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God Reaches Out to Us in Many Ways

INTRODUCTION

In chapter 1 we introduced the young people to the concept of the human search for meaning. At the heart of that search is the search for God and the longing deep within the human heart that cannot be satisfied except in God. Now in chapter 2 we examine the question of belief in God. The chapter is developed under five major headings:

- ⊙ **ATTEND AND REFLECT:** Is it reasonable to believe in God?
- ⊙ **HEAR THE STORY:** The heavens proclaim the glory of God
- ⊙ **EMBRACE THE VISION:** We can begin to know God through human reasoning
- ⊙ **THINK IT THROUGH:** Consider other arguments for God's existence
- ⊙ **JUDGE AND ACT** (*Activities and exercises that encourage the young people to integrate what they have learned in the chapter into their daily lives*)

Theological Background for the Teacher

THE QUESTION OF GOD'S EXISTENCE

We begin chapter 2 by examining the question of belief. Is it possible to believe in a reality (someone or something) that is not material? Do we need scientific proof that something or someone exists before we can believe in it? Whether or not we can ever prove God's existence in a manner that is acceptable to science is open to debate; but even if we could, what purpose would it serve? And exactly what would it prove? Rather, 'the existence of God is not a problem to be solved, but a mystery to be lived' (Gabriel Marcel, 1889–1973).

PATHWAYS TO GOD

We seek to help the young people to come to know God more deeply and to develop their relationship with him, who has made himself known to us as a God of love, present to each one of us more intimately than even those with whom we have our closest relationships. In this and the following chapters we try to encourage the young people to respond to God's presence in their lives.

We introduce the young people to the three paths by which people can come to know God: creation, the human person and Divine Revelation. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states:

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 'ways' of approaching God from creation have a twofold point of departure: the physical world and the human person.

— CCC, no. 31

By natural reason man can come to know God with certainty, on the basis of his works. But there is another order of knowledge, which man cannot possibly arrive at by his own powers: the order of divine Revelation. Through an utterly free decision, God has revealed himself and given himself to man. This he does by revealing the mystery, his plan of loving goodness, formed from all eternity in Christ, for the benefit of all men. God has fully revealed this plan by sending his beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit.

— CCC, no. 50

We explore how we can come to know God in the beauty and grandeur of the created world, as well as through human reasoning.

Throughout their history, human beings have understood the beauty and grandeur of the universe, the order and purpose of all created things, from inanimate objects to human beings, as pointing

toward the existence of a Creator who is wise and good. Everything has a beginning and an end. This points to an eternal Creator who has neither beginning nor end. Some students may raise a question about atheists. For the Church's response to atheism, see CCC, nos. 2123–2126, 2128, 2140.

Human beings, with all their potential for good, their thrust toward freedom and their longing for fulfillment and happiness, are in themselves signs of the immortality of the human soul. The restlessness of human beings and their constant search for 'more' point toward their origins in God, who alone can fulfill their deepest desires and yearnings.

The world, and man, attest that they contain within themselves neither their first principle nor their final end, but rather that they participate in Being itself, which alone is without origin or end. Thus, in different ways, man can come to know that there is a reality which is the first cause and final end of all things, a reality 'that everyone calls God'.

— CCC, no. 34, with quotation from St. Thomas Aquinas

In our discussion of this topic we introduce the young people to the five proofs of St. Thomas Aquinas and to the arguments of philosophers and thinkers who point to the very existence of evil, and human repugnance to evil, and the desire and effort to resolve it as itself pointing to the existence of God.

ADDITIONAL BACKGROUND READING

Catechism of the Catholic Church, nos. 31–43, 153–159, 302–314; *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults*, 1–9, 56–57.

CHAPTER OUTCOMES

See general note on page 18 of this resource.

Learning Outcomes

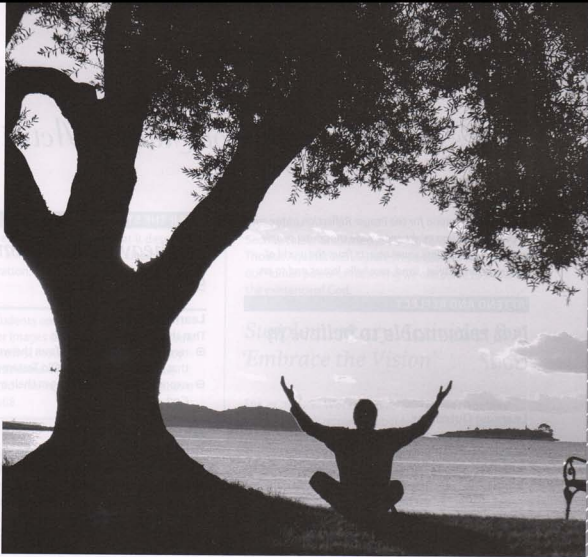
As a result of studying this chapter and exploring the issues raised, the young people should be able to:

- explain what it means to say that a person has 'faith';
- articulate why they believe in God and how their belief affects their lives;
- recognize images of God from the world of nature that are presented in the Old Testament;
- express in words and images their own images for God;
- know the story of St. Thomas Aquinas and explain his five proofs for the existence of God;
- understand the argument that the goodness of human beings reveals something of the goodness of God;
- understand the argument that we can recognize God in the depth of things;
- understand the concept of transcendence.

Faith-formation Outcomes

As a result of studying this chapter and exploring the issues raised, the young people should also:

- have reaffirmed their belief in God and his existence;
- be open to seeing the power and wonder of God in the created universe;
- through the use of their own intellect and reason, develop a deeper confidence in their belief in the existence of God;
- recognize the goodness they see in the lives of human beings as pointers toward the goodness of God;
- have an increased awareness of the presence of God in their own lives and of how they can respond to that presence.



Teacher Reflection

The Presence of God

I see his blood upon the rose,
And in the stars the glory of his eyes;
His body gleams amid eternal snows,
His tears fall from the skies.
I see his face in every flower;
The thunder and the singing of the birds
Are but his voice; and, carved by his power,
Rocks are his written words.

All pathways by his feet are worn;
His strong heart stirs the ever-beating sea;
His crown of thorns is twined with every thorn;
His Cross is every tree.

Notes and Guidelines for Student Activities

Note: In preparation for the Prayer Reflection at the end of the chapter you might encourage the young people to bring into the class some objects from the world of nature: stones, twigs, sand, seashells, leaves and so on.

ATTEND AND REFLECT

Is it reasonable to believe in God?

Learning Outcomes

That the young people would:

- ⊙ explain what it means to say that a person has 'faith';
- ⊙ articulate why they believe in God and how their belief affects their lives.

Faith-formation Outcome

That the young people would also:

- ⊙ have reaffirmed their belief in God and his existence.

Overview

Chapter 2 begins by exploring the nature of faith, leading on to a discussion of what it means to have faith in God.

Supplementary Activity for 'Attend and Reflect'

Vox Pop

You might invite the young people to conduct a vox pop that asks the question: 'Do you believe in God? Why?/Why not?'

(See 'Student Activity Tool Kit', page 273 of this resource, for instructions on conducting vox pops.)

HEAR THE STORY

The heavens proclaim the glory of God

Learning Outcomes

That the young people would:

- ⊙ recognize images of God from the world of nature that are presented in the Old Testament;
- ⊙ express in words and images their own images for God.

Faith-formation Outcome

That the young people would also:

- ⊙ be open to seeing the power and wonder of God in the created universe.

Overview

Section two, 'Hear the Story', focuses on the Revelation of God in the natural world. It explores particularly how the Old Testament authors used many elements of the natural world to describe some of the attributes of God.

Supplementary Activities for 'Hear the Story'

Having explored the various ways in which we can come to know and experience the presence of God in the world, it is important that the young people go a step further and actually come to know and experience more deeply for themselves God's presence in their lives. Sometimes we may not recognize that God is present in our experiences. The exercises in **Worksheet 1: 'God in Our World'** (page 48 of this resource) seek to enhance the students' awareness of God's presence in everyday life as well as in people's creativity.

The diary exercise in **Worksheet 2: 'A View from Apollo 8'** (page 49 of this resource) provides the young people with an opportunity to deepen further their awareness of the beauty of the earth. The

deeper this awareness is, the more likely they will be to regard the earth with the awe that it deserves. This in turn will lead them to see more clearly God's presence in creation.

Teacher Tip: Students could use the Internet to search NASA for images of Earth from space or look at footage of the first moon-landing in 1969. They could also look at some of the photographs that Frank Borman took during his voyage in the *Apollo 8* spacecraft in 1968.

Worksheet 3: 'Images of God in the Bible' (page 51 of this resource) invites the young people to look carefully at some of the biblical references quoted in chapter 2 in order to identify images of God in the Bible.

Group Project

Invite the young people to make a collection of photographs and pictures that illustrate the wonders of creation. They could present the images as a poster collage or PowerPoint display and write a commentary to explain their meaning.

EMBRACE THE VISION

We can begin to know God through human reasoning

Learning Outcome

That the young people would:

- know the story of St. Thomas Aquinas and explain his five proofs for the existence of God.

Faith-formation Outcome

That the young people would also:

- through the use of their own intellect and reason, develop a deeper confidence in their belief in the existence of God.

Overview

Section three, 'Embrace the Vision', tells the story of St. Thomas Aquinas and explores his argument that through our human power of reasoning we can come to know of the existence of God.

Supplementary Activities for 'Embrace the Vision'

The exercise in **Worksheet 4: 'St. Thomas Aquinas'** (page 53 of this resource) provides the young people with an opportunity to revise what they have learned about Aquinas and his five proofs for the existence of God.

Worksheet 5: 'St. Thomas Aquinas in the Spotlight' (page 55 of this resource) provides role-cards to be photocopied and cut out for use in an 'In the Spotlight' activity. (See the general instructions for 'In the Spotlight' activities in the 'Student Activity Tool Kit', page 273 of this resource.)

Divide the class into five groups. Select five volunteers to play the role of Thomas Aquinas.

Assign one 'Thomas' to each group and one of Thomas' arguments for the existence of God to each volunteer, who will argue his proofs before that group.

Invite discussion and then, as time permits, have the volunteers playing the role of St. Thomas move from group to group.

At the end of the activity, facilitate some further class discussion with questions such as:

- What argument do you find most convincing? Why?
- Could you think of other reasons or evidence to convince someone about the existence of God?

THINK IT THROUGH

Consider other arguments for God's existence

Learning Outcomes

That the young people would:

- ⊙ understand the argument that the goodness of human beings reveals something of the goodness of God;
- ⊙ understand the argument that we can recognize God in the depth of things;
- ⊙ understand the concept of transcendence.

Faith-formation Outcome

That the young people would also:

- ⊙ recognize the goodness they see in the lives of human beings as pointers toward the goodness of God.

Overview

In section four, 'Think It Through', the young people explore how we can come to meet God in the depth of created things, especially in human beings. In the gentleness of a parent's touch, in the generosity of a neighbor's helping hand, in the smile on a baby's face, we can see the presence of God.

Supplementary Activities for 'Think It Through'

The story in **Worksheet 6: 'Meeting God'** (page 56 of this resource) explores the presence of God in human beings.

Worksheet 7: 'The Human Response to Evil' (page 57 of this resource) invites the young people to consider their personal response to right and wrong, leading to an awareness of the human response to evil.

JUDGE AND ACT

Faith-formation Outcome

That the young people would:

- ⊙ have an increased awareness of the presence of God in their own lives and of how they can respond to that presence.

Overview

In section five, 'Judge and Act', we introduce the young people to Katharine Drexel as an example of someone who paid attention to what God was saying to her in the ordinary events of her life. We encourage the young people to reflect on what God is saying to them now in their lives.

Supplementary Activities for 'Judge and Act'

Note: You might choose to read the story in Worksheet 8 as an alternative or in addition to that of St. Katharine Drexel (page 37 of students' text), especially if you wish to offer your students material reflecting the African-American/Black cultural family within the Church in the United States.

Worksheet 8: 'Divine Presence in Aztec Culture and Tradition' (page 59 of this resource) explains the concept of *flor y canto* (flower and song) and uses the account of Our Lady's apparition to St. Juan Diego, a Nahuatl (Aztec) Indian convert to Christianity, to illustrate how the Nahuatl people experience God's presence in their daily lives.

Directives for the Prayer Reflection at the end of the chapter

Begin the Reflection by encouraging the young people to form a circle around the items they have gathered. They should spend some time in silence looking at these items so as to feel a sense of wonder at the great things that God has created.

NAME: _____

CLASS: _____

Then, those young people who would like to, might tell the others in the group what it is that most reminds them of God, for example:

'When I see a beautiful flower, it reminds me of the wonderful work of creation and the amazing beauty of God the Creator.'

'When I see a parent taking care of their infant, it reminds me of the unconditional love God has for all humanity.'

For the reading of Psalm 8, you might choose to allow the young people to read it, line by line, going around the circle in turn. If they wish, they could add in their own phrases or words to reflect their personal response to the sentiments being expressed.

Additional Prayer Suggestion

Scripture Reflection

(See instructions for the use of doodling in prayer in the 'Student Activity Tool Kit', page 274 of this resource.)

Use the following Psalm verse to engage the young people in prayer:

**The LORD is my
shepherd, I shall
not want.**

PSALM 23:1

You could introduce today's prayer with these or similar words: 'God our Creator, we know that you are always with us. We thank you for your constant, caring presence.'

After the young people have heard the prayer a number of times, and before they begin to doodle, ask them to imagine God caring for each one of them individually as a shepherd cares for his sheep.

NAME: _____

God in Our World

Choose **one** of the following activities.

1. Look through various newspapers and magazines for pictures or photographs or images that give you a sense of God present in our world. Then choose one of these and, on the lines below, explain your choice in a few sentences and say how it links with your experience of God present in your own life.

Or

2. Choose something that a poet or author or musician has produced which you think communicates a sense of God. Explain your choice.

NAME: _____

Images of God in the Bible

A View from Apollo 8

With a partner, read these verses in chapters 4 and 5 together.

1. What does this text say about God?

2. Identify the names of people that were used to describe God.

Imagine you were one of the three astronauts on board *Apollo 8* on Christmas Eve 1968. Complete your diary entry for that day, describing what happened and how you feel about it.



December 24, 1968

NAME: _____

Images of God in the Bible

St. Thomas Aquinas

With a partner, find these texts in chapter 2 and answer:

1. What does this text say about God?
2. Identify the image or images that most appeal to you and say why.

Romans 1:20

1. _____

2. _____

Psalms 23:1–3

1. _____

2. _____

Psalms 19:1–4

1. _____

2. _____

Psalms 18:2

1. _____

2. _____

Psalms 29:7–8

1. _____

2. _____

Deuteronomy 32:11

1. _____

2. _____

NAME: _____

St. Thomas Aquinas

In the Spotlight



Using the information provided in section three of this chapter, 'Embrace The Vision', complete the following fact-file on St. Thomas Aquinas and explain in your own words his five proofs for the existence of God.

Name	Thomas Aquinas
Year of birth:	
Place of birth:	
Religious order to which he belonged:	
His great text:	

