

The last word

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Why I believe in God

Some of my favourite authors are agnostics, men and women who face life honestly and courageously without faith in a personal God. They're stoics mostly, persons who have made peace with the idea that God may not exist and that perhaps death ends everything for us.

I see this, for example, in the late James Hillman, a man whom I greatly admire and who has much to teach believers about what it means to listen to and honour the human soul.

But here's something I don't admire in these agnostic stoics: while they face with courage what it would mean for us if God didn't exist and death ended our personal existence, they don't with the same courage ask the question of what it would mean for us if God did exist and death did not end our personal existence.

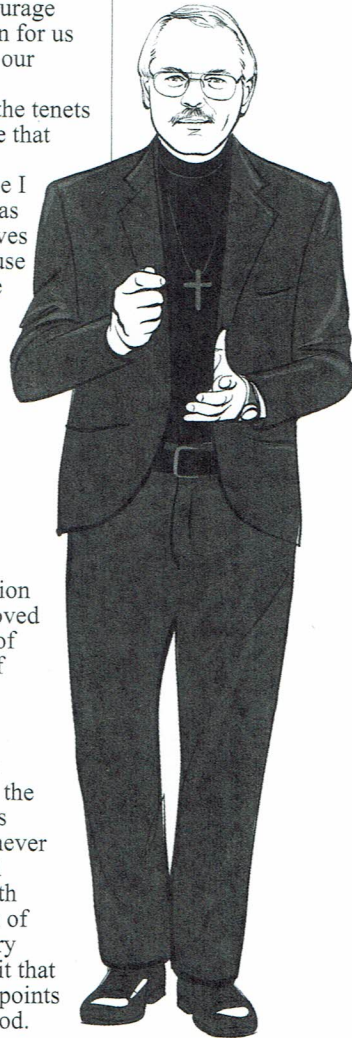
What if God does exist and what if the tenets of our faith are true? They need to face that question too.

I believe that God exists, not because I have never had doubts, or because I was raised in the faith by persons whose lives gave deep witness to its truth, or because perennially the vast majority of people on this planet believe in God.

I believe that a personal God exists for more reasons than I can name. The goodness of saints; the hook in my own heart that has never let me go; the interface of faith with my own experience; the courage of the martyrs throughout history; the stunning depth of Jesus's teachings; the deep insights contained in other religions; the mystical experience of countless people; our sense of connection inside the communion of saints with loved ones who have died; the convergence of the anecdotal testimony of hundreds of individuals who have been clinically dead and resuscitated back to life; the things we sometimes intuitively know beyond all logical reason; the constant recurrence of resurrection in our lives; the essential triumph of truth and goodness throughout history; the fact that hope never dies, the unyielding imperative we feel inside of ourselves to be reconciled with others before we die; the infinite depth of the human heart; and, yes, even the very ability of atheists and agnostics to intuit that somehow it still all makes sense: it all points to the existence of a living, personal God.

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I believe that God exists because faith works; at least to the extent that we work it. The existence of God proves itself true to the extent that we take it seriously and live our lives in face of it.

Simply put, we're happy and at peace to the exact extent that we risk living lives of faith. The happiest people I know are also the most generous, selfless, gracious, and reverent persons I know. That's no accident.

Leon Bloy once asserted that there's only one true sadness in life, that of not being a saint. We see that in the story of the rich young man in the Gospels who turns down Jesus's invitation to live his faith more deeply. He goes away sad. Of course being a saint and being sad are never all or nothing; both have degrees. But there's a constant: we're happy or sad in direct proportion to our fidelity or infidelity to what is one, true, good, and beautiful.

I know that existentially: I'm happy and at peace to the exact extent that I take my faith seriously and live it out in fidelity; the more faithful I am, the more at peace I am, and vice versa.

Inherent in all of this too is a certain "law of karma", namely, that the universe gives back to us morally exactly what we give to it. As Jesus worded it, the measure you measure out is the measure that will be measured back to you (Matthew 7:2).

What we breathe out is what we're going to inhale. If I breathe out selfishness, selfishness is what I will inhale; if I breathe out bitterness, that's what I'll meet at every turn; conversely, if I breathe out love, graciousness and forgiveness, these will be given back to me in the exact measure that I give them out.

Our lives and our universe have a deep, innate, non-negotiable structure of love and justice written into them, one that can only be underwritten by a living, personal, divine mind and a heart of love.

None of this, of course, proves God's existence with the kind of proof we find in science or mathematics; but God isn't always found at the end of an empirical test, a mathematical equation, or a philosophical syllogism.

The Belgian Benedictine, Benoit Standaert, submits that wisdom is three things, and a fourth. Wisdom is a respect for knowledge, wisdom is a respect for honesty and aesthetics, and wisdom is a respect for mystery. But there's a fourth – wisdom is a respect for Someone.

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