

St. Leo the Great RICA for Teens

Beginning to Understand God

INTRODUCTION

This week's study focuses on assisting the students and parents come to a proper understanding of what and who God is. This is an important lesson in that Christians, and especially Catholics, have not presented a convincing apologetic for many years related to this foundational subject. That being said, Catholicism has a rich intellectual tradition that sets reality and our relationships in its proper order when accessed and made available to the People of God.

The prevailing attitude(s) in society is that one god is just as good as another and that there is no need to make distinctions among them. But that is absurd. The very definition of God, given by S. Anselm, is "that which nothing greater can be conceived." He also argued that this being, God, must exist in the mind; even in the mind of the person who denies the existence of God. To have a plethora of gods violates the *Principal of Non-contradiction*.

This lesson examines those attributes that are necessary for a being to be a God. It begins through the use of reason on the part of the students and parents and then clarified by the instructor.

All other discussions are predicated on understanding that:

1. God exists
2. God is an exclusive Being
3. God is intelligible
4. God is knowable
5. God is a community of persons

When considering the attributes of God, it is natural for the parents and students to pick those that most directly affect them i.e., forgiveness, mercy, love, etc. That being said, this lesson is aimed at discovering those attributes that are necessary for a god to be God whether creation exists or not. Considering the prevailing cultural theme or narcissism, one would fully expect the parents and students to only be able to come up with those qualities that suit themselves thus the instructor will need to guide them through it.

This session is fast paced but is critical for everyone to move forward. It relies on a reason with a few references to Sacred Scripture and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. It is important to remember that moderns place no faith in the accuracy or testimony of Sacred Scripture and even the Magisterium. These arguments have not been discussed or developed yet. Therefore, discussions and reason are the primary tools of our trade for this session.

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CATECHIST PREPARATION

SCRIPTURE TEXT

Exodus 3: 1-6

See the Scriptural references provided in the lesson plan for each individual attribute.

KEY CONCEPTS TO COMMUNICATE

- God is a reasonable assertion given the evidence provided by The Argument from Contingency and Efficient Causality¹
- You are able to consider and articulate various attributes of God because you have the gift of reason and because God is intelligible²³
- God is *Ipsium Esse Subsistens* (Self-Subsistent Existence or Subsistent act of Existence or Existence itself.
- God is not a creature among creatures (*Ens Esse*) and cannot be compared to others. God is not just wholly other but is the Existence that allows all of creation to exist.
- The central attributes or the attributes that the Divine being possesses as the Divine being in order to be the Divine being. St. Thomas Aquinas gives us eight though most speak of ten. They include: Simplicity, Perfection Unicity, Goodness (Moral or Holy, Benignity and Beauty), Infinity, Ubiquity (Immense and Transcendent), Immutability, and Eternity. Additionally, we add True (Ontological, Logical and Moral) which some would claim to be a subset of Simplicity since for something to exist it is true.
- Because God is necessarily Simple, "The Divine Attributes are really identical among themselves and with the Divine Essence (*De Fide*)"⁴

KEY TERMS TO UNDERSTAND

The following defined terms are for the catechist and/or to review in order to better understand the lesson plan. It is our hope that the catechist is able to distill and communicate in their words, when appropriate, to the student the principles of the terms. Words are important and we should use the correct terms even if the fullness of the word is not completely understood at this moment in time. In many ways, some of our most important terms are meant to be

¹ Peter Kreeft and Ronald Tacelli, "Twenty Arguments for the Existence of God," Catholic Education Resource Center, 1994, accessed October 6, 2016, <http://www.catholiceducation.org/en/religion-and-philosophy/apologetics/twenty-arguments-for-the-existence-of-god.html#13>.

² God, our Creator and Lord, can be known with certainty, by the natural light of reason from created things. (*De fide*.)

³ Ott, Ludwig. *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*. Rockford, IL: TAN Books, 1960., p. 13

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 28

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understood over time. This Catholic understanding of progressive revelation i.e., each grade level builds and reveals upon the former, continues through RCIT but with the understanding that the students have likely missed most of the years between First Holy Communion and high school.

Beauty: This quality is an expression of the attribute of Goodness. Beauty is an objective quality whose perfection is measure in the degree that it reflects and conforms to: 1) Wholeness, 2) Harmony and 3) Radiance.

Essence: What a thing is.

Eternity: The eternal nature of God is dependent on the quality of immutability. Eternity is not so much a measure of time or change but a quality of permanence. Boethius says it this way,

Eternity is the everlasting, totally simultaneous and perfect possession of life.⁵

Evil: The lack of some good. Ex. Hole in paper. Hole is not something but a lack of paper.

Existence: That a thing is.

Goodness: God is not good but goodness itself. "A being, in so far as it is like God, is good, and a being, in so far as it is unlike God, is not."⁶

Immensity: The quality of the divine attribute of Ubiquity that describes the fact that since God is *Ipsium Esse Subsistens*, God is everywhere existence is. God is not only the reason that this or that exists but that it continues to exist and has the qualities that it does in its essence.

Immutability: This means that God is unchangeable.

If a thing changes it changes for better or for worse. If God was mutable, therefore, his changing would make him better or worse. If it made him better then he wasn't perfect to begin with. If it made him worse, then he isn't perfect now.⁷

⁵ Boethius, "The Consolation of Philosophy.", circa. 5th Century

⁶ Quotes from D. Q McInerney were taken from his book, *Natural Theology* (2005).

⁷ *Ibid.*

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Infinity (Ps 146:5; 144:3): Infinity refers to the necessity that God is constrained or limited in any way as it is in accordance with God's nature -

God is, without limits because He is Himself the inexhaustible source of all the riches of being.⁸

Simplicity (Jn 4:24): The Simplicity of God gets to the point that God is spirit. It literally means that God has no parts, that He is not composed in any way. Our existence dictates that we have an essence or form (soul) that is expressed through a material body. In God, existence and essence are the same thing.

We see Biblical evidence of this in the book of Exodus where God responds to Moses' request for a name, "I am who I am" (3:14). If essence and existence were not the same in God, if what he was was not the same thing as that he was, then there would exist outside of God the reason for his existence, which is absurd.⁹

Perfection (Mt 5:48): The perfection of God means that God lacks nothing. He is the unconditioned or infinite totality of essence. All beings are less than God. The more perfect a being is the more it resembles God. That being said, it also means that if one being is more perfect than another then that means there is the most perfect being, which we call God.

Thing: While in proper English grammar the word *thing* is ambiguous and discouraged, it is a specific descriptor in philosophy and theology. A "thing" is that which exists in reality. Reality is measured by God who is existence itself.

Transcendence: This quality is a description of Ubiquity that further defines God's immensity. Though God is "in" all that exists, God is not this or that created thing. God is transcendent or wholly other than what this or that thing is.

Truth: This quality relates to the intellect of God. Truth consists in the agreement of a thing with its idea. God is the "idea" of all things because God is being itself. Thus, truth and being are the same. Every created thing is a realization of a Divine idea but not in the sense of Plato's created perfect form. God is not each perfect form but communicates the essence of each form in different degrees of perfection in accordance with its nature.

From this understanding we may speak of logic truth or "truth of thought" which consists in the agreement between thought and things. Perfect cognition

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

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requires a perfect and infinite intellect. In English, when we are able to identify something, we use the word recognize. This word even indicates that there already existed cognation or knowledge of, meaning it is already known to God.

There is also “moral truth” that depends on veracity (truth in speech) and faithfulness (truth in action).

Ubiquity: This means that God is everywhere (all of creation, material and immaterial). This should not be confused with the pantheistic view but that wherever something is, there God is because God is existence itself. This also shows us why St. Francis could say, “Brother sun and Sister moon...” At the deepest core of reality, we share a familial relation to all existence in that God is continually acting on our existence i.e., loving us by sustaining our existence.

Ubiquity may be broken down into two other qualities: immensity and transcendence.

Unicity Dt 6,4; Mk 12:29): This quality is true because God is simple.

St. Thomas writes, “that which is simple, is undivided both with respect to act and potency.” And since it is not possible to divide God in any way (matter/form; essence/existence, etc.), then it follows that God is perfect in unity.¹⁰

MATERIALS NEEDED AND PREPARATION

The following materials and preparations needed:

- **Flipchart:** One page for each group and two for presenter (10)
- **Index cards:** Enough for Six groups numbered for students to pick up when they come in and another set for the parents (48)
- **Markers:** For flipcharts (8)
- **Masking tape:** Put flipcharts up on the walls
- **Chalk:** Used as a prop

Room set-up:

- Arrange six groups of two tables put together with chairs surrounding them
- Place cards and chart pages on the back table for easy access
 - Hand out cards to students and parents as they come in

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

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- Place markers with flipcharts Keep chalk and masking table toward the front

LESSON PLAN

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1. Begin by praying together the Apostles Creed
2. Pass out the quiz and collect. Provide seven minutes.
3. Provide an overview – what is the starting point and where are we going?
4. Set the stage for the lesson
 - a. **Question 1:** Do you believe in God? And if you do, what God or kind of God do you believe in? (**Take about 15 minutes**)
 - i. **Answer 1:** Most will say yes but probe more
 1. What kind of God do you believe in?
 2. Who is this Jesus you keep talking about?
 - a. Let's see after this class if we believe in the same God that the Church believes in
 - ii. **Answer 2:** I do not believe in God
 1. It is reasonable in this culture to say that but are you willing to consider a different option?
 - b. **Question 2:** Why don't you believe in God?
 - i. **Answer 1:** Evil in the world
 1. Reasonable. Stick with us and see over the next few weeks as we consider sin and God's remedy and see if our arguments are enough to reconsider your position
 - ii. **Answer 2:** Science has dispelled the need for God
 1. Also, a reasonable answer because we have done a poor job teaching what and who God is.
 - a. I would submit that the more we know, the more it proves that God exists
 - iii. **Answer 3:** God exists but there is no need anymore
 1. That would appear to be true but I think you do not have all the information
 - iv. **Answer 4:** There have been too many scandals and charlatans
 1. Scandals are terrible and charlatans do us great harm
 - a. And yet, we have the saints who demonstrate the best in us who respond to God
 - b. "Judge the Catholic Church not by those who barely live by its spirit, but by the example of

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those who lived closest to it." – Venerable Fulton Sheen

- v. **Answer 5:** I do not want God to change me
 - 1. Stick with me and see over this year if we make the case that God only makes us better. Better even more than the best we could be on our own.
- 5. **Provide an Argument for God:** All the answers important but we need to reason through what and who God is. **(Take 5-10 minutes)**
 - a. Personal experiences and witnesses are important but they lack a reasonability and objective form of reason
 - b. The Church believes that reason is the first step and the witness confirms reason
 - c. Let's take a look at two arguments even though there are more (Choose two that you like and feel comfortable communicating. The following 20 are hyperlinked to the web page. I prefer Contingency, Causality and Pascal's Wager. Bishop Barron prefers Desire and Change).
 - i. [The Argument from Change](#)
 - ii. [The Argument from Efficient Causality](#)
 - iii. [The Argument from Time and Contingency](#)
 - iv. [The Argument from Degrees of Perfection](#)
 - v. [The Design Argument](#)
 - vi. [The Kalam Argument](#)
 - vii. [The Argument from Contingency](#)
 - viii. [The Argument from the World as an Interacting Whole](#)
 - ix. [The Argument from Miracles](#)
 - x. [The Argument from Consciousness](#)
 - xi. [The Argument from Truth](#)
 - xii. [The Argument from the Origin of the Idea of God](#)
 - xiii. [The Ontological Argument](#)
 - xiv. [The Moral Argument](#)
 - xv. [The Argument from Conscience](#)
 - xvi. [The Argument from Desire](#)
 - xvii. [The Argument from Aesthetic Experience](#)
 - xviii. [The Argument from Religious Experience](#)
 - xix. [The Common Consent Argument](#)
 - xx. [Pascal's Wager](#)
 - d. Tell them that even if they do not believe in God, which is fine at the moment, let's examine what God should be
- 6. **Group Activity: Design a God**
 - a. Provide the following directions for the activity

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- i. We will be splitting up into groups to design what we think are the most important attributes or qualities necessary to be a God.
 1. Make the following distinctions:
 - a. The attributes are those necessary for God to be God
 - b. These attributes should exist even if we and creation did not exist
 - ii. Please send one person up to me to get a flip chart page and a marker
 1. Write the group number at the top of the page
 2. List out those attributes on the page
 - iii. Please **Take 15** minutes to make your list – Be prepared to explain why
 - b. Have the teens and parents split up in the groups they have on their index cards (Four groups of students and four of parents)
 - i. Use the hall for the teens
 - ii. Room for the parents
 - iii. Give a 2-minute warning
 - c. Bring them back together to present
 - i. Have them tape the flipchart pages up at the front of the room
 - ii. Have each group sit together
 - d. Go through and identify those attributes that are common to all
 - i. This serves two purposes:
 1. There is a common ache and desire for the same thing – why is that?
 2. Adults and students have a common understanding
 - ii. Have your own flipchart page to write up the common attributes
 1. Have in mind the attributes you are presenting so that you may group them together
 2. Be prepared to reword them in order to clarify
 - a. All answers are acceptable
 - i. Each answer is also a shadow of the truth and tells us something about the need and desire of the student and/or parent
7. Before explaining the 10 Attributes declare a time out
 - a. Explain the difference between essence and existence
 - i. Begin from what we know to what we do not
 1. We all share a common attribute of existence
 - a. We have a beginning and an end

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- i. Hint towards our immortality
 - ii. Agree that our bodies have an end
 - b. Because we have a beginning we understand that we are created and thus have a finite existence
 2. We all also have an essence
 - a. Essence is the term we use to explain what something is
 - i. It determines all the attributes that a thing has
 1. Hold up a piece of chalk and ask, **What is the essence of chalk?**
 - a. All the attributes describe it but does not get to the “essence” of the thing.
 - b. It is hard to explain
 - c. We say that we know what something is by what it does
 3. Explain that we need to understand that God's existence and essence are one and the same thing
 4. Back to the regularly scheduled program
8. Using all the information they provided, teach them the 10 Attributes of God (**Take 25 minutes**) using the provided definitions:
 - a. The Simplicity of God
 - i. The Unicity of God
 - b. The Perfection of God
 - c. The Goodness of God
 - i. The Beauty of God
 - d. The Infinity of God
 - e. The Ubiquity of God
 - i. The Immensity of God
 - ii. The Transcendence of God
 - f. The Immutability of God
 - g. The Eternity of God
9. Bringing it together with a practical application
 - a. Remind them of the Burning Bush story – most will recognize it
 - i. Point out three specific points
 1. YHWH does not give Moses an answer to what is your name
 - a. To know a name is to exert power over a being
 - b. No one has power over God
 2. YHWH means I Am Who Am

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- a. This refers back to the attributes we discussed
- b. The God of the Jews and the Christians is existence itself
 - i. Fully in possession of self
 - ii. Does not change
 - iii. The most basic of all essence – existence
3. God does not consume creation
 - a. In the ancient world, when God's interacted with humans they were destroyed
 - b. But the Judeo-Christian God enhances creation when God comes in contact with it
- ii. We know and believe what St. Ignatius said,
 1. "The Glory of God is a man fully alive."
 2. Even if we perfectly lived to our potential, God desires to make us more than we could even dream
- b. What does all this mean to us?
 - i. Consider science.
 1. It developed and flourished in a systematic way in the Western World. Why?
 - a. All sciences presume that the world is intelligible. For that to be true, an intelligence had to create and sustain it
 - b. If a thing (tree) is a God, you do not study it you worship it
 2. Because God is not a creature among many: *Ipsum Esse Subsistum*, all of creation is not God and therefore, may be studied
 - ii. Consider us
 1. Since God created everything
 2. All of creation finds its purpose in the reason its creator designed it
 - a. This means in order to figure out who and what we are, we must approach the Living God

APPLICATION QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER THIS WEEK

- How am I going to discover the answers:
 - Who am I?
 - Why am I here?
 - What am I called to do?

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RESOURCES & REFERENCES

ADDITIONAL REFERENCES FROM CHURCH TEACHING

The following are dogmatic (*De Fide*) statements that are required to be believed by all Catholics:

The Attributes of the Divine Being

1. God is absolutely perfect. (*De fide.*)
2. God is actually infinite in every perfection. (*De fide.*)
3. God is absolutely simple. (*De fide.*)
4. There is only One God. (*De fide.*)
5. The One God is, in the ontological sense, The True God. (*De fide.*)
6. God possesses an infinite power of cognition. (*De fide.*)
7. God is absolute Veracity. (*De fide.*)
8. God is absolutely faithful. (*De fide.*)
9. God is absolute ontological Goodness in Himself and in relation to others. (*De fide.*)
10. God is absolute Moral Goodness or Holiness. (*De fide.*) D 1782.
11. God is absolute Benignity. (*De fide.*) D1782.
12. God is absolute Beauty. D1782.
13. God is absolutely immutable. (*De fide.*)
14. God is eternal. (*De fide.*)
15. God is immense or absolutely immeasurable. (*De fide.*)
16. God is everywhere present in created space. (*De fide.*)

The following are those attributes that are dogmatic or believed with certainty because they follow from dogmas and are related to God as the Divine Persons relate to one another or creation:

The Attributes of the Divine Life

1. God's knowledge is infinite. (*De fide.*)
2. God's knowledge is purely and simply actual.
3. God's knowledge is subsistent
4. God's knowledge is comprehensive
5. God's knowledge is independent of extra-divine things
6. The primary and formal object of the Divine Cognition is God Himself. (*Scientia contemplationis*)
7. God knows all that is merely possible by the knowledge of simple intelligence (*scientia simplicis intelligentiae*). (*De fide.*)
8. God knows all real things in the past, the present and the future

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(*Scientia visionis*). (*De fide*.)

9. By knowledge of vision (*scientia visionis*) God also foresees the free acts of the rational creatures with infallible certainty. (*De fide*.)
10. God also knows the conditioned future free actions with infallible certainty (*Scientia futuribilium*). (*Sent. communis*.)
11. God's Divine will is infinite. (*De fide*.)
12. God loves Himself of necessity, but loves and wills the creation of extra-Divine things, on the other hand, with freedom. (*De fide*.)
13. God is almighty. (*De fide*.)
14. God is the Lord of the heavens and of the earth. (*De fide*.) D 1782.
15. God is infinitely just. (*De fide*.)
16. God is infinitely merciful. (*De fide*.)

REFERENCE BOOKS

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| • Handbook of Christian Apologetics | Peter Kreeft & Ronald K. Tacelli |
| • The God Who Loves You | Peter Kreeft |
| • The Evidential Power of Beauty | Fr. Thomas Dubay |

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