

PROVING THE EXISTENCE OF GOD : SOME PREAMBLES

The first thing to apply our minds to is the question whether we need to prove God's existence. Is God's existence self-evident, as some thinkers have said ? In his great work the *Summa Theologiae*, St Thomas, in the second question of his very first article, tackles the question. He says it is *not* self-evident. It is possible to affirm that there is no God. To illustrate he quotes the first line of *Psalms* 52 : "The fool has said in his heart there is no God."

It is for us, also, a matter of common experience that many people refuse to acknowledge that God exists. This refusal is what has made so popular Charles Darwin's theory of evolution. The theory gives some credence to the view for it offers what, at first sight, seems a rational explanation as to how things could have come into existence with none but a material cause.

Those things are self evident which the mind cannot deny. For instance any of the following three propositions is self evident, either from an understanding of the entity itself or from the evidence of our senses :

A whole is greater than any of its parts.

Man is an animal

John Pat is here in this room.

The reason God's existence is not self-evident turns on the proper object of our human intellect. If God was its proper object, we would not be able to deny His existence. But God is not a body and our intellects are ordered to bodies.

Specifically, the proper formal object of the human intellect is the quiddity, the *what-ness*, of sensible things. We are animals, a special sort of animal, the *rational* sort. Remember the parable of the lump on the road ? The dog in the back of the ute' sees the lump on the road. He is content to know THAT it exists, and unless it falls into a category of things he is programmed to notice, it will be of no interest to him. But you, sitting in the front seat, want to know WHAT the lump is. *Quiddity* is a Latin derived expression which signifies 'what is', or 'what it is'. The same reality can be signified with other terms as follows.

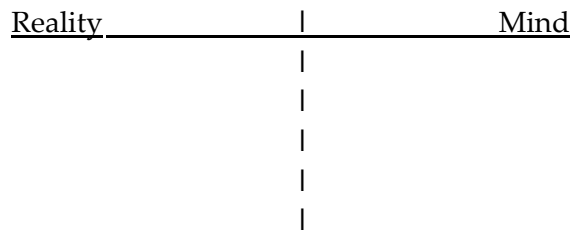
Quiddity - signifies WHAT is

Essence - signifies what IS

Nature - signifies How (the thing) Operates

I have mentioned before St Thomas's insistence that things exist in mind in a manner different from the way they exist in the real. This truth is especially important for our own age when there are many who confuse the intentional (what is in mind) with the real. One only has to consider the way 'virtual reality' can be created in movies, or the importance with which people regard opinion polls, or the way advertising asserts ideal perfection in any product it promotes, to get some hint of the extent of the problem. The mind can reflect reality, or it can create a 'reality' of its own. An elephant is real ; a

pink elephant is not. Pigs are real but flying pigs exist only in the mind.



Truth, logical truth, is the identity between what is asserted, i.e., what the mind affirms, and what is in the real. When the truth is told, it can be said that—

$$\text{Mind} = \text{Thing}$$

Mind and reality *correspond*. When the truth is *not* told, the mind does not reflect the thing, i.e., does not reflect reality. In any decent society, the failure to tell the truth is reproved. Indeed, the failure is damaging to society.

What would happen if, at the highest level in society, a lie should be upheld to be the truth ? what is wrong should be held to be right ? There would be dramatic consequences. This is just what happened in Germany in the early 1500s, and in England from about 1528. Martin Luther rejected the authority of God's Church in favour of his own authority. That is, he rejected what was objectively true in matters of theology—what God had revealed of His own life and of the Church He had established on earth—and asserted that it was open to each man to accept what he would, or would not, believe of God's revelation. This error occurred in the *theological* sphere but it was to have enormous social consequences.

In England, Henry Tudor, King Henry VIII, sought to overturn his marriage to his Queen, Catherine of Aragon, so he could 'marry' his mistress, Anne Boleyn. When, through his legates, the Pope refused his arguments, Henry took matters into his own hands, had Archbishop Thomas Cranmer declare that he had never been lawfully married to Catherine, and had his chief adviser, Thomas Cromwell direct the parliament to pass a 'law' which declared that he had never been lawfully married to her. Thus he did violence to the truth, insisting that a lie was the truth.



Henry Tudor, King Henry VIII

He went on to reject the authority of the Pope, and claimed leadership of God's Church in England for himself. Like Luther, he rejected what was objectively true—in a *moral* matter this time—and used this as an excuse to follow Luther's example of rejecting God's authority and the authority of His Church. He extended this error to the temporal sphere by imposing his opinion tyrannically on the people of England. In fact, he did something worse, much worse. He required the people *to swear before God* that what was a lie was in fact true. This involved a breach of the first two Commandments of the Decalogue. For the people were required to put the king above God, and to take God's name in vain.

The effect of the common action of these two evil men was to abandon the definition of truth as measured by reality (by facts), and assert in its place that, henceforth, *that was true which the king, or the state, should assert to be true*. We shall examine the consequences of their actions in the lives of men generally in the next lesson.
