thus we see why the Catholic Church has so stubbornly insisted that the rational approach to God be adopted: only in this way can we be certainly sure that God, the "numinous," the Sacred, is really there, even though God be active within the subject before the subject's reflection on the rational grounds for his belief.

One more important point should be noted here: the intellectual character of Thomas' proofs. For Thomas our knowing faculty has two modes, that is, one by way of intellect and the other by way of reason. The intellect apprehends or grasps truth immediately; the reason "moves

¹Ibid., p. 215.
²Luijpen, op. cit., p. 78
about" in a mediate route toward the truth.

But what are these "moderns" criticizing? They are criticizing that laborious, mediate approach to reality characteristic of reason, not intellect. Here we see a real failure to appreciate the basis of traditional proofs: the intellect is now understood as reason and is criticized as such. Thus experience, intuition, imagination, and a host of other approaches are substituted to give immediacy in knowledge.¹

We must be able to see, then, that it is not necessary to be an irrationalist to recognize and appreciate mystery and human sentiment. The rational recognition of God's existence can be the starting point of a religious life in which God can assume an ever greater and deeper meaning.

¹Sheen, op. cit., p. 63.
CHAPTER III

CONCLUSION:

A SYNTHESIS

Have a reason for the faith that is in you.

St. Paul
The existence of God is the most important issue for man anywhere, anytime. It is the only fact that can give true meaning and value to man's life; without God life becomes absurd. In the preceding pages we have been delving into man's approach to God. We have seen that belief in the existence of God can be rationally justified; but now I would like to point out that it can and must be more than rationally justified.

In the last chapter we asked the question "What is man?" We said he was specifically rational, a thinking being. Yet it would be a great error to think of man as only a "rational animal": he deals not on the conceptual or rational level alone, but as a living, experiencing, dynamic being he deals with the emotional, physical, "feeling" side of life.

The "whole man," then, includes much more than the rational; he is also a physical being vitally influenced by emotions, passions, and feelings. We must assure ourselves that the physical side of man's being is not by nature corrupting or erroneous--it helps integrate the entire picture of man's life by actively pursuing and deepening conviction to rationally-known beliefs. The "whole man" then is rational but yet physical--both are intimately woven together to form the fabric of the total man. Although the rational is the higher or more noble part of
man's nature, that does not mean the physical must be de-emphasized. We do not live every waking hour in a purely rational milieu, but spend most of our time on the immediate emotional and physical plane.

Why did you, the reader, come to believe in God—just because his existence is rationally justifiable? Probably not. True, as we learned from Thomas' argument, contingent beings depend on a Necessary Being which is God: but this must be seen. It must, to be compelling, be seen to exist in real life situations. The intellectual approach justifies and deepens our formed conviction of faith, but yet our non-intellectual faculties have in some way perceived the operations of God immediately in the world.

We must then, honestly appreciate the "natural" or "experiential" approach to God. The value of their insights, especially those of Rudolph Otto, clearly apply to the "whole man" approach in each of us. We must admit that we have all experienced at one time or another, a "feeling" that God exists. Let us not be critical, therefore, of those who seemingly have an "irrational faith"; they have their reasons for believing which are as valid as Thomas' metaphysical proofs. The true faith of the common man cannot be boiled down to "brainwashing by parents" or superstition—he has experienced authentic instances of God's life in the world, and has rightly concluded to His existence.

There is perhaps nothing "colder" to man in the realm of philosophy than the scientific Quinque Viae of
St. Thomas. Here there is no appeal to "feeling" or affectivity as we saw in Augustine. Thomas' purely rational approach has little appeal to the heart of the "whole man" whose legitimate and truth-seeking desires must also be fulfilled. We do not bow down to the Prime Mover, nor do we love the Uncaused Cause. We intimately worship and love God because we have seen His operations in the world.

But let us get this one important point straight: Thomas' proof for the existence of God is not meant to be an exact representation of how all men arrive at the knowledge of God. It is a strict scientific development of the popular "whole man" approach.\(^1\) The "proofs" in the Summa are not dealing with man's immediate knowledge of God, but are dealing with man's reflex knowledge of his belief in God. Man knows something directly, then he reflects on his knowledge: he knows the thing before examining his knowledge of it. St. Thomas called his proofs Viæ—they are ways to show that this immediate and natural belief is really true and rationally defendable. They are not so much an invention as an inventory or elucidation of the fundamental beliefs of all humanity.\(^2\)

To further clarify why Thomas presented his proofs, let us make ourselves aware of the situation, the Sitz im Leben, at the time Thomas wrote. Reason was on the defensive,

\(^1\)Sheen, op. cit., p. 181.

\(^2\)de Lubac, op. cit., p. 64.
trying not to be swallowed up by revealed religion based on
"blind faith." But Thomas, following the dictate "Have a
reason for faith that is in you," based his solution
to the faith-reason problem on an existential metaphysics
and a realist epistemology. With this poetic foundation,
Thomas scientifically delves into what it means "to be" or
"to exist" and sees that we are dependent in our very being
upon Being Itself.

In this context, Thomas recognizes no possibility
of conflict between faith and reason—for both have truth,
which is one, as their goal. A true act of faith, then,
is not the abdication of reason; it is always made on ac-
count of intelligible reasons or grounds of belief, and
never blindly. But these reasons are not totally con-
vincing, as a geometrical proof or a physical demonstration
is, since they do not make the truth proposed for belief
evident in itself. They adequately vouch for its rational
certainty, but they do not totally explain it for the "whole
man": experience must necessarily "fill in" that which the
rational approach lacks.

We can see, then, that true belief in God for the
"whole man" has a specifically rational yet experiential
character; both are combined to give a full human meaning
to man's relation with God.

1Benignus, op. cit., p. 443.
2Sheen, op. cit., p. 31.
No treatment of the approaches to God in modern times would be complete without a few words about Immanuel Kant. In fact, this paper would probably not have been written if he had not begun his bitter skepticism of the traditional approach. But this skepticism, even though it denied man the power to rationally approach God, inevitably led to the long-neglected development and real analysis of the non-rational approach in religion.

It is hard to over-emphasize Kant's influence on the modern mind, especially in the field of religion. As a point in fact, I would like to cite a certain "letter to the Editor" that appeared last month (April, 1965) in the University of Montana's student-run newspaper, the Kaimin.¹ The following letter appeared as a reply to an article presented the week before by the Kaimin editor who had criticized Christianity as swelling with "religious sickness" and as failing to intelligently re-examine itself in its belief:

Something very strange happened Tuesday. The Kaimin editor had the guts to step on a real hornets' nest. The only trouble is that I'm not one of those hornets and it was not my nest. Pardon the change of metaphor, but what disappointed me about the editorial is that he smacked heck out of a punching bag already beaten to death from within!

Such men as Barth, Bultmann, Ebeling, and Tillich, to name a few, have said what the Editor says (perhaps, a little better) from within the Church some time ago. Most theologians aren't concerned with Natural Theology's use of Aristotelian Philosophy

¹The Kaimin, April 22, 1965, p. 2.
in an attempt to prove God's existence because of Kant's work...

Now this is a significant point: the author of this letter is a Protestant Pastor, who very definitely thinks that Kant has settled once and for all the problem of rationally approaching God. Barth and Tillich, contemporary Protestant theologians, are well-known to be vehemently opposed to any rational approach to the "numinous." The letter goes on:

Furthermore, our church rolls are not swelling and what your editor calls "religious sickness" may be the rebirth of relevant Christianity...

Wow! Kant couldn't have said it better himself. For him, to take religion off the emotional plane would be to destroy it.

But what can we learn from this critique of Kant? That we should not be "unbalanced" in our approach to God toward the purely rational plane. And this is my main point: God can be reached rationally, yet he also can be experienced—but to exclude one or the other totally will result in an unbalanced or lop-sided view of the "whole man" approach.

This, then, is of utmost importance: The existence of God can be rationally proved, but God may also be experienced in many situations in life. The rational aspect should stabilize the whole belief, that is, guarantee to

1Weigel and Madden, op. cit., p. 14.
the believer that God is really there; the experiential aspect should "humanize" the belief, that is, elicit human emotions and feelings which deepen and vivify belief.

In our own personal approaches to God, we can see that the seeming battle between experience and intelligence or faith and reason is not easily brought to an integrated maturity. The possible solution has been developing for twenty centuries--your honesty in seeking an answer for yourself is an important part of this development.

A parting thought: the more man understands himself in all his varied manifestations, the better he can develop a meaningful relationship with God.


