

Sr. Margaret Dorgan's Weekly

This reflection appeared first in *The Church World*, the diocesan weekly of Maine.

[<<Hub](#)

© copyright 2004 by S. Margaret Dorgan, DCM

DOES GOD EXIST?—Part One

Human life—what is it all about? Why do I exist? Does God exist? If there is a God, what does that say about me? How does my existence point to God's existence? When I ask myself: where did I come from, I answer: from my parents. But where did they come from? The question keeps going back, back--always deeper into the past. How did it all get started? Not just how did I come about, but everything. Deep questions. Basic questions. Yet there are people who say, "There is no God. God doesn't exist. It's all a fairy tale. Something made up." They say, "When you think about it, God just disappears."

Not at all. Actually, when you truly ponder it, when your thoughts go really deep, you reach the conviction: God has to exist. The greatest thinkers in the history of western thought, not just Christian thought, came to that conclusion: there is an omnipotent Being Who is the origin of all that is. Socrates, Plato, Aristotle and other Greek philosophers pondered existence and saw it must have a source in God.

The Psalmist, who had no doubt about God's existence, gives us proof in song. "By the word of the Lord, the heavens were made....The waters of the sea were gathered" (Ps 33: 6,7). He urges us, "Let all who dwell in the world show reverence. For God spoke and it came to be; commanded and it stood in place" (8,9). Out of nothingness, the almighty hand of God brings forth all creation.

I believe there is a God. My faith embraces this divine reality. You may have no doubts at all about God, but you could be put on the spot. "Hey, nobody believes in God anymore. Get with it." I'm with it all right. With the God who keeps me subsisting. Yet my mind wants to work it out logically. Is that possible? Can I reach God through my reason? We go to St. Thomas Aquinas for his texts concerned with proofs for the existence of God. These pages are not dealing with revelation. They are the product of the human mind at work on a major issue. In our religious education programs, taking place in a secular culture that avoids mention of God or derides our credulity, we ask St. Thomas for help. His *Summa Theologica* offers five proofs that lead to the necessity of a Being who is called God. Today one can peruse these pages on the Internet. The linguistics of philosophy may make one pause, but reading slowly we can find the mind's justification for affirming God's existence.

That affirmation starts with where I am. I see what is right here in my own situation. I look at change. How does something move from one state or condition to another. It was cold. Now it's hot. What brought about the change? I applied fire to what was cold. But what started the fire? Wood that I ignited. Where did the wood come from? A tree. How did the tree get planted and grow? I can find an answer. Still, if I keep going back, back, back I need to reach an ultimate Agent who is responsible for everything that changes. I ask: What makes change, makes things become what they *were not* a few minutes ago? Where is there an Unmoved Mover—something that is the basis of all change? That got it all started?

Close to St. Thomas' argument of an Unmoved Mover, an Unchanging One who underlies all our created change, is the relation of cause and effect. I see an effect and I look for a cause. Well, what caused the cause? I gaze out the window when it is dark. What removed the light? What happened to the sun and made the skies lose their luminous quality? In the Book of Job, we find the words, "Have you ever in your lifetime commanded the morning and shown the dawn its place?" (38:12). Science can explain the movement from brightness to shadows and then to the black of night. We can count on the leaving of the light. We can describe the process. So what made that process go forward? Again I go back, back, back till I reach an Uncaused Cause, which is God. God is the author of all that we perceive as going from one state to another different one. God speaks to Job, "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements?" (Jb 38:4,5). We ponder the evidence our eyes, ears, and all our senses, take hold of.

This can be just a rational exercise: the brain at work. But reflecting on what takes place around us can also lead us to the God who is the origin of all. Then prayer comes forth in a kind of awe. "God, You have made all things. You have made me." Wonder captures the mind and then embraces the heart. The most brilliant of human intellects can unlock wonderful secrets of the universe, but God still presents a question to us, "Can you send forth the lightnings on their way or will they say to you, 'Here we are'?" (Jb 38: 35). Understanding how creative energy functions gives us the ability to use these processes ourselves. And we are grateful to scientists who unlock so many secrets of the physical world. This understanding, nevertheless, gives only limited control over them. It does not clarify how they all began. Only an Unmade Maker initiates the work of creation and keeps it working.

Here we've dealt with only two of St. Thomas' proofs. His others are also compelling. People, however, are all different and some of his words will be more convincing to one person than to another. We'll take up some of the other proofs in a later reflection. St. Paul speaks to us as he did in his epistle to the Romans, "Ever since the creation of the world, invisible realities, God's eternal power and divinity, have been clearly perceived in the things that have been made" (Ro 1:20).

Gazing on the things that have been made, we chant, "How varied are your works, O Lord! In wisdom You have wrought them all. The earth is full of your creatures...May the Lord be glad in these works" (Ps 104:24, 31). The Lord will be glad in the unrepeatable work you yourself are when you pray the lines, "**I will sing to the Lord all my life. I will sing praise to my God while I live.**" (Ps 104:33).

Sister Margaret Dorgan, DCM