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 Knowing God Through Natural Revelation, Reason, and Faith

God has created us with both the desire and the capacity to know him.
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Introductory Lesson
(for first day of class)

INSTRUCTION

- Give each student a syllabus for the course and review it with the class. This should include the overall goals of the course and the breakdown of the content by semester, quarter, and week of instruction. It should include major projects and tests.
- Explain how the lessons of this text will be taught. Explain to the students the cycle of instructional lessons, review lesson, and test day.
- Give each student an instructional policy for this class and go over it with them. The instructional policies are your classroom behavior and academic policies, including policies for late work, missing work, academic honesty, neatness, and so on.
- Pass out student texts and Bibles, and any other materials you are providing.
- If you wish students to read ahead, present the Objectives of tomorrow’s first instructional lesson, and let them begin the Homework Assignment if any time remains.

HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT

- Read Chapter 1 through “Wisdom 13: 1–9” (p. 5)

FOCUS QUESTIONS

- According to the Catechism, no. 33, what are some of the signs by which a person can perceive he or she possesses a spiritual soul? They include openness to truth and beauty, a sense of moral goodness, freedom, the voice of conscience, and longing for the infinite and for happiness.

GUIDED EXERCISE

Have each student work with a partner to read Supplementary Reading 1 (p. 23) and then write a bullet point summary of what St. Paul teaches in regard to (1) a person’s ability to know God through reason and (2) the consequences of his or her refusal to see God.

- Since the creation of the world, God’s invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, can be clearly perceived in the things that have been made.
- Because they did not acknowledge God, people became futile in their thinking, worshiped idols, and lived lives of sexual impurity.

FOCUS QUESTIONS

- What inborn capacity do human beings possess that no other creature in material creation has? They have an inborn capacity to know God and to be in communion with him.
Knowing God through Reason
(pp. 2–5)

LESSON OBJECTIVES
- Natural religion
- Fundamental ways of knowing God

BASIC QUESTIONS
- What is natural religion?
- What are the two fundamental ways of knowing God?

KEY IDEAS
- Each human being is born with a natural desire for God, which is answered in the natural capacity to know God through reason.
- The fundamental ways to know God are through reason and Revelation.

ANTICIPATORY SET
Incorporate the passage from the Book of Wisdom (p. 5) into the class’s opening prayer, and then lead a class discussion using the following question:
- What does this passage reveal about natural knowledge of God, that is, knowledge anyone can obtain through reason and experience?

People ought to be able to see God through the things he made rather than see created things as gods. Idolatry is perhaps understandable because people are distracted by the power and beauty of creation, but idolatry is foolish and inexcusable because, if men can perceive the power and beauty of created things, they should also be able to perceive the much greater power and beauty of the God who created them.

FOCUS QUESTIONS
- What is the natural desire for God?
  Each person has this yearning for God in his or her human nature.
- How does Pope Benedict XVI see the natural desire for God evident in Plato?
  Beauty causes a certain kind of suffering — a nostalgia and longing — in each person that keeps him or her from being satisfied with ordinary life.
- How does St. Augustine describe man’s natural desire for God?
  “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.”
FOCUS QUESTIONS

- What is the supernatural counterpart to a person’s natural desire for God? It is God’s desire for us.
- What is God’s supernatural desire for each person, and what is the result of this desire? God wants people to live in communion with him, so he reaches out and enables them to find him.
- What does it mean to say each person is — by nature and by vocation — a religious being? People come from God and seek and desire God.
- What are the two ways one can come to know God? One can know God through Revelation and human reason.
- What is the overarching subject of the textbook? Faith and reason work together to help understand God’s Revelation.
- Even without the help of Divine Revelation, what can human reason lead a person to realize about God? Human reason can lead one to realize God exists. It can even tell us some about his divine nature.
- According to the Catechism, no. 31, what is the nature of the proofs reason can give in regard to God’s existence? They are proofs for the existence of God not in the sense of proofs in the natural sciences but in the sense of “converging and convincing arguments.”
- What did the pagan philosophers Plato and Aristotle conclude about God? Using reason alone, they concluded there must be one god.

KNOWING GOD THROUGH REASON

Human reason, even without God’s Revelation, can lead us to realize that God exists. It can even tell us something about his divine nature.

**CREATED IN GOD’S IMAGE AND CALLED TO KNOW AND LOVE HIM, THE PERSON WHO SEeks GOD discovers certain ways of coming to know him. These are also called proofs for the existence of God, not in the sense of proofs in the natural sciences, but rather in the sense of “converging and convincing arguments,” which allow us to attain certainty about the truth. (CCC 31)**

In his Epistle to the Romans, St. Paul wrote that creation itself shows us there is a God and that he is all-powerful. “Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made.” Even those who have never heard the Gospel or read Scripture can arrive at this knowledge by the use of reason. They can also know something about what God demands of them morally.

**FOR THE WRATH OF GOD IS REVEALED FROM HEAVEN AGAINST ALL UNGODLINESS AND WICKEDNESS OF MEN WHO BY THEIR WICKEDNESS SUPPRESS THE TRUTH. FOR WHAT CAN BE KNOWN ABOUT GOD IS Plain TO THEM, BECAUSE GOD HAS SHOWN IT TO THEM. (ROM 1:18-19)**

However, even without the Revelation of Scripture and the Church to guide us, everyone can still come to know of God’s existence. Throughout history and even before the time of Christ, many of the greatest thinkers of the world were able to reach this conclusion. Pre-Christian philosophers like Plato and Aristotle argued from reason alone that there must be a god. Aristotle concluded that there must be one single First Cause of everything, and that this First Cause must be perfect and eternal. Although he lived in a polytheistic culture—that is, one that believed in many gods—Aristotle argued that there can only be one First Cause.

**In reason, Aristotle had discovered the truth of God’s existence. He also knew that God must be eternal and perfect, and that there is only one true God. In the thirteenth century, St. Thomas Aquinas clarified and extended Aristotle’s arguments (see sidebar, “St. Thomas Aquinas and the ‘Five Ways’”). Each person, by nature and by vocation, is a religious being. We come from God, and we seek and desire God; thus, we will not live a true human life if we do not choose freely to live in this bond with God. Every person has been created to live in communion with God, and ultimate happiness can only be found in him.**

One can arrive at the knowledge of the existence of God in two ways: by the light of reason and by the grace of faith. By using reason (natural knowledge), and by listening to the message of creation, and to the promptings of conscience, we can be certain that there is a God. Sacred Scripture describes four characteristics of our knowledge of God. It is mediatrix, or received through created things or things by other persons; natural, because it is reached through the light of the intellect; universal, in that it is accessible to all people; certain, since God’s creation clearly leads us to the Creator; and easy to attain, because it requires only the natural use of reason.

FOCUS QUESTIONS

- **What is Aristotle’s First Cause?** Despite his polytheistic culture, Aristotle reached the philosophical conclusion there is one god.
- **What attributes of God did Aristotle discern by reason?** He reasoned God must be eternal and perfect.
- **What did St. Thomas Aquinas do with Aristotle’s arguments about God?** He clarified and extended them in the thirteenth century.