



I Can Prove There Is A God

by LILLIAN ROTH

One of the most inspiring stories of our time is that told by Lillian Roth in her remarkably candid and moving autobiography, I'll Cry Tomorrow, which recounts the successful struggle against alcoholism by a screen star of the 30s, who is now once more a top entertainment figure. A best seller for over a year, her book will appear as a motion picture in October. The following article was written especially for Coronet by Miss Roth in collaboration with Gerold Frank, co-author of her book and a senior editor of Coronet.—The Editors.

I DO NOT SET myself up as an authority on religion. What I know, what I am certain of, the faith that is now mine, I have learned the hard way.

Atheist, agnostic, unbeliever—I have been all these. In the depths of my anguish, when I saw myself relentlessly destroying what had once been a happy, successful girl, I cried out to God. When I was not answered, I wept, *God does not exist.*

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Where was God, and of what use were prayers, if He could allow even one human being to make such a wreck of her life and to drag down with her in shame and despair those who loved her and had sacrificed so much to bring her to fame and success?

I was wrong. Out of my life, out of the lives of others, and out of that conviction which comes to all of us when we face ourselves in absolute honesty, I have come to know God. I can prove there is a God. Not by theological proof, such as you would receive from a priest, minister or rabbi, for I am not qualified. Nor by scientific means, because I am no scientist.

My proof is based not alone on my humble studies in science and religion but also on belief in the value of the human being. And it rests upon the realization of the infinite wonder and glory of the universe.

Too many people cry out: "I don't believe! How can you believe?" And this before they have even studied to see what it is they don't believe.

To me, the basic approach to proof of God's existence is first to recognize that there are powers—that there is *a* Power—greater than ourselves and beyond ourselves. Many people dismiss this as supernatural. They find it hard to accept.

It was difficult for me, too—at first. It came to me slowly in my

first days in Alcoholics Anonymous, an organization of former alcoholics to whom I turned in my extremity when I had nowhere else to turn.

I came there as a woman of 34, who had earned more than a million dollars, and was now penniless. Behind me lay 16 years of alcoholic horror which not even treatment in a mental institution had cured. I had been married four times—and each marriage had failed. I had nearly committed suicide. I had forsaken virtually everyone who had known me, while virtually everyone who had known me had given me up—save my mother.

“Forget your daughter,” friends pleaded with her, watching her slowly destroying herself in vain attempts to save me. “You have no daughter. She would be better off dead.”

I knew all this—and yet I was helpless. If there were a God, I used to think in my lucid moments, would He not take pity on me?

But at AA they told me, again and again: “You can believe in a power greater than yourself, no matter what you call that power for the moment. You can turn your will over to a greater Power.”

I could not, I said to them. Once, as a little girl, I had dreamed of becoming a nun. I had had some spiritual contact with God. But now I had lost God. I did not believe in an outside power.

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I shall never forget the words of the AA member who said to me: “Lillian, look about you. There are 200 of us here, men and women, and each one of us was a helpless, hopeless drunk. Now we are sober. *Will you believe in that power, whatever it is, that keeps us sober?*”

Somewhere deep in the depths of my alcoholic-fogged brain, this touched whatever was left of my sanity. Yes, they *were* sober, and they had been as I. I could believe in that power. I could turn and pray to it, and pull myself up toward it.

That was the beginning: to admit that a greater Power—no matter what name you give it—existed. And when I reached sobriety and could live and think again as a human being, I began to understand that there is much we must accept because reason tells us to accept, because the evidence is such that it is a denial of reason to refuse to accept.

After all, we cannot account for electricity or the electron. Why will people not struggle against the mystery of the electron, which they cannot touch or see, but will deny the mystery of God because they cannot touch or see it?

Is it harder, for example, to accept the mystery that God exists than it is to accept the mystery that enough energy is imprisoned in a pebble to blow a city apart? In a universe where such things can be,

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God also can exist.

But because we are reasoning beings, we constantly seek a simpler answer. A friend who once discussed how to build a train of reasoning at whose end even the doubter must find God put it this way.

“Lillian, you think of God. Why? Because God exists. If He did not exist, you could not have thought of Him.”

Before I could protest that I couldn't quite follow this, he went on: “I challenge you—I challenge anyone—to think of anything *that does not exist*. Try it.”

I looked at him. It was true. You cannot imagine anything completely non-existent. No matter what you think of, however bizarre or fantastic—a five-legged man, a mind composed of mist and echo, an impossible creature from another planet—you discover that part of your concept is based on reality. So it is with God: for if any part of the concept of God is real, then God Himself is real.

When I report this conversation to some, they shake their heads. “A trick of reasoning,” they say. “That argument has a fallacy somewhere . . . You still have to show me.”

Then I think of the small wrist-watch I am wearing. I place it on the table before me. If I were to take it apart, I wouldn't expect it to re-assemble itself, would I? And looking at all its amazing intricacy, I know

that someone made that watch.

Those fine, almost invisible gears meshing with such perfection, the fragile hairspring with just the exact amount of tension, the extraordinarily minute wheels and cogs, each planned to play its role in a microscopic little universe no bigger than my thumbnail—surely all this did not just “happen.” It was not the result of chance.

No. An outside intelligence with a plan put it together. I need not see the watchmaker to know he exists. My evidence is the watch.

Now, move from the watch to the human eye. Iris, pupil, lens, retina, the image cast, caught, registered in the space of a heartbeat.

. . . How wonderfully delicate and intricate the human eye! Can I really believe that it threw itself together, that it just “happened”?

No. As with the watch, an outside Intelligence with a plan was at work. Not faith, not fear of the unknown, not superstitious belief, but *reason* makes it as impossible for me to believe that the eye was the product of chance as it is to believe that the watch was an accident.

I cannot conceive that the wonder about us—the timing of the seasons, the marvellous rhythm of the planets, the magnificent achievement that is man, forever aspiring upward and outward toward something higher than himself—I cannot conceive that all this is the result of chance, coincidence and chaos.

I ask, how can there be such

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universal hunger for God without the existence of God? Could we hunger for food if food did not exist?

Everywhere I look, everywhere I go, every emotion that shakes me, every thought that stimulates me, every dream that inspires me—from where do these come? Why should you and I be so driven by something outside ourselves to achieve something beyond ourselves?

I say it is impossible to believe that this faith that exists everywhere in the world, the faith of millions of Christians and Jews, Moslems and Buddhists and all the religions of man, is absolutely meaningless. If so, then all humanity is a grotesque mockery. No one who believes in man's dignity can accept the conclusion that all is senseless and without meaning, that the overpowering wonder of the universe is nothing but a cosmic freak!

SHALL I GIVE YOU another reason which to me is proof of God? It is one that grows out of my life. Because I have, with God's help, come back from the dark places of the soul, and once more can walk with dignity—spiritual dignity, some are good enough to say my example has given them strength to surmount their tragedies. Others are good enough to believe that what I say encourages and helps them.

They have written this to me in thousands of letters I have received since "I'll Cry Tomorrow" appeared, and they tell it to me when I

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come off the stage in nightclubs where I sing or in halls where I lecture.

I know that of myself I haven't the strength to have done this. I haven't the intelligence, nor the education, nor the power, to have said what I have said, unless God gave me this strength and put these words and thoughts in my mind.

Often I have talked and written to people and there has been a cure of some kind, mental or physical. Is this not proof of the power of a positive faith? When I am asked, "Where does it come from?" what other answer can I give but that it comes from above?

In Philadelphia, there is a polio patient who has forced herself, since reading my book, to walk, on crutches to be sure—but to walk for the first time in years. She did this herself through her renewed belief in God.

In Denver, there is a muscular dystrophy victim who has begun again to take an interest in life, although she knows that her disease is progressive and incurable. She writes me of the gay dresses she buys, and asks my advice about style and describes the adorable new shoes she has ordered "even though I'll never stand up in them."

In Los Angeles, there are 25 boys in a correctional school who have written me, each signing his name to the letter: "Knowing the problems you met and defeated, we know how minor our problems are, and that we'll lick them, too."

And each week hundreds of let-

ters pour in to me from men and women who have had terrible alcoholic problems and tell me that my example has brought them to sobriety and keeps them sober now.

I do not cite these examples as something for which I should be thanked. Should I be thanked for saving my own life? But in all this I see the mysterious workings of God. I see it as proof, as an adding up. I am an instrument of a power beyond me, a power I cannot see, but whose Presence is made manifest to me again and again.

I think of the letters I receive day after day, from a Lutheran minister in Greenland, from a rabbi in New York, from priests who offer masses for me, from nuns who ask me to speak before their young girls . . . when I think of this constant surge of good things coming to me, I can only say: if no material success had come to me but only this, then this alone would prove there is a God.

For if one like myself can know once more the sweetness of life, the respect of my fellow man, the love of those dear to me—if I can once more, in my chosen profession, bring pleasure and joy and laughter to people—then I say this could only be the work of a beneficent Being, a God who knows the frailties of man and, knowing them, forgives. ●

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