

From the Summa of Scholasticus

By and Based on the Books of Robert J. Cormier (www.thefaithkit.org)
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From the Summa of Scholasticus

(The following is the author's attempt to speak in the style of the schoolmen.)

Biographical notes:

Born somewhere in Medieval Europe, Scholasticus was baptized days later; everyone was; and he entered into a world with just one religion. The existence of God was not a question, and neither was God's justice. There was a price to be paid for every sin, both here and in the hereafter, unless one was relieved by a pious act specified for this purpose. Life was scary.

It was partly to protect himself that Scholasticus entered the monastery, and he was in most ways a model monk.

As a model monk, Scholasticus spent a lot of time in meditation. Over the course of time, this meditation brought about some remarkable developments.

He might have liked to claim that it all began with an experience of God's love, but the deepening of Scholasticus' faith actually began with anger at God.

Contemplating the possibility of an eternity of torment—an eternity!—Scholasticus found himself resentful. "After all," he thought, "I did not ask to be born! Why should I live at risk of suffering for not keeping *Your* rules?"

Scholasticus knew that this sort of thinking might be seen by some as sacrilegious, but he knew his point was good, and if God was good, God would have to grant him that. For Scholasticus, this became the point: God is good. God is love. He gave us life in an act of love; and we should have NO reason to despise this life. We didn't ask to be born; so there must be NO reason that anyone would ever regret the life, and destiny, that he or she was given.

This line of thinking led Scholasticus on a great theological journey. He needed to understand better the life God gave us, and what we are to do with this life, and what we can expect from it. The world, too, needed to understand these things better.

Scholasticus did well. He came up with a formulation of faith that proclaimed the goodness of God without qualifications. He saw, he experienced, that this formulation of faith fulfilled his spirit like nothing else; and there was nothing better he could imagine.

But Scholasticus also knew that faith has its effects to the extent that it is sure. It does not work at all if we suspect and fear that we are believing only what we want to believe. This means that we need to be able to give the good reasons we believe, and to see plainly that these reasons are not inventions that presume what they propose to prove, or ignore better reasons not to believe.

It was to assemble these reasons, and to confront the reasons for unbelief, that Scholasticus wrote his *Summa*. The following are excerpts from this book.

It would not seem that God exists:

Some say it would not seem that God exists.

After all, we have reason to believe only where there is evidence, but where is the evidence of God?

People who believe in God argue that the world cannot “just” exist. But this is precisely what they say about God—that God “just” exists. Well, if something “just” exists, why not uphold that it is the thing we can see rather than something else we cannot see?

Along with the idea of God comes the ideas of perfection and goodness. But look at the world with its terrible history and all the suffering always taking place. It hardly bespeaks perfection and goodness.

But I say...

The evidence of God is the world. Apart from people who define truth solely in terms of laboratory testing, it is the (almost) universal human testimony that to experience something, anything, is to experience that it owes its existence to something greater. The science of knowing has justified this testimony by pointing out that human knowing involves several “global” ideas (knowledge that transcends what we can learn from individual events) that emerge as our spirits grow into something greater thanks to experience.

Our experience of the world indicates that it, the world, cannot “just” exist. But this implies the existence of something greater that must “just” exist, and this, of course, is God.

If, as faith explains, there is a good purpose for imperfection (which creates space for us to grow) and suffering (necessary if, indeed, we are to experience imperfection for what it is) the history and state of the world does not contradict the goodness of God.

It would not seem that there is life after this one:

Some say it would not seem that there is life after this one.

After all, what evidence is there of this life?

Is it not obvious that life is in the body and the body dies?

Is not belief in an afterlife too easily explained in terms of hope and fear?

But I say...

The evidence of heaven is the existence and goodness of God who could not have given us life to take it away.

For God, there is certainly more than one way to do things. In terms of the memory and self-consciousness which make a person a person, it is not hard to argue to that, after our work in a body is finished, our memory and self-consciousness will be given a new body, sustained by the divine substance as it is, so we will be able to see God.

The hope of life with God, and anguish in the face of eternal death, is hardly evidence AGAINST heaven, but rather an aspect of human nature that God would not have written into us if not to inform us that we were made for life with Him.

It would not seem that people have a soul:

Some say it would not seem that people have a soul.

After all, as physiology now demonstrates, we do not need a purely spiritual thing in order to think and feel.

But I say...

Thinking and feeling, and self-consciousness ARE the soul. These are the things that make up a “person,” and provide God with what he needs to give a person life with Him. The fact that these spiritual realities—that we experience as wonderful—arise out of the working of the human brain is simply testimony to the power of complex organization and God’s marvelous design of matter.

It would not seem that the will is free:

Some say it would not seem that the will is free.

After all, everything has its causes and so does the human mind and will. This, certainly, is what we see as the science of psychology does a better and better job of explaining human behavior and predicting it.

But I say...

Freedom has nothing to do with any argument that what goes on in the mind is NOT caused. Freedom has to do with the fact, plain to see, that the things that happen to a person do not result in behavior until the person has thought about them, “translating” them into action, according to his own existing ideas and feelings. Since this process affects the person, i.e., the mind he will bring to whatever happens to him tomorrow, a lifetime of this

process makes him uniquely the product of himself. This is the freedom that faith requires.

It would not seem that what we do here can have eternal effects:

Some say it would not seem that what we do here can have eternal effects.

After all, even if people are uniquely the product of themselves, their starting point and the experiences that give them their ideas and feelings still originate outside them. This means that if there be a God behind everything, He is the ultimate cause of who people become.

As we consider this, let us also acknowledge that people are given vastly different experiences of life, and these produce vastly different degrees of faith, or love, or anything that we might call the “holiness” that would make a person’s eternal life richer or poorer. It is not possible, then, that God has destined some to be richer and some to be poorer FOREVER.

But I say...

The doctrine of the family—the idea that we are going to share God’s life as a family where all of us will be richer for the holiness of each of us, explains everything, including the struggle of human history and the many different roles that God has given people so that His family will do what it needs to do and become the family it needs to be.

It would not seem that there is a good reason to call Jesus “the Son of God”:

Some say it would not seem that there is a good reason to call Jesus “the Son of God.”

After all, how can God have a son?

How can a human be divine?

But I say...

What is a son? A son is an offspring, in the image of the parent, who comes of the flesh of this parent. How is this not true of Jesus? After all, *all* creation is sustained by God's love, i.e., His power, i.e., His being; and, all of us are made in God's image in the sense that we think and feel and know that we exist. Jesus, moreover, was "the" Son sent to make this known; and, like no one else, his is the divine face in human terms.

It would not seem that it is sensible to say that in one God there are three "Persons":

Some argue it is not sensible to say that in one God there are three "Persons."

After all, God is one or He is three.

How can there be many "persons" in God?

But I say...

God is the source of all that is or can be. This includes many things that imply the participation of more than one person—friendship, romance, sports, etc. It cannot be that these things were new to God when first they appeared on earth. They must have existed, in some way, "in" God first.

The idea of speaking of God as three (instead of "more than one") persons has the advantage of calling our attention to the three ways we know God: as our Creator, as the face we see in Jesus, and through creation generally. In speaking of knowing God through creation generally, this is what we mean: The things that God has made reflect Him, especially our nature which is made in His image. In this sense, His Holy Spirit dwells within us.

It would not seem that it is sensible to say the cross "saves" anyone:

Some argue it is not sensible to say the cross "saves" anyone.

After all, how does another person's sacrifice make me "right"?

How does blood make anything “right”?

But I say...

A sacrifice that inspires you, in this sense, “saves” you.

A sacrifice that gives humanity the example it needs in order to understand God’s love “saves” us all.

It would not seem that it is sensible to say that God wants people to belong to any one Church:

Some argue that it is not sensible to say that God wants people to belong to any one Church.

First of all, *everybody* claims that God wants everybody else to belong to *their* Church.

Besides, why would God want people to give up their religious freedom, and believe according to someone else’s creed, and obey someone else’s religious’ orders?

But I say...

Since we are going to share God’s life as a family in heaven, certainly God wants us to be a family in faith on earth. Indeed, it is our experience that, in every way, life is better when we share it. This makes it clear that God made us for sharing everything, including what is most important to us—our faith. This is the reason He sent Jesus—so that we could know that He wants us to be a family in faith, one family, the family that Jesus founded.

Besides, people do not give up their religious’ freedom joining the Church. Rather, they profess to see the truth in certain formulas written purposefully so that they would express essential truths that all of us can see together. People’s obedience is their choice—their holy, unselfish choice, to cooperate for the good of us all.

It would not seem that it is possible to argue that Jesus rose from the dead:

It would not seem that it is possible to argue that Jesus rose from the dead.

After all, this kind of thing never happens.

What does it even mean?

How can we possibly know what happened two thousand years ago, a time when people were not so strict about the truth, and there were no recording devices?

Isn't it just too explicable that the followers of someone would try to keep his movement going with a story of this sort?

But I say...

The teachings that come to us from Jesus, and explain life as nothing else can, clearly imply that God had to send someone to call us to be one, and then done something remarkable in order to identify this person as the one He had sent. (Thus the resurrection had to be a one of a kind event)

The appearance of Jesus after his death is not impossible to imagine once we call to mind that those who die are transformed, and now are alive with God. More clearly than ever as the human spirit has gotten deeper, faith gives people the ability to experience the presence of their loved ones with God. That God should empower Jesus' apostles to have an especially vivid experience of Jesus in heaven should hardly surprise us if doing so was necessary.

Two thousand years is, indeed, a long time, but reports of the resurrection have been passed onto us from generation to generation, by people whose faith we recognize and admire. Besides, any historical event was eventually going to be "a long time ago," and if this particular one had somehow been recorded, it would mean that faith would be based on seeing a movie, not growing in holiness.

And how does one imagine that the God who has planned everything would allow the beauty of Christianity to be born of a falsehood, and to remain based on a falsehood for two thousand years?

It would not seem that it is sensible to say that “sacraments” change things except by psychology:

Some argue that it is not sensible to say that “sacraments” change things except by psychology.

After all, isn't arguing otherwise arguing in favor of magic?

And what are the constant, remarkable signs that a sacrament has changed something that *cannot* be explained by psychology?

But I say...

If God had brought the Church into existence for a certain purpose, and this purpose involves saying things (receiving new members, etc.) that cannot be said with words alone, isn't it obvious that the actions that say these things speak for God, and affect their most essential purpose?

It would not seem that it is sensible to say that blessed bread is the “Body of Christ:

Some argue that it is not sensible to say that blessed bread is the “Body of Christ.”

After all, you can bless it all you want to, but what, really, has changed?

But I say...

What, really, is the “Body of Christ,” something that someone would want to receive and even eat. The Body of Christ that someone would want to receive and even eat was the body of Christ on the cross, which was a message—God saying “I cannot love you more” (and more). And isn't it obvious that the bread that Jesus blessed as a sign that he was going accept

the cross, a natural sign of this same love? And by doing this, didn't God establish an unbloody way to see Jesus' sacrifice, a way we could easily repeat that would naturally produce a sign that could be received by people personally (so they would know that God was talking to them, too) and even eat (so they would know that they could never lose His love)?

Dear reader,

You might be interested in this author's other alter-egos, Patristicus, who is available in the "More Short Stories" menu of www.thefaithkit.org/panorama, and Mysticus, who is available in the "Theological Shorts" menu of www.thefaithkit.org/panorama2.