

Association of Hebrew Catholics Lecture Series
The Mystery of Israel and the Church

Fall 2013 – Series 12

*Introduction to Theology:
Faith Seeking Understanding*

Talk #10

*God's Existence: the Reasons of the Heart,
and the Problem of Evil*



© **Dr. Lawrence Feingold STD**
Associate Professor of Theology and Philosophy
Kenrick-Glennon Seminary, Archdiocese of St. Louis, Missouri

Note: *This document contains the unedited text of Dr. Feingold's talk.
It will eventually undergo final editing for inclusion in the series of books being published by
The Miriam Press under the series title: "The Mystery of Israel and the Church".
If you find errors of any type, please send your observations to lfeingold@hebrewcatholic.org*

*This document may be copied and given to others. It may not be modified, sold, or placed on any web site.
The actual recording of this talk, as well as the talks from all series, may be found on the AHC website at:
<http://www.hebrewcatholic.net/studies/mystery-of-israel-church/>*



Association of Hebrew Catholics • 4120 W Pine Blvd • Saint Louis MO 63108
www.hebrewcatholic.org • ahc@hebrewcatholic.org

God's Existence: Reasons of the Heart and the Problem of Evil

If God Did Not Exist, the World Would Be Absurd

The fifth way to show God's existence through the order of nature can also be formulated as an argument *per absurdum*. If one supposes for the sake of argument that God does not exist, the result would be a world utterly absurd and contradictory. But when an argument that proceeds according to the rules of logic arrives at an absurd result, something is certainly wrong in one of the premises.

The proof of absurdity has been made considerably easier by the efforts of certain existentialist philosophers such as Jean-Paul Sartre, who consciously set out to map the features of a world in which God does not exist. In his *Letter on Humanism*, Sartre describes his existentialism as "nothing more than an effort to draw all the consequences from a coherent atheist position."¹ The first conclusion that he draws from his atheism is that if God does not exist, then man has no essence or nature that has been predetermined in the divine Intelligence. Man's nature must be completely self-defined, or to speak in the existentialist jargon, "man's existence precedes his essence."² In other words, man comes into existence, unaccountably, without any fixed essence or parameters, without any natural law or finality. However, he cannot continue in this undefined fashion for he must decide his course, and thus he must assign an essence to himself, including a code of morality and a certain finality, all of this by the exercise of his freedom alone.³

Man must decide his course, but this constraint necessarily produces anxiety, for he must find his way without any fixed criteria for choosing one way or another. Absolute freedom in the absence of any limits produces absolute anxiety, which becomes the keynote of the existentialist analysis of human existence. Sartre goes further still in that this absolute freedom without finality or natural law produces not only anxiety but also nausea, which is the title of one of his works. He is speaking about the particular nausea of seasickness, caused by the absence of all fixed points—essences, finalities, causes, or laws—in man's moral and existential landscape.

This nausea is also accompanied by a sense of infinite responsibility, for man must decide not only his own

course, but he must try to give parameters to the entire universe. Surely this is a task suited only for God! In other words, every man must carry the crushing burden of seeking to be God for the whole universe. At the same time, the existentialist man knows that he did not create himself, but was rather thrown into the world against his will, soon to be excised from it violently at his death. He is completely *abandoned* to himself, and will ultimately be abandoned by existence itself. He is a strange mortal God, thrown into the world which he must "create" by assigning it some sense and value which it does not have on its own.

What becomes of love in this existentialist vision of a coherent atheism? Can atheism provide a solid basis for the duty of loving one's neighbor as oneself, for what is my neighbor for me? After all, in this existentialist hypothesis, my neighbor has no essence or human nature which would give him some title on my love. He is not a creature made in the image of God, redeemed by the blood of God Incarnate. On the contrary, he is an absurd existence without an essence. He too is a complete freedom who has to define his own world, and this includes me as an object. My own absolute freedom is limited by my neighbor's definition of his world, in which I become an *object* against my will. Each one of us are subjects in our own world, but mere objects in the world of our neighbor. To Sartre this is odious, and he gave expression to this odiousness of our neighbor in the conclusion of one of his plays, *No Exit*:

Garcin: So this is hell. I'd never have believed it. You remember all we were told about the torture-chambers, the fire and brimstone, the "burning marl." Old wives' tales! There's no need for red-hot poker. HELL IS - OTHER PEOPLE!⁴

Sartre quotes the famous line of Dostoevsky: "If God does not exist, then everything is permitted." However, the great Russian novelist said this as *proof* of God's existence, for man's moral sense tells him that everything cannot be permitted, and that therefore God definitely exists. This is the proof of God's existence through the existence of the moral order. However, Sartre's absolute first principle is the non-existence of God, so he must resolutely face the absurd consequence that everything indeed is permitted.

Here the reader is rightly utterly horrified. If God does not exist, all the crimes of history become nothing more than the free choices of men living without fixed parameters, under no moral law, without any other criteria than their own freedom. If the universe has no finality, there are no criteria by which we can condemn any evil act. But this

1 Conclusion of his work, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*.

2 See Sartre, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*.

3 See Sartre, *Existentialism* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1947), 58: "If I've discarded God the father (sic), there has to be someone to invent values....To say that we invent values means nothing else but this: life has no meaning a priori. Before you come alive, life is nothing; it's up to you to give it a meaning, and value is nothing else but the meaning that you choose."

4 See *No Exit, Four Contemporary French Plays*, trans. Stuart Gilbert (New York: Random House, 1967), 111.

is absolutely absurd, for who does not know in his heart that acts have been committed that are terribly worthy of punishment because they violate an objective order written into the universe itself? Without God, man becomes an utter absurdity, the victim of an absolute anxiety, nausea, and abandonment, and the world likewise becomes an absurd place of nausea and odiousness.

Obviously such a vision of man and the world must be false. This is because the falsity of any conclusion is shown simply by showing that it is contradictory and absurd. What is contradictory and absurd is false, otherwise we will have to abdicate reason itself and fall into despair! Now if Sartre's conclusion is false, one of his premises must likewise be false. In essence Sartre argues: 1) If God does not exist, the world is absurd, 2) God does not exist, and therefore 3) the world is absurd. Sartre does not even try to demonstrate his second premise that God does not exist, but simply takes it for granted as a first principle. His reasoning therefore contains two gross errors in that he assumes a premise (God does not exist) without offering any proof, and he does not realize that the conclusion of absurdity shows the falsity of one of the premises.

Sartre's effort lies in developing his first premise, which indeed is true. However, on the basis of this true first premise, we should construct another syllogism that is true: 1) If God does not exist, man and the world are absurd, but 2) it is absurd to think that man and the world are absurd, and an absurd conclusion is the sure sign of falsity, 3) therefore, God exists. In order to grasp more powerfully the demonstrations for God's existence, it is important to have the firm conviction—common to every sane mind—that the universe is not absurd. Absurdity is the hallmark of falsehood and madness. A worldview which is absurd, such as that of the atheist, is necessarily false.

Why didn't Sartre see this, given that he was a very intelligent man? Of course we cannot say for sure, but we can suspect that it is because *he did not want to*. Certain moral dispositions are necessary for being able to grasp the proofs of God's existence. If a man idolizes his own personal freedom, he will come to see as odious any limitation on that freedom. The existence of God surely puts a limitation on individual freedom, for God orders man to a determinate end in Himself. In other words, the atheist rejects God ultimately because he wishes to be God himself, to be his own final end. A similar reasoning can be seen in other famous atheist philosophers such as Marx and Nietzsche.

Reasons of the Heart for God's Existence

The French philosopher Blaise Pascal observed that the most effective arguments for convincing people of the existence of God and the truths of religion are reasons of the *heart*, rather than strict and rigorous philosophical

demonstrations.⁵ These arguments of the heart touch on our most fundamental convictions, which are based on the experience of love. Before leaving the proofs of the existence of God, let us offer some arguments of the heart, for although they are less rigorous in their formulation, they are by far the most practical and efficacious.

These arguments of the heart can be formulated in various ways. First, if God does not exist, then the hunger of man's heart which seek to love Absolute Goodness will have no object worthy of his love, no object in which his aspirations can come finally to rest. No one has expressed this better than St. Augustine at the beginning of his *Confessions*: "You stir man to take pleasure in praising you, because you have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you."⁶ Who has not tasted in some way this bitter discontent as he strayed from God?

It is well known that the experience of genuine human love, whether of parents, spouse, children or intimate friends, is an excellent preparation for better understanding the existence of God and His love for man. Such an experience of genuine love shows us that our loved ones need and *deserve* more love than we are able to give them. We sense dimly that our finality is to love and be loved in a divine way, more than any finite person could offer. If God does not exist, this finality of the human person would be forever in vain.

Furthermore, we grasp that men deserve this greater or divine love because we sense dimly the truth of the Biblical phrase that man is made in the image and likeness of God. Disinterested love discovers this likeness in our neighbor, to which self-love is blind. We naturally recognize that man has a dignity—a worthiness of being loved—that transcends the material universe, and can only come from God. Therefore God exists, and has an absolute dignity, in which the human person shares or participates in a limited way because of God's paternal love for man.

Finally, if God does not exist, then there is no loving providence at the very basis of our existence, as the ultimate reason for our coming into the world. We would be nothing more than products of blind chance and freak accidents of an intrinsically meaningless world, as Sartre, Jacques Monod, and others would have it. But love tells us that this cannot be so, that the human person cannot fail to be the product of divine love, in which he is destined to share if he does not fail to correspond to the divine vocation.

⁵ See *Pensées*, trans. A.J. Krailsheimer (New York: Penguin Books, 1966), 154: "The heart has its reasons of which reason knows nothing: we know this in countless ways. . . . It is the heart which perceives God and not the reason. That is what faith is: God perceived by the heart, not by the reason."

⁶ St. Augustine, *Confessions* 1.1.1, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 3.

Let me confess here that this was the argument that convinced me of the truth of God's existence at age twenty-nine. On a certain day after several years of marriage, I realized that I had never been able to love my wife as she deserved. The thought that God must exist then came to me with vivid force, if human life is not to be completely absurd and in vain. And I realized that the ability to love is God's gift, which must be implored through prayer. Who can explain the impressions that are made on our minds under the impulse of God's grace?

There is no doubt that the arguments of the heart are effective to persuade, but are they also true proofs with a foundation in reason? Pascal himself did not think so,⁷ but he underestimated their philosophical basis. The reasons of the heart, as outlined here, are based on fundamental principles of reason, even if they are not enunciated in the form of a strict syllogism and thus skip many steps. These reasons presuppose and develop a special application of the fifth way of St. Thomas, based on the order of nature. They also presuppose the principle of reason that all things have a natural finality, which they tend to realize. This finality corresponds with a natural desire in the thing, and natural desire cannot be in vain. If a given nature tends naturally and consistently towards a certain end, then that end must not be naturally or intrinsically impossible. For if it were impossible, then the creature would be absurd, tending to something that is naturally impossible. This would be inexplicable, for it would be simultaneously ordered and not ordered to some end. Now the rational creature, who is capable of conceiving absolute good, tends towards the possession of an absolute good. Therefore such an end must be possible and thus must exist. And an absolute Good can be nothing other than a loving God, who is possessed by being known and loved.

Summary of the Five Ways

St. Thomas provided five different and complementary ways of proving the existence of God, each one revealing different aspects of the divine nature. In the first and second ways, for example, St. Thomas proves that there must exist a Prime Mover who is Himself unmoved, an Uncaused First Cause. A further conclusion from this is that God is Uncaused Being and Pure ACT, the first source

⁷ It should be noted that Pascal makes an excessive division between the reasons of the heart and of the reason, excessively limiting the latter to mere *reasoning* (the third operation of the mind). Nevertheless, what Pascal refers to as the "heart" includes what St. Thomas refers to as the habit of first principles, by which we see first principles as evidently true. This is the work of reason, taken in the broad Thomistic and classical sense (to include all three operations of the mind, and not just the third). The "reasons of the heart" are not irrational! On the contrary, they are supremely rational, even though they are not formulated as syllogisms. See Peter Kreeft, *Christianity for Modern Pagans: Pascal's Pensées, Edited, Outlined and Explained* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 229-230.

of all movement, change, and activity. God must also be immutable, for the First Mover is Himself unmoved. In the third way, St. Thomas showed that there must exist an absolutely Necessary Being who does not receive His necessity or being from another. This argument proves that God's essence is *to be*.

The fourth way showed that there must exist a being which is maximally perfect, noble, good, and beautiful—in short, a Maximal Being, who is the cause of all participated or limited being. In philosophical language, God is Being by essence, containing all perfection of being. The fifth way showed that the laws and order of nature imply the existence of a cosmic or universal Lawgiver, who orders things fittingly to their ends so as to create a harmonious, hierarchical, and utterly marvelous world. This Lawgiver must be maximally intelligent, guiding all things by wisdom, will, and omnipotent power. Finally, the arguments of the heart show that there must exist a God who loves man with an absolutely gratuitous and paternal love, and that this love is operative at the basis of man's very existence.

In all of these proofs the same pattern emerges. There must be two types of beings, one which we experience, and the other which we do not experience directly, but which we infer must exist as the cause of all things. The first and second ways use our experience of changeable beings to infer that there must exist a second type of being—an *unchanged and Uncaused Being*. In other words, all change must have a first cause in an unchangeable and Uncaused Cause, which is the unmoved First Mover of all movement. The third way relies on our experience of perishable things whose being is received to infer that there must exist a second type of being that is *imperishable and necessary*, and whose being and necessity comes from itself alone.

In the fourth way, our experience shows us the existence of limited things which have various degrees of being and perfection. From this we infer that there exists a Supreme Being which is being by essence, and which is the cause of all being by participation. This proof also shows that God is Goodness and Truth by essence, and the source of all participated goodness and truth. In the same way, God is Love by essence, and the source of all participated love. Likewise, He is unity by essence, and the source of all participated unity in creatures.

In the fifth way, our experience shows us the existence of things which are ordered by their nature to various ends. From this we infer the existence of a supreme Legislator, who orders all other things, but who is not Himself ordered by or to anything outside of Himself, for He is the Supreme Governor and Supreme Good of the universe. Finally, in the arguments of the heart we experience the aspirations of the human heart, and we deduce the existence of a Final End—supreme Goodness and Love—capable of completely satisfying those aspirations.

Objections to the Existence of God

It is important to turn now and consider the most common objections against the existence of God. St. Thomas considers two main objections in his article on the five ways. The first is the problem of evil in the world, and the second is the apparent sufficiency of natural causes to explain all natural phenomena.

First Objection: The Problem of Evil

If God exists and is truly an absolutely Perfect Being, the omnipotent cause of all of creation, then how does it come about that there is evil in the world? Where does the evil come from, and why is it permitted? It would seem that God must not exist, or perhaps He is not omnipotent or completely good. The presence of evil in the world is the greatest objection to the existence of God.

Evil can be distinguished into two kinds: physical and moral evil. *Physical evil* is the corruption of the natural perfections of things, whereas *moral evil* is the corruption of the order that should reign between the free and voluntary acts of the rational creature and the dictates of reason. Moral evil is another name for sin. Both types of evil consist properly in a *lack* of a perfection that should be present, a *privation of the good* (for example order, being, virtue, etc.) that is due. In fact, evil can only be known by comparison with the good of which it is a lack.

The great Catholic doctors St. Augustine and St. Thomas teach that being and goodness always exist together. Everything that exists is good, insofar as it is. Being as such is intrinsically desirable, and every nature or essence is good in itself because it is a particular way of being. The desirability of being as such is evident in the fact that all creatures have a natural desire for self-preservation. Therefore evil exists in things only insofar as they *lack* the being that they should have, according to their nature. From this it is obvious that there cannot exist something that is evil by nature, such as an evil god, for evil can only exist as a lack of due perfection in a nature that in itself is good. Evil as a lack or privation is very easy to see in physical evils, such as death, injury, disease, and genetic defects. It is obvious that these evils are nothing more than the *corruption of a nature that is good*.

The same is also true of moral evils, which consist in free human acts that lack or violate the law of right reason that ought to guide them. While physical evil is due to a lack of physical good or order in a thing, moral evil is due to a lack of reason in a moral act. A moral act depends on the proper order among the intention of the person, the moral object chosen, and the circumstances of the action. For example, if a man chooses to take a walk for the sake of health, the moral object and intention are sound, but if this walk takes place while he ought to be working or at Mass, the lack of order with regard to circumstance makes

the action evil. So too if a man should give alms because of vainglory rather than charity, his intention perverts the good object and makes his action evil. A bad moral object such as stealing will always produce an evil act regardless of intention or circumstance. In all these actions, reason ought to guide the interplay of intention, object and circumstance, and the lack of reason in one or more of these produces an evil moral act. Such acts are disordered with respect to the final end of men and angels, which is God, and with respect to the divine and natural law that orders their acts to their proper ends. These moral evils therefore consist in a voluntary *lack of order* which ought to have been present.

Moral evil can only exist in the highest created natures of men and angels, for only they possess reason and can order their actions freely, and thus only men and angels can pervert the right order of moral actions. The higher the nature, the greater may be the magnitude of the defects that may arise, and the fall of the highest is the greatest and most tragic. As Shakespeare wrote: "For sweetest things turn sourest by their deeds; Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds."⁸ There is also a saying in Latin: *Corruptio optimi pessima*: The corruption of the best is the worst.

A right understanding of evil is crucial in order to clarify its relation to God, for the original objection was whether its presence in the world is an argument against the existence and rule of a benevolent Creator. The answer of the Catholic Tradition is that God can never will evil directly in itself, because He only wills what is good and evil itself has nothing desirable about it. However, He can will to permit evils—both natural and moral—*so as to draw from them a greater good*.⁹ If the presence of evil in the world were not ordered to the realization of some greater good, then it would truly be an argument against the existence of God, and it would be inexplicable. However, if natural and moral evils are permitted so as to draw from them greater goods, then this fact offers no argument against the existence of a wise, loving, and omnipotent God, for this order belongs to wise government.

The Permission of Physical Evil

It is important to examine now how evil in the world is indeed ordered to the realization of greater goods in general. Beginning with the vegetable and animal kingdom, what is the greater good that is the reason for willing the presence of physical evils? Obviously the greater good which justifies these evils among irrational nature is the preservation of the whole natural order, which presup-

⁸ Sonnet 94.

⁹ See St. Thomas, *ST I*, q. 2, a. 3, ad 1: "As Augustine says, 'Since God is supremely good, he would not permit any evil at all in his works, unless he were sufficiently almighty and good to bring good even from evil.' It is therefore a mark of the limitless goodness of God that He permits evils to exist, and draws from them good."

poses the corruption and generation of things, especially of living beings which feed off one another. The purpose of creation is to externally manifest the glory of God by creating many different levels of participation in His infinite goodness and Being.

If God had so desired, He could have made a creation in which no corruptible creatures existed and which thus had no physical evil. Such a world would have been populated by angels alone. It would have been possible, but such a world would have been lacking in the manifold lower levels of being, beauty, goodness, and truth which exist in the material creation, and therefore such a creation would have been less rich and less able to manifest externally the glory of God. It would be like a symphony composed entirely of first violins, or like a painting composed entirely of shades of white. It seems that God, not limiting Himself to producing just the highest grade of creatures, wished to show forth a rich variety of grades, from the lowest to the highest, by which His infinite perfection can be imitated or participated. This variety included material beings, but the existence of material natures necessarily implies corruption. This is because matter is a principle capable of taking on all different kinds of forms, one after another, and this implies the corruption of what went before so as to make room for what will come later.

The physical evil which exists in the world of men is slightly different, for here it is not just a natural consequence of the natural order. Men are an unusual hybrid, for their material bodies are prone to corruption as all other bodies are, but the fact that they also possess immortal souls raises them to a special dignity that calls out for special care. God could have fittingly eliminated physical evil in human society by giving special gifts to men to make them immune from the common lot of the animal kingdom. Philosophy can say no more than this, but Revelation tells us that God did in fact will to make men immune from physical evil, *as long as they restrained themselves from moral evil*. This immunity from physical evil was insured through the four preternatural gifts given to Adam and Eve together with sanctifying grace. These preternatural gifts were immortality, immunity from suffering, infused knowledge, and freedom from concupiscence.

However, the preternatural gifts were withdrawn from the human race as a consequence of Original Sin, and physical evil entered into human history as its penalty. A physical penalty which chastises a moral evil is in itself something good and just, for it reestablishes the order of justice which was gravely offended by the moral evil. God withdrew a gratuitous gift which was by no means due to human nature, and through the consequent suffering He reestablishes justice and calls out to His creatures to recognize their limitations and return to Him.

Moral Evil

The most difficult problem of all is why God would permit moral evil in men and angels. In order to see how this permission brings forth a greater good, let us apply the same principle used to explain physical evils. God's purpose in creation is to externally manifest His glory with many different levels of participation in His infinite Goodness. God's desire to create rational creatures who could participate in His goodness in a higher way than irrational nature also necessitated that they possess a truly free will. Now God knows and loves perfectly His own Goodness and thus is incapable of sinning, but creatures made outside of this perfect divine life have imperfect vision, and thus a freedom that is potentially open to evil. It is this freedom of the will outside of the Beatific Vision¹⁰ that can be corrupted to moral evil and fall away from its own true good, which is God.

Sin is never God's fault, for it comes about through the voluntary defect of the free will of the creature who chooses a lesser good over a higher good in violation of the Law of God. However, God wills to permit sin in order to uphold the natural moral order He has created which includes the *freedom of the will* which can fall away from goodness through its own fault. This radical freedom of the will is a necessary condition of the even more radical destiny God had planned for His rational creatures—a share in His own divine life of love after a period of trial to confirm the will. The angels were made free to do good or evil in their period of trial, which was the first moment of their existence, while Adam and Eve failed their trial in Eden.

God could indeed make a creature who, although not impeccable by nature, still never sinned either mortally or venially. Such is the Blessed Virgin Mary, who was immaculate from the first moment of her conception. She was able to remain free from sin because of her absolute fullness of grace, given to her to make her a worthy mother of God Incarnate. She corresponded perfectly with her own freedom to the grace given her. However, the divine wisdom deemed it wiser not to give the same level of grace to all rational creatures. All are given the graces they need for salvation, but not all choose freely to correspond to the grace they are given and thus merit an increase. God could have given to Adam and Eve a fullness of grace such as was given to the Virgin, but the Church indicates a deeper divine plan when she sings in the Easter Vigil Mass: "*O happy fault of Adam which merited us such a Savior.*" God permitted the sin of Adam so as to remedy it with the Incarnation and Passion of Christ, which is the greatest manifestation of God's glory that can be conceived.

¹⁰ This is why the blessed in heaven are impeccable, for they see God face to face and thus can never desire to offend Him whom they see to be Goodness Itself.

Even though man failed his trial of perseverance in the Garden of Eden, God always works to bring good out of evil, for now the existence of moral evil accidentally creates opportunities for the greater exercise of moral and supernatural virtues in man's fallen state. Man's path to salvation now is the way of the Cross, through perseverance amidst suffering and a response of love to the hate which surrounds him. The moral evil of persecution, for example, (such as that of Nero, Stalin, Hitler, etc.) provides an opportunity for the martyrs to achieve a level of courage, faith and pardon, perseverance, charity, and merit which otherwise they would not have attained. We can now show God how much we truly love Him above all things by suffering for His sake.

Our virtue is constantly tested and proven by the moral evils of those around us. For example, if God had not permitted St. Augustine to stray miserably from the faith and from purity for eleven years, the world would have been deprived of the supernatural merit of the tears of St. Monica, which won from God the gift of her son's conversion. The same reasoning can be applied to the sufferings of all parents, spouses, or friends for their children or loved ones. The *true end of Creation is the possession of supernatural charity*, and so God permits sin and evil so that charity may be given further impetus and scope. If our neighbor had no spiritual or physical ills, how could we learn in charity to sacrifice ourselves for his welfare and salvation?

The perfection of a work is to be judged by the end for which it is made. God made man for the moral purpose of learning to grow freely in love for God and neighbor, and thereby developing moral character and virtue. For this end freedom of the will is necessary, as well as the opportunity to develop our character and prove our love through hardships, which at times can be very trying indeed. Nevertheless, we can be certain that God never tries us beyond our strength. The necessity of suffering for spiritual growth can be formulated as an axiom: The greater the perfection of charity we hope to achieve, the more we shall have to participate in the Cross of Christ.

The Bible is full of tremendous examples of this trial by fire: Job on the dung heap, Tobit, Abraham who was asked to sacrifice his own son, St. Joseph when he saw that Mary was with child, Our Lady at the foot of the Cross, and finally, our Lord on Calvary. In all of these cases, the trial was permitted for the greater good of providing an opportunity for heroic merit and the greater manifestation of faith, hope, and charity. Obviously, the case of Christ is absolutely special, for He did not grow in love through suffering, as the rest of us are called to do, but suffered rather to manifest the fullness of His love and so redeem man.

Second Objection: Natural Causes Seem Sufficient

Another chief objection against the existence of God is the advance of science, which has had great success in explaining the causes of natural phenomena. People tend to think that science will be able to answer all questions if given enough time, so that the whole question of God will become superfluous. This type of objection is not unique to the modern era, and St. Thomas addresses it in as an objection in the *Summa* (I, q. 2, a. 3, obj. 2):

If a few causes fully account for some effect, one does not seek more. Now it seems that everything we observe in this world can be fully accounted for by other causes, without assuming a God. Thus natural effects are explained by natural causes, and manmade effects by human reasoning and will. There is therefore no need to suppose that a God exists.

To answer this objection we must distinguish between the first cause and secondary causes. Secondary causes are those efficient causes which act on things, only insofar as they themselves are moved to act by other causes. They are caused causes or moved movers. Now the first proof of God's existence consisted in showing that such causes in themselves are insufficient to explain all movement or change in the world. Such causes are indeed the proximate causes of any given individual phenomenon. However, as we have seen, the whole sequence or collection of such causes could never come to act, if they were not all moved by a first unmoved mover, or uncaused cause, who is the remote and first cause of all change.

There is no contradiction between the proximate causes and the First Cause, for they are complementary. Together they produce the results that we see in the world. Empirical science investigates the proximate sensible causes of phenomena, whereas metaphysics and theology investigate the remote and First cause, which is immaterial and thus outside the realm sense observations.