

Not Atheist, but the Seeker!¹

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We often meet people, for instance, in our families, among our relatives or friends, who have difficulties with their faith. They say: "I do not believe in the teachings of the Church; I do not believe in God, I am an atheist." And they begin to argue with us that it would be better to do some sports and games or attend some cultural events than practice the boring faith. In such situations we often lack the right words. How can you get into a conversation with people who do not believe? "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied." (Jn 14:8). This statement of Philip to Jesus is similar to someone saying: "I only need the experience of God. This would be enough for my life. That is all I need!" The statement of Philip is the highest degree of a mystical desire for God. This thirst for God can be found without difficulty among the holy men and women in the Bible and among the saints of the Church. Moses too thirsted for God in the desert and on Mount Horeb, where he met God and was desperate to know God's name. (cf. Ex 3, 13).

Knowing God's name does not simply mean bringing the name of God into our consciousness or reminding us of it. In the biblical sense, knowing God's name indicates meeting Him personally. In the Psalm, King David clearly expressed this thirst for God: "As a deer longs for

¹ Cherian Menacherry, "Not Atheist, but the Seeker!", Cherian Menacherry, *Myopia of Humanity: Engaging the Words of Jesus*. Mauritius: Blessed Hope Publishing, 2021, pp. 23-25.

flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God.". (Ps 42: 1). St. Augustine also clearly expressed this thirst for God when he said: "Our hearts are restless until they rest in You!"² It is not only the saints, all people have this thirst for God.

In a major study, the British University of Oxford found out that people are religious by nature. People have a "built-in" propensity to believe in God and in life after death. This is the conclusion of an international research project that this university conducted over three years. Involved in the project were 57 researchers who produced over 40 studies in twenty religiously and atheistically influenced countries. The co-director, Roger Trigg, professor of philosophy, said at the presentation of the study that human thought is directed towards seeing the world in a religious dimension. So belief in God is almost a supernatural instinct.³

The reason for this supernatural instinct in biblical language is: "God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them..." (Gen1:27. Also cf. v 26). All men have this thirst for God. Even if many do not realize this in their consciousness or do not want to admit it. Actually, nobody can be an atheist in the right sense. "Unbelief is also a belief," wrote Arnold Stadler.⁴ Apparently there is no atheism according to Paul Tillich, since all people have a firm, final conviction. Everyone feels moved by this conviction. God is a kind of

²St. Augustine, The Confessions (Book I, Chapter 1), <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/110101.htm>

³Taken from German, *Newsletter von Radio Vatikan* – 18.5.2011

⁴ „Der Unglaube ist auch nur ein Glaube.“ ARNOLD STADLER, „Warum wir Ostern brauchen,“ Focus 17/2011, S. 52.

faith, religious conviction even if you call it with different secular words.⁵

Rather than an atheist, you can be an agnostic. They say, "We don't know if there is a God or not." Agnostics don't define whether there is a God or no God. They don't know, so they don't believe. It's possible that many people fall into this category. Arnold Stadler has a piece of advice for these persons: "The belief in something is much nicer than belief in nothing."⁶

We can view the situation in a positive sense: some of our fellow human beings who do not believe are searching - searching for what? The unconscious search for God! At some point they succeed; for not only do people search for God, but God is also in search of these people who deny Him.

It is precisely about this searching God that Pope Francis expressed: God "has a certain weakness of love for those who are furthest away, who are lost." "And how does he search?" Pope Francis continues. His answer: "Like the shepherd who journeys into the darkness looking for his lost sheep until he finds it."⁷

⁵ "Faith is the state of being ultimately concerned. The content matters infinitely for the life of the believer, but it does not matter for the formal definition of faith." <https://quotepark.com/authors/paul-tillich/>

⁶ „Der Glaube an etwas ist jedoch viel schöner als der Glaube an nichts.“ Arnold Stadler, „Warum wir Ostern brauchen,“ Focus 17/2011, S. 52.

⁷Pope Francis, Morning Meditation In The Chapel Of The Domus Sanctae Marthae, God does not like to lose, Thursday, 7 November 2013, www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/cotidie/2013/documents/papa-francesco-cotidie_20131107_lost-sheep.html

God seeks the lost! This is comforting and motivating for all who are worried about the unbelief of some of their own family members or friends.

Jesus Christ is searching for his lost sheep. But at some point the lost sheep finds the shepherd Jesus Christ. Jesus says to Philip, "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father." (Jn 14:9).