

“What man can know the intentions of God?”

The premise of this question we heard from the Book of Wisdom is that, left to himself, man cannot attain wisdom. Our reasoning powers are quite limited.

Additionally, we’re often distracted by the cares of life which get in the way.

The Lord isn’t saying to us here in the Book of Wisdom that we can’t discover truth.

But, it’s true that man cannot discover God’s intentions and His Wisdom on his own.

So, if we cannot grow in wisdom on our own, how do we attain it?

St Athanasius said that before God had completely revealed Himself, small traces of His Wisdom could be discovered through creation. His Wisdom can be seen reflected in His works.

His living Wisdom can be found in created things insofar as they bear His image.

When Christ was born, Wisdom itself had become flesh. In former times, the Wisdom of God stamped His seal on all created things.

But, later, this same Wisdom, who is the Word, **“was made flesh”** (Jn 1:14), revealing Himself in a clearer way, and through Himself, revealed God the Father.¹

This being the case, you and I cannot expect to know God, His ways and His Wisdom as well as we could without Christ.

Ancient philosophers such as Aristotle and Plato tried to explain the ways of God to man.

Keep in mind that Aristotle was born over 300 years before Christ and Plato was born over 400 BC.

Aristotle taught that you don’t need faith to believe that God exists. He was correct in teaching this.

St Paul taught the same thing in his *Letter to the Romans*,

as does the Church in the Second Vatican Council:

“God ... can be known with certainty from created reality by

¹ cf. *Contra arianos*, 2, 81-82.

the light of human reason (see Rom. 1:20).”²

Although we don’t need faith to believe that God exists, we certainly do need faith to believe what transcends reason, for example, that God is three Persons, but one God.

As we shall see, although some of the things God has revealed to us

transcend reason, such divine revelation does not *contradict* reason.

Plato recognised that religious truth is the highest truth and the strongest bond for cementing society, so much so, that he saw that the responsibility of the State is to foster religious worship.

This may sound as a surprise to you because we are living in a day and age in which religion is seen to be inferior to science and even politics. Although the ancient philosophers were correct in recognising the supremacy of religious truth, we enjoy a greater advantage today.

² *Dei Verbum*, no. 6.

Dr Scott Hahn, a famous Bible scholar, said that although the Ancient philosophers recognised that everything can be discovered by human reason, they acknowledged that not everything has been discovered. That the truth about God is *discoverable* in theory is one thing, but this truth is another thing to be actually *discovered* in fact.

The Ancient philosophers acknowledged that religious truth can only be known as a result of much time and energy which only few can attain and it is mixed with errors. So, it takes a long time! And a lot of effort! And only a few people have the leisure to afford that much time and effort, and only a few people have the intellectual skills to exploit the leisure to really do it well. But, even when it *is* done well, it’s mixed with error!

Why?

Because there's something that Aristotle and Plato did not understand.

What is it?

The "mysterium iniquitatis" (Latin: "mystery of iniquity"). St Paul refers to sin as being a mystery (2 Thess 2:7).

Our struggle to be open to and respond to the love of God is also referred to in what we heard from the Book of Wisdom today:

"It is hard enough for us to work out what is on earth, laborious to know what lies within our reach; who, then, can discover what is in the heavens?"

So, only after a lot of time and effort; only by a few; and then it's mixed with error.

Now, just before you begin to think: "Well, why bother trying to love God if he makes it so difficult?" consider this...

There's something else the Ancient

philosophers didn't know.

We have the advantage of having the fullness of God's Revelation revealed to us in Christ.

Regarding this matter, the Church teaches through the Second Vatican Council:

"Through divine revelation, God chose to show forth and communicate Himself and the eternal decisions of His will regarding the salvation of men. That is to say, He chose to share with them those divine treasures which totally transcend the understanding of the human mind ... it is through His revelation that those religious truths which are by their nature accessible to human reason can be known by all men with ease, with solid certitude and with no trace of error, even in this present state of the human race."³

Doesn't that cause your heart to rejoice?

³ *Dei Verbum*, no. 6.

In other words, we're not just talking about adding a second story on top of the first – you know, building an addition – we're talking about going back and enriching and purifying what reason had on its own before the Mystery of faith comes to us in the Person of Christ.

So, these truths which by their nature are accessible by human reason are now 'shored up'; they're reinforced; purified; they're deepened.

Consequently, they can be known by *all* men, with *ease* – and even more – with solid certitude and with no trace of error!

Now, knowing *that* God exists and *what kind* of God exists is easy. God Himself has said so in Scripture and the Church's sacred Tradition. God has indeed revealed Himself with a clarity and purity that the philosophers never attained, "even in this present state of the human race."

In Christ, we also have the guidance of the Church, for it's His Body. Speaking of this, St John of the Cross said:

"We must be guided humanly and visibly in all by the law of Christ the man and that of His Church and of His ministers. This is the method of remedying our spiritual ignorances and weaknesses; here we shall find abundant medicine for them all."⁴

⁴ *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, II, ch. 22, no. 7.