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# GOD MAN'S FIRST NEED

BY REV. FRANCIS J. CONNELL, C.S.S.R.

DAVIS



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FOUNDATIONS FOR TRUE PEACE  
IN THE POST-WAR WORLD

# GOD—MAN'S FIRST NEED

*by*

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# GOD—MAN'S FIRST NEED

## I. WHAT IS WRONG WITH THE WORLD?

**T**HE most widespread and the most disastrous war ever waged on earth is now in progress. Up to the present, millions of human beings, civilians as well as soldiers, have perished in this tremendous conflict. It is quite probable that millions more will be slain before World War II comes to an end. Throughout Europe and Asia men, women and children are suffering intensely from poverty and hunger and fear—unhappy victims of the bombings and the invasions, the confiscation of property and the enforced labor that accompany modern warfare. Masterpieces of art and science that were the product of centuries of toil—universities, cathedrals and libraries, priceless paintings and books—have been ruthlessly destroyed by the huge machines of war in the course of the past four years. However soon the war may end, it will take hundreds of years for the world to recover from its havoc.

Paradoxically, the nations involved in the war are those that have made the most notable material progress. The uncivilized tribes of Africa are quite content with their simple domestic life in their primitive huts. They have little desire to engage in global warfare. The Eskimos continue to hunt and fish, as did their ancestors, quite satisfied to be out of the conflict being waged by their more civilized fellow men. But those nations in which the cultivation of the natural sciences has been fostered are now turning their scientific prowess to the destruction of life and property. The automobile, the airplane, the steamship, the marvelous adaptations of chemistry and electricity—products of civilization and aids to man's well-being, as their inventors intended them—are now employed almost exclusively to

cause death, suffering, want, terror. It is tragic to realize that if the scientific knowledge now available were applied to beneficial projects, and if all the toil and effort expended in the destructive work of war during the past four years were devoted toward providing men with food and clothing, homes, means of transportation, roads, schools, hospitals and medical care, every person in the world would be able to enjoy a comfortable, even luxurious, existence. But the human race has turned the fruits of its civilization against itself.

### **A Troubled World**

War is not the only evil that afflicts mankind today. Even before the first gun of the present conflict was fired, there was trouble aplenty brewing in the world. Here in our own country, reputed to be a peace-loving and prosperous nation, there was bitter strife between labor and capital, frequently leading to strikes and lockouts. There was much dire poverty, despite the abundance of our natural resources. There was deep-rooted antagonism between racial groups, particularly between the whites and the negroes. There was grave disloyalty to duty on the part of many public officials, who sought their own welfare rather than that of the country. Above all, there was an alarming prevalence of crimes of violence—robbery, rape, murder—committed in great part by adolescents. In the hectic days of war these domestic evils do not receive so much attention, and war conditions may have brought about the decrease of some of them, but there is grave reason to fear that with the return of peace they will become more extensive and more dangerous to our national life than ever before. And certainly, other countries are a prey to similar evils.

Any intelligent person must conclude from all this that there is something radically wrong with modern society. Nature provides men with all they need for a comfortable and contented existence; yet, men are not comfortable and contented. By their strife, their wickedness, their selfishness they are bringing misery on themselves and their fellow men.

Not all men are wicked; not all are desirous of war. It is safe to say that the majority wish to live peaceful, decent lives. The fact that, despite this wish of the majority, the civilized world is in so troubled and deplorable a condition indicates that there must be some defect in the management of human life. There must be some factor which men as a whole, are not taking into sufficient consideration in the regulation of their own lives and of their relations with other men. As a result of this defect mankind, both individually and collectively, is suffering intensely. Modern society is like a great, complicated engine which, in spite of the care that has been expended on it, is not operating properly because of some serious flaw in the machinery.

### **Plans for Reconstruction**

Today there are serious and far-seeing persons who realize that world affairs need radical improvement, and so they are planning for a better post-war world. Such prevision is surely called for. We have every reason to believe that the Allied powers will eventually triumph. But that victory will by no means solve all the problems of humanity. It will be no real victory if the peace thus secured will be only a transitory affair, a mere breathing-spell, preparatory to another and more terrible war. It is only a quarter of a century since "the war to end all wars" was terminated, and now we can see how illusory were the hopes of those who then believed that war was outlawed forever from the earth. Whatever planning we do must take into consideration vital factors which were neglected then; otherwise, the future of civilization is indeed dark and foreboding. Any grave defect in the ordering of human affairs must now be repaired.

Numerous and diverse are the plans being proposed for the establishment of a permanent peace in a better world. Many believe that this objective will be secured only by coercion. They are convinced that the Allied nations will have to disarm the vanquished and co-operate in keeping them subdued by a kind of international police force. In fact,

in a recent Gallup poll this plan received 74 per cent of the votes. The obvious objection to such a proposal is that it takes for granted that the present coalition of nations known as the Allies will endure permanently. Now, every one knows that any of these nations would withdraw from the coalition if its national interests were seriously endangered.

Others believe that by rendering material blessings, such as good homes, sufficient food and clothing, employment with satisfactory wages, etc., available to all, the world will be made good and happy and peaceful. Still others extol education as the panacea for the ills of humanity. Cover the earth with schools and colleges and universities open to all, and the main problems of mankind will be solved, they say. There are some who hope for the regeneration of society by impressing men with humanitarian and aesthetic ideals. Thus, *Time* for March 22, 1943, in its article "Background for Peace," states: "The belief in the dignity of man, of all men, is in itself a primary protection against the perfidies of the war of nerves, a check against the regimentation of domestic life, a guarantee against life's waste in war." The same article quotes an English philosopher, W. Macneil Dixon, to the effect that "there is no sure shield against the tyranny of this ruinous passion for possession save a transference of our affections from possession to admiration, from immoderate craving for wealth and power to an intense longing for beauty and excellence."

### **What the World Needs**

Undoubtedly, material comforts, education, humanitarianism and aesthetic apperceptions afford some help toward happiness and concord and morality. But experience has proved time and time again how inadequate they are in themselves to make men as a whole contented and united and virtuous. Even among those who enjoy all these advantages discontent and strife and wickedness have frequently flourished. Some other element must be introduced into human life if the post-war world is to be appreciably better



than that in which we live today. Some factor, the lack of which has brought about present conditions, must be made an important objective of men's aspirations and efforts. Catholics—and indeed all who believe in a Supreme Being that rules the universe—know that this necessary element of human life, this all-important factor which the world so desperately needs, is the restoration to God of His rightful place in the lives of men and of nations. If we are to prevent further social decadence, if we are to save the human race from sinking to the level of savage beasts, we must acknowledge and observe our obligations toward Almighty God and try to induce other men to do the same. This must be the first feature of any plan for the post-war world if it is to provide reasonable hope of success.

### **Who Cares About God?**

It is hardly necessary to prove that little heed is given to God in the affairs of modern life. As far as conditions in the United States are concerned, we cannot indeed say that our people are atheistic or anti-religious. But, on the whole, they are utterly indifferent to God and to religion. Most of them acknowledge, at least in a vague way, the existence of a Deity; but this belief has little practical bearing on their lives. Our public school education studiously excludes every form of religious instruction, although the purpose of education is supposed to be the training of the young for proper living. How can an educational program purport to prepare boys and girls for proper living when it deliberately forbids every attempt to solve those problems that have such an important bearing on proper living: "What is the purpose of my life? Is there a God Whom I must obey? Shall I continue to live after death?" Our higher stages of education, in colleges and universities, sometimes go beyond the phase of religious indifferentism, and are characterized by positive atheism and agnosticism. Not a few of our sophistic professors deem it a mark of learning to ridicule the idea of God and religion as antiquated superstitions.

In most American homes God has no place. The parents never go to church (except for a wedding or funeral), never give their children any religious instruction, never suggest or recite a prayer. Modern literature and the drama contain no reference to God, except when they mention His name in derision or blasphemy. Those who write on social problems, such as marriage, the home, the relief of the poor and the sick, the restriction of crime, seem to take it for granted that human beings are only animals, destined to go out of existence with death, and that the only objective of social science is to make men and women as comfortable as possible in this world. They never even imply that man might possibly possess a spiritual, immortal soul which makes him essentially different from the other living creatures of earth. Those who hold civil office sometimes make reference to God in their public utterances, but in the case of many of them it is doubtful if their political conduct is influenced to any notable extent by the consideration of their duties toward God—at least, when the support of their constituents is at stake.

In view of such undeniable facts, we certainly cannot call the United States a religious nation. And beyond doubt, even worse conditions prevail in other lands, where the government is committed to atheistic principles, or at least to an ideology that renders man's right to worship God entirely subordinate to the authority of the State.

### **We Must Seek God**

Certainly, any one who is sincerely anxious to contribute toward the reconstruction of society for the post-war world must take into consideration the restoration of God to the place due to Him as Creator and Lord of the universe. This movement back to God must begin with individuals. Society will recognize God in as far as the men and women who compose it give Him entrance into their minds and hearts. Hence, if individual human beings in sufficiently large numbers are convinced of the need of God in their own

lives, and put this conviction into practice, we can reasonably hope that when the turmoil of war is ended, there will be a stable foundation for peace and amity among men. But if individuals and nations continue to neglect or to reject their duties toward God, the human race has nothing to look forward to in generations to come save more widespread misery, more bitter strife, more shocking devastation than our generation has witnessed.

In the following chapters we shall study man's need of God under a threefold aspect—as the First Truth to be believed, as the Final Goal to be sought, as the Supreme Law-giver to be obeyed.

## II. GOD, THE FIRST TRUTH

The most exalted faculty of man is the power of intelligence. Man alone, of all earth's creatures, can think and judge and reason. Animals possess sense perception, whereby they can see and taste and touch concrete material things, but only man can elicit abstract ideas. The horse enjoys a lump of sugar because it is sweet; but only a human being can form an idea of sweetness. A dog can be trained to obey his master's commands; but it takes the human mind to produce a concept of obedience.

Animals exercise their bodily powers for the fulfillment of their needs. The bird builds its nest, the bee makes honey, the spider spins its web. But since it is instinct that enables animals to perform such tasks, they never improve in their methods. The bird of today builds his nest in the same way as the bird of a thousand years ago. The bee has no more efficient a method of making honey than that employed by the bees about which Virgil wrote, 2,000 years ago. The spider's web is no better than that spun by the spiders of ancient Egypt.

With man it is different. Man, by the use of intelligence, has learned many new truths in the course of time. He can understand the laws of nature and apply them in countless ways to his advantage. Recent years have witnessed numberless inventions for making life easier and more comfortable. A modern New York apartment is a great improvement over the wigwams in which the inhabitants of Manhattan Island lived four centuries ago. The airplane is a much more effective means of crossing the continent than the covered wagon of the early Western settlers. And beyond doubt, if the human race survives a few centuries more, the material facilities then in use will make the most wonderful devices of today look like the work of an amateur inventor. For no limits can be set to the capacity of the

human mind to grasp truth and to deduce new conclusions from previously known premises.

### **The Chief Problem**

If man follows up his natural inclination to learn all that is possible about the things he perceives about him, he will naturally inquire about the origin of the universe in which he lives. Certainly, it is illogical for a man to devote himself assiduously to the study of the elements that make up the earth and the laws that govern their activity, the composition of the stars and the phenomena of electricity, and yet to neglect the study of the origin of the earth and the stars and the wonderful laws of nature. But if an intelligent person does set himself seriously to the study of these fundamental problems, he will logically come to the perception of the most sublime truth that can be grasped by the human mind—the existence of God. This is justly designated the First Truth—not because it is the first fact that man perceives in the order of time, but because it is the most important of all truths, the only truth that satisfactorily explains and correlates all other truths, the truth that has the most vital bearing on the life of every human being.

Unfortunately, there are many persons who do not realize that we can prove the existence of God by arguments of sound reason, just as we can prove that the earth revolves around the sun or that the sum of the angles of a triangle make up two right angles. Such persons sometimes believe in the existence of a Supreme Being, but they accept it as a postulate of feeling or sentiment. They experience a sense of yearning, an interior need of a divine Being to give them support and consolation, and on the basis of this subjective craving they accept God's existence as a fact.

Catholics—and in fact all those who realize that intelligence, not feeling, must lead man to truth—know that this interior longing for a divine Being provides a very inadequate argument for the existence of God. Indeed, those who base their religion on this type of argument are actually lending weight to the charge made by unbelievers that reli-

gious belief is simply a matter of sentiment. Hence, we should study the question of God's existence from the standpoint of pure reason. We should sincerely seek a rational argument for the existence of a Supreme Being, endowed with infinite intelligence, Who created all that exists outside Himself. Such an argument is available to all. It is sufficiently clear and simple to be understood by the least educated, yet sufficiently convincing to win the assent of the most brilliant genius.

### **Reason Proclaims God**

Our intelligence informs us that the great variety of beings that make up this vast universe—the numberless stars that dot the firmament, the earth with its oceans and continents, the plants and the animals, including our own selves—do not possess in themselves the reason for their existence. They do not exist necessarily; it would be possible for any of them, or all of them together, not to exist. Evidently then, the reason for the existence of all that makes up the universe is to be sought in some being distinct from the universe itself—a being that exists necessarily by virtue of its very nature, and accordingly was always in existence, a being on whom the entire universe must depend for its existence. That Being is God, the First Cause of all that is not Himself. Unless we admit a self-existing First Cause, we must admit the absurd contradiction that things which require a cause for their existence came into being without a cause.

An argument for God's existence appealing to the average man in the constant propagation of the human race. The men and women now on earth came into being through the co-operation of their parents. These in turn derived life from their parents. This process of transmitting life from parents to children goes back in an unbroken line to the first man and woman. For, we know scientifically that human life did not always exist on earth; there must have been a first couple. Whence did these two receive life? The most reasonable answer is that they received it from a superior Being, capable of bringing into existence creatures en-

dowed with the lofty dignity of human nature. Some try to escape this conclusion by asserting (without any shadow of proof) that the first germ of life came to earth from some other planet and from this all other forms of life, human included, developed by evolution. But this would only push the question back further, without solving it. For, how could one explain the origin of life on that other planet, or on a series of planets which communicated it from one to another, without eventually admitting a First Cause, itself uncaused, that gave life to the first living being? It would be just as impossible to have a series of living beings without the first of them having been caused as to have a chain suspended in the air without having anything to support the first link. Even if one holds that most extreme form of the evolutionary theory which asserts that the entire universe developed in the course of many centuries from a vast mass of nebular matter, he must still explain how this nebular matter came into being. In fine, unless we are willing to reject the fundamental principle that every effect must have a cause, we must hold that there is a First Cause, existing from all eternity—and that is God.

### **God's Infinite Wisdom**

Our intelligence informs us further that the Supreme Being is endowed with wisdom immeasurably surpassing that of any human being. For, throughout the universe there are innumerable varieties of creatures, each perfectly formed and perfectly adapted to fulfill its particular function in the scheme of creation. A vast system of constant and harmonious laws governs these myriads of beings, from the greatest to the very least. Even the smallest insect, if examined under a powerful microscope, is revealed as a masterpiece of design and beauty. Each of its tiny organs has been fashioned according to a definite plan, and functions with flawless precision. The same manifestation of perfect orderliness and arrangement is found in every scale of being, up to the majestic constellations that move through the heavens with incredible speed, yet according to precise and

uniform laws, and with exact timing. What conclusion can any sane person reach but that the First Cause must possess infinite wisdom, since He has created a universe so varied in its components, yet so perfectly designed in all its details and so harmonious in its operations?

A simple example will emphasize the absurdity of those who will not admit an intelligent Creator and ascribe the origin of the universe to blind chance. Let us suppose one of these unbelievers finds on the street a watch of fine workmanship, wound and running and keeping perfect time. Then let us suppose that I gravely inform the finder that I am convinced that the watch was made and put together without the aid of any human agent—that by mere chance the springs and wheels and hands and case and crystal assumed the proper shape and size, then by another strange coincidence they assembled themselves in just the right way to form a watch, and finally this watch in some way wound itself. If I attempted seriously to persuade any person with a minimum of intelligence that such an event had taken place, he would naturally conclude that I am insane. Everyone knows that a watch can come into existence only through the skillful and painstaking labor of a trained watchmaker. How then can any sensible person attribute to mere chance the origin of the universe, which is immeasurably more complicated and exact than the best watch ever made by man? How can any honest person fail to perceive that He Who created heaven and earth is infinitely more intelligent than the most brilliant human genius?

### **Objections Answered**

Of course, objections are constantly raised against belief in an all-wise, personal God. The most common is that which is based on the prevalence of evil in the world. Frequently we meet persons who claim that they could have done a better job of the creation of the world by eliminating all evil—poverty, sickness, death, sin. They seem to think that this is a very telling argument against the existence of



an intelligent Creator. It is indeed pitiful when a human being attempts to make his petty intelligence the standard for the Supreme Being to follow. The man who regards the evil in the world as an argument against the wisdom of God is like the small boy who thinks that his parents lack common sense in making him study his lessons. To him the painful effort of study is an evil which a sensible person would shun; he is not aware of the benefits which this inconvenience will bring him. If those who look on physical evils, such as poverty, sickness and death, as incompatible with an all-wise Creator would consider the spiritual benefits men can derive from these human ills, particularly the occasion of practicing patience and courage, they would realize that it is a part of God's wise plan to allow sufferings and trials to befall human beings. As far as moral evil, or sin, is concerned, no charge can be leveled against God for its prevalence in the world, since men themselves produce this type of evil by their deliberate misuse of the great gift of free will. Does it bespeak a lack of intelligence on the part of the Creator if He gives men the power to choose freely either to serve Him or to reject Him, instead of making everyone virtuous without any personal effort?

Sometimes we are asked why so many learned men are atheists. This question is based on the supposition, quite prevalent in modern times, that the only genuine form of learning is proficiency in the physical sciences. Ask the average man today to name some learned men, and ordinarily the list he gives will comprise only those who have a high reputation in the realm of physics or chemistry or medicine or biology. This is a very narrow concept of learning. A man who devotes himself exclusively to the study of what comes within the range of his bodily senses, to the complete neglect of the far nobler metaphysical and spiritual truths of which his intellect is capable, is certainly not learned in the correct sense of the term. It is a well-known fact that those who limit their studies to the physical sciences are frequently found to be below the average in the power to reason closely and to apply properly the rules of logic.

Certainly, when men of this type ignore or reject God, their authority has very little value as an argument for atheism or agnosticism. Indeed, the scientist who refuses to concern himself sincerely with the question of God's existence is violating a fundamental obligation of a scientist—to explain the cause of what he observes. In this connection it should be noted that there is a tendency to exaggerate the number of scientists who are atheists. The truth is that many men of outstanding scientific proficiency are devout believers in a Supreme Being.

Moreover, it is certain that not a few of those persons who deny the existence of God are actuated by pride and the desire to be free from restrictions. It is humiliating for them to feel that they are entirely under the domination of a Supreme Being, and are obliged to conform their actions to His will. Hence, they allow their processes of thought to be influenced by their personal ambitions. That is why many who scorn the idea of God when they enjoy vigorous health turn to Him in humble prayer when they are in danger of death. The present war has verified this on numerous occasions in the case of soldiers facing extreme peril. There is much truth in the saying: "There are no atheists in foxholes."

### **Knowledge of God All-Important**

Every human being needs to possess a knowledge of God, the First Truth. Without this knowledge the human intellect is stunted and warped. However extensive a person's knowledge of material things may be, it is unsatisfying and disconnected unless he acknowledges the existence of a Supreme Being beyond the realm of sense. The facts we learn from the universe are like a message in code. Without a key they are a meaningless jumble, with a key they are clear and connected—and the key is the truth that there is a God. It is not surprising that a world in which so many have rejected God or ceased to concern themselves with Him has gone astray. Indeed, it is to be expected that the decline of belief in God should be followed by a decline in the power

to apply even natural knowledge to the maintenance of culture and civilization and international harmony. When a person's mind is in error regarding the noblest and the most important of all truths, he naturally makes mistakes regarding matters of less significance.

The disasters that have befallen the world in recent times have awakened many to the necessity of regulating and rectifying all human wisdom by belief in God. However, many more must be convinced of the need of accepting this basic truth before we can expect a notable improvement in human affairs. If the post-war world is to be a better world, educators in particular must have sufficient intelligence to realize that they are imparting only a mutilated education unless they point out to their pupils, whether in primary school or in university, that belief in God's existence is just as reasonable as belief in the law of gravity or in the multiplication table. To be education in the proper sense, the training of the young must include the understanding of the solid, logical argument for the existence of an intelligent, personal Creator.

Catholics believe that the knowledge of God obtained by the natural powers of human reason is corroborated and perfected by supernatural revelation. In other words, they believe that God has deigned to teach men, particularly through the preaching of His divine Son, Jesus Christ, many religious truths, some of which can be learned by the natural powers of reason, while others are so sublime that they could never be discovered by man's own intelligence. These revealed truths, according to Catholic belief, are authoritatively proposed to mankind by the Catholic Church. Hence, while those men and women are to be commended who use their intelligence properly to come to the knowledge of the First Truth, they should go further and investigate the reasonableness of the Catholic claims. For, if they discover these claims to be sound and logical, the fruit of their investigation will be an insight into the nature of the Creator such as all the powers of human genius combined could never acquire.

### III. GOD, THE FINAL GOAL

Every human being seeks happiness. In every action we perform, however insignificant, we aim at something regarded as a good; we strive for something which we view as contributing to our wellbeing. Sometimes we err in our choice and seek as a good some object that is not conducive to our true, reasonable happiness. The child is eager to grasp the sharp knife which attracts him by its brightness, for he does not realize that it is liable to injure him. The unfortunate victim of alcoholism craves for drink, regarding the brief satisfaction it affords as compensating the ruin of his health and fortune. However mistaken our evaluation of an object may be, we must necessarily visualize it as some kind of good before we can deliberately seek it.

Many and varied are the ways in which human beings seek happiness. Many strive for riches, stimulated by the anticipation of the comforts and luxuries that wealth can procure. Others devote their efforts to winning positions of authority and of responsibility, craving the honors and the adulation annexed to these offices. Many regard pleasure, particularly sexual gratification, as the principal source of human happiness. A few seek happiness solely in cultural pursuits, such as literary or scientific or artistic studies.

#### **No Perfect Happiness in Earthly Goods**

But, whatever may be regarded as the goal of happiness, no one can be made perfectly happy by anything which the earth provides. However fortunate a person may be in attaining his worldly objectives, there is always something lacking, something else needed to make him fully content. Abundant proofs of this, many of them very tragic, can be found in everyday life. A poor boy sets out with the ambition of becoming a millionaire, convinced that once he has reached

this mark he will be perfectly satisfied. But, if he does eventually become the owner of a million dollars, he must have more; in his desire for greater wealth he is probably less happy than when he earned his first dollar. The statesman who has obtained the office for which he strove so diligently at once starts planning for a higher post, and the fear that he may not win it or that he may not long hold his present position takes away much of the happiness he had anticipated. The man who sought happiness in sensual pleasure is undeceived in a very short time, even though every form of bodily gratification is available to him. It often happens that one who has run the gamut of all the sensual pleasures that life affords is so surfeited and wearied of it all that he commits suicide.

All these facts corroborate a sound psychological principle—that no created object can fully satisfy man's desire for happiness. The reason is to be found in the unlimited range of the goods which the human intellect can conceive as desirable and the corresponding unlimited power of the will to desire whatever the intellect presents to it as conducive to happiness. However abundant the accumulation of created goods a person may possess, these goods are limited, and he realizes that there are other desirable things which he could obtain. This very realization that he has not everything that could contribute to his happiness is an indication that his happiness is not perfect. Even in the case of those exceptional individuals who are entirely content with their present situation in life, the thought that they can enjoy this happiness for only a few years diminishes their joy, so that it becomes less and less, the nearer they come to the grave.

### **God Alone Gives Perfect Happiness**

In a word, man can be made perfectly happy only by some good that is unlimited, or infinite, and endures forever. Now, there is only one good that answers this description, and that is God. He is the only being that is infinitely good and eternal. Consequently, only the possession of God can

make man perfectly happy. This sublime truth, deduced from the very nature of the human soul with its spiritual faculties of intellect and will, was expressed more than fifteen centuries ago by St. Augustine in the words: "The heart of man was made for Thee, O God, and it is restless till it rests in Thee."

To enjoy perfect happiness, man must possess God forever. In other words, if we are to suppose it possible for human beings to reach the stage of complete contentment, without any admixture of anxiety or regret or longing, for which their souls crave, we must conclude that when the body of man dies, his soul continues to live, and that for all eternity it can possess God, the infinite good, in some way that will entirely satisfy its desire for perfect happiness.

Can we prove that this supposition is a reality? Can we prove that man's soul survives the ravages of death and can attain to the everlasting possession of God in a manner that will render it perfectly happy? We can give arguments to prove this adequately. In the first place, the wise and good Creator would not have put into every human soul so strong and persistent a craving for perfect happiness without also providing the means whereby it could be satisfied. Add to this the fact that the soul of man is capable of spiritual actions. It can elicit abstract ideas and form concepts of purely immaterial things; hence, it must itself be a spiritual substance, not dependent for its being on material things. Consequently, the soul's departure from the material body does not cause its destruction; once it is brought into existence by the creative hand of God, its very nature demands that it exist forever. And when freed from the body, the soul naturally tends to return to its Creator.

It is, therefore, a truth based on arguments of sound reason that every human being is destined to find complete happiness in the possession of God, the sovereign Good, in the life beyond the grave. From this it does not follow that the quest for happiness on earth is wrong. Men may seek the goods of this life—temporal success, honors, pleasures—within the bounds of moderation. But ever and always they

must remember that earthly happiness is not their final goal. It is but a shadow of the happiness which can be theirs in a short time. The things which appear desirable in the present life are truly good only if they help man toward the attainment of God; they are evil if they constitute an impediment to the everlasting union of the soul with its Creator.

### **Folly and Wisdom**

Because in our times so many men and women have denied or disregarded the important fact that the final goal of human life is happiness in the world to come, and have concentrated their desires and efforts on the gaining of what this world offers, sorrow and strife have filled the earth. We know from our own observation that in the United States there are millions of persons who never give a thought to the question of a future life, but spend their days in a feverish striving for money or power or pleasure. Little wonder that they are discontented and unhappy, for even if they attain the full measure of success in their efforts, the craving for genuine happiness rooted in the depths of their souls remains unsatisfied. But, far from seeking the only Goal that can bring peace to the human heart, they try to gratify their earthly desires still more, with the unreasonable hope that full contentment can still be found in creature comforts. Thus they become so unreasonable in pursuing their unrestrained ambitions that they entirely disregard the rights of others, like wild beasts stalking their prey. This is the source of the many evils we have witnessed in recent times—selfishness and injustice, labor troubles and political dishonesty, poverty and oppression, war and world-wide destruction.

On the other hand, those who regulate their lives by the principle that God is the ultimate goal of true happiness, are not overwhelmed with sorrow if their efforts toward worldly success result in failure. If they must spend their days in poverty and suffering; never rising above a humble and obscure station in life, they are not disheartened, for they know

that earthly happiness is brief and uncertain, and that the very best things the present life can give are mere trifles compared to the immeasurable and unending bliss they expect beyond the grave. In fact, those who adopt this attitude—which is the only sane philosophy of life—actually enjoy more real happiness in the most acute privations than those who have acquired all that life can give but have no concern or hope for the eternal possession of God.

### **What Eternal Happiness Means**

When we say that man is destined to the possession of God, we mean that every one has the opportunity of satisfying his desire for perfect happiness by an everlasting union with the Creator through acts of knowledge and love. However, it depends on each individual's free choice whether or not he will reach this goal. It stands to reason that to merit this supreme happiness man must be faithful to God in the course of his earthly life. It is just that God should confer everlasting bliss on those who have chosen Him as their final goal and have striven to serve Him loyally and constantly. It is equally just that He should refuse this unalloyed happiness to those who have not sought Him but have violated His laws and tried to find happiness in the perishable things of earth.

Our own reason by its natural powers could demonstrate all that we have considered so far about God as our Final Goal. The Christian revelation, as expounded and interpreted by the Catholic Church corroborates the findings of reason and throws still more light on this subject. Most emphatically does this divine message assert that every human soul has been created to enjoy God forever in the life beyond the grave. Furthermore, divine revelation teaches that the happiness to which we are all destined in the world to come consists in the direct intellectual perception of the grandeur and beauty of God's own nature, accompanied by ecstatic love and unbounded spiritual joy. This glorious destiny is known as the beatific vision, or the supernatural



happiness of heaven. Even if we had only probability that we are destined to this eternity of bliss, common sense would dictate that we employ every power of our being toward its attainment. But, we have more than probability to assure us—we have the infallible testimony of God's own word.

### **Life's Purpose**

In the deductions of sound reason and the teachings of the Catholic Church we find the only logical solution to the problem of human life, the only satisfactory answer to the question: "What is the purpose of my life?" If you ask the little Catholic child who has studied the first lesson of the catechism: "Why did God make you?" his reply will contain more profound wisdom than can be found in all the scientific books ever written: "God made me to know Him, to love Him and to serve Him in this life, and to be happy with Him forever in the next."

If men would acknowledge God as their Final Goal and direct their lives accordingly, we should soon have a far more contented and peaceful world. Discord and jealousy would disappear, men and women would be satisfied with a moderate share of life's possessions and comforts, the inordinate craving for wealth and honors and pleasures would cease, and justice and charity would bind men into a world-wide brotherhood, seeking in unity and concord the everlasting happiness for which they were created. We cannot, indeed, expect that all human beings without exception will conform their lives and their conduct to the standard of right reason. As long as men dwell on earth, some will do wrong. But perhaps from the misfortunes that have recently befallen the human race because so many have unreasonably sought happiness in earthly possessions, a goodly number of those who have hitherto lived for the present life alone will learn to direct their desires and activities toward Him Who is the only object that can fully satisfy the cravings of the human heart—the Final Goal of life, Almighty God.

#### **IV. GOD, THE SUPREME LAWGIVER**

In the previous chapter, where it was demonstrated that man is destined to possess God for all eternity as the Final Goal of his existence, it was also pointed out that God, in His justice, will bestow everlasting happiness only on those who serve Him faithfully and obey His commands. Only those have a right to unending bliss in the intimate company of their Creator who do good and avoid evil. Now, the question naturally arises: "How shall we know what is good and what is evil?"

As in the case of the other fundamental questions we have considered, our own intelligence is the first guide in the solution of the problem of morality. Sometimes we meet men and women who claim that morality is a matter of mere convention, that the distinction between right and wrong is based only on arbitrary custom and tradition. Now, any intelligent person who will study the question honestly will perceive that there is a clear distinction between good and evil, right and wrong in human actions—a distinction that is not based on custom or man's free choice, but is inherent in the actions themselves. Anyone who holds that morality is a purely arbitrary, conventional affair, must be prepared to admit that at some future time the civil laws may punish people for staying sober and reward those who pass their days in a drunken stupor.

#### **Reason Declares Right and Wrong**

Our reason assures us that we can properly apply the terms "good" and "bad" to the activities of the things we employ in daily life. An ax is good if it is sharp and able to cut wood properly; it is useless, or bad, if it does not cut as it was made to do. A tree is good if it produces sweet and sound fruit; it is bad if it cannot yield fruit or if its

fruit is stunted and sour. In a word, an action is good if it is in accordance with the nature of the agent that performs it and is adapted to the purpose of that agent; an action is bad if it is at variance with the nature of the agent from which it proceeds, or is unsuited to the purpose for which this agent was made.

If we apply this principle to human actions we see that a person performs a good action when he does something that is in harmony with his human nature and is adapted to the purpose of human life, whereas he performs a bad action when he does something unbecoming his nature or tending to frustrate the purpose for which he was created. Thus, man by his very nature is a social being; he needs the company of other human beings to satisfy his needs and to live his life properly. Hence, it is wrong to lie or to steal, because such actions disrupt the social order, but it is good to be just and kind because such actions foster the friendship and trust that unite the members of society. Again, man's nature is composed of body and soul, and reason demands that the material body be subject to the guidance and direction of the spiritual, intellectual soul. For this reason a person does wrong when he deliberately becomes intoxicated, for he then inverts the order prescribed by nature, and allows his body with its immoderate craving to dominate the soul and to deprive it of its exalted prerogative of reason. Again, the sexual faculties have for their primary purpose the propagation of the human race. When a person uses his reproductive organs in accordance with this primary purpose—that is, in lawful marriage and in the manner ordained by nature—he is performing a good deed; but if he uses them in a manner opposed to this primary purpose, he is acting at variance with his human nature, he is performing an evil deed for his own gratification.

### **Man's Chief Duty**

Certainly, it is in accordance with man's nature and purpose that he show honor and love for God. For he depends entirely on God for his existence, from God he has received

everything he possesses, to God he tends as the Final Goal of his life. His nature requires that he testify his gratitude and homage to his Creator by acts of his intellect and will, the faculties which are proper to him as a reasonable creature. In other words, it is in accordance with man's nature and destiny, it is morally good, to practice religion, just as it is good to treat his fellow men justly and to live according to the rules of temperance. On the other hand, it is out of harmony with human nature, it is evil, for a man to neglect the worship and love of God. The man who boasts that he is leading a good life, just because he is temperate and honest and faithful to his wife, but neglects religion, is sadly deceiving himself. Although he may be living up to the requirements of his nature as far as his conduct toward himself and his fellow men is concerned, he is failing in his most fundamental duty—the duty of adoring his Maker, the One from Whom he received his very being. He may be a good neighbor and a loyal citizen and a devoted husband, but he is a disloyal and ungrateful creature. He is violating the basic norm of morality by acting at variance with his nature and in a manner unsuited to the final purpose for which he was created, everlasting happiness with God.

### **The Natural Law**

The rules of right and wrong which human reason can perceive by its own powers are known as the natural law. When man does good and avoids evil in accordance with the natural law, he is really obeying God, since he is conforming his actions to his nature as God fashioned it and to the destiny which God assigned him. The judgment which the intellect of man passes when confronted with a question of right and wrong is called conscience. Some persons have the idea that conscience is merely an instinct—a feeling that something is right or wrong. This is a mistaken notion. Conscience is an act of logical reasoning, and the less we allow sentiment and feeling to enter into our discernment of good and evil, the greater is the probability that we shall

judge correctly. Everyone has the duty to form a correct conscience—that is, to find out honestly what is right and wrong in the moral problems he encounters—and to regulate his conduct according to this knowledge.

No one in possession of intelligence can be inculpably ignorant of the fundamental obligations prescribed by the natural law, such as the duty to be honest and temperate and obedient to authority, and to avoid theft and murder. In regard to certain more intricate problems one might be in doubt, and could even in all sincerity judge something to be lawful which in reality is sinful. Catholics believe that God has manifested the rules of right and wrong in divine revelation—particularly in the ten commandments—in order to prevent human judgment from failing in these important matters. It is also a doctrine of the Catholic faith that God has imposed on men certain obligations over and above the natural law, such as the duty to receive Baptism. These constitute the positive law of God. Finally, Catholics hold that Christ has committed to the Catholic Church the function of interpreting authoritatively both the natural law and the positive law of God, so that men may be guided more securely in their inquiry as to what is morally right and wrong.

### **Crime in America**

Recent years have witnessed an alarming prevalence of immorality, particularly in the United States. There has been a notable increase of sex offenses and of crimes of violence, such as murder and robbery. Our sense of decency is shocked at the drunkenness and the obscene shows and the pornographic literature that are so common in our land today. The most tragic feature of this moral decline is the fact that so many young people, mere boys and girls, have thrown aside all regard for the laws of morality. For example, on September 16, 1943, Mr. J. Edgar Hoover, head of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, reported that in the first part of the year the arrests of girls under 21 for drunkenness, vagrancy and disorderly conduct had increased 89.5

per cent over those of the same period of 1942. (*The New York Times*, September 17, 1943.)

The explanation of this deplorable state of affairs is quite simple. When people neglect the most fundamental duty of the natural law, their primary obligation as reasonable beings—that is, the worship of God—they naturally throw aside the other obligations also. It is true, there are some persons who practice no religion, yet observe their duties toward their fellow men and lead temperate, clean lives. But such persons are the exception. The average person will fail in other matters if he fails in his obligations to his Creator. It is pathetic to realize that there are educators who believe that they can instill the principles of morality into the young without any reference to God. They glorify the beauty of virtue, they emphasize the good sportsmanship of giving others their rights, they enlarge on the feeling of contentment that follows good deeds. But in the case of the average individual, confronted with a moral obligation entailing sacrifice to his own convenience, all these motives fail. It is a pity that those who try to make the Golden Rule the supreme norm of right and wrong do not realize that this Rule has very little binding force unless it is regarded as coming from a Supreme Ruler. In other words, men, as a whole, are not willing to obey the second of the great commandments: "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" unless they are first willing to obey the one that precedes it: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart."

### **The World Needs God's Law**

If we are to have any reasonable hope for a post-war world in which there will be more peace and concord among men, more honesty and temperance and moral decency than were found in the world that involved us in our present plight, we must conscientiously acknowledge and fulfill our duties toward God, our Supreme Lawgiver, and do our best to induce other men and women to do the same. Civil legislation will never make the world moral. We may increase

our police force and enlarge our jails, but there will be no real improvement in morality unless men and women are willing to lead good lives. However, they will not be willing to lead good lives unless they are deeply conscious of their duties toward God, and are convinced that it is primarily because of Him that they must be honest and kindly toward their neighbors and obedient to the laws of the land.

It is important to remember, in anticipating post-war problems, that the laws of morality bind nations as well as individuals. Just as the natural law forbids a private citizen to steal another man's watch, so it forbids a government to steal a portion of another country's territory. Just as an individual is bound to live up to the terms of a contract he made with a tradesman or builder, so a country must observe the obligations of the treaty it makes with another nation. Moreover, just as the average person will not consistently fulfill his obligations toward his fellow men unless he is faithful to his religious duties toward God, so the rulers of a country will not perform properly their duties toward their subjects and toward other governments unless they acknowledge their duties toward Him Who rules all nations, the King of kings. The world-wide catastrophe that we have witnessed in our times arose chiefly from the rejection of God by those who governed their fellow men. They regarded themselves as the supreme arbiters of right and wrong, they scorned the idea that they were subject to a higher law, and accepted the principle that might makes right. It is to be hoped that those who gather around the peace-table after this war will be guided in their planning for the future set-up of the world by the conviction that the rulers of nations must obey the law of the Ruler of heaven and earth. If the atheistic policy that has been followed by many governments in recent years is continued, all that we can expect in the near future is another and a more horrible war.

The reform of society must begin with the reform of individuals. A nation can be no more religious than are its individual citizens. There never was a time in the world's history when individuals had so grave an obligation as they

have today to be faithful to God for the upbuilding of society. Every individual, however humble his state in life, can do something toward bringing the world back to God. We must all keep before our mind the fundamental principles of human life—that our intellect must accept God as the First Truth, that our will in its quest for happiness must seek God, the Final Goal, that our actions must conform to the commandments of God, the Supreme Lawgiver.

The men and women of the post-war world must accept these principles if human society is to survive. We can do our part, each one of us, toward a spiritual renaissance of mankind by spreading far and wide the hopeful message that in God can be found the truth and the happiness and the guidance that are needed for the making of a better world.









