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**Speech by Dr. Alvin Plantinga on Receiving the 2017 Templeton Prize
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First, I want to thank the John Templeton Foundation for this wonderful award. I'm not at all sure that I deserve this prize, but I'm not going to let that interfere with accepting it.

This prize is given for spiritual progress or progress in religion. I don't know if I've made progress in religion – I started out as a member of the Christian Reformed Church, and I'm *still* Christian Reformed – but maybe that's not the sort of progress they had in mind.

What I *have* done is this. I've argued that belief in God, and more specifically Christian belief, is not irrational. Maybe that doesn't look like much of a big deal (and may be it isn't). But very many philosophers have argued that belief in God *is* indeed, irrational; and of course if it is irrational, we ought not to accept it. They think as follows: it would clearly be irrational to believe in God if there were not good evidence for the existence of God. But there really isn't any good evidence for theism. That's because the only real candidate for such evidence would be the so-called theistic proofs – arguments for the existence of God. And these proofs really don't work.

Now what I've argued, in a nutshell, is this. First of all, that there *are* some pretty good arguments for theism, for the existence of God. Maybe none of these theistic arguments is absolutely conclusive – hardly any philosophical arguments are – but some of them are in fact pretty good arguments. More important, though, what I've argued is that if belief in God is *true* – if there really is such a person as God – then belief in God is not irrational. And if my argument is right, then a very common attitude among those who don't believe in God is mistaken. That attitude goes like this: "I don't know whether or not there really is such a person as God – who could know a thing like that – but I do know the belief in God is irrational, not up to cognitive snuff, not such that a sensible person could accept it.

My argument, very simply, is that if theism is true – if there really is such a person as God, then in all likelihood God would make his presence known to us human beings. If theism is true, God is a God of love and concern: in fact his most essential property is that of loving. But the most important thing for us human beings to know is that there is indeed such a person as God; hence in all likelihood God would make his presence known to

human beings. And if this is so, then it would make sense to think of God as creating us in such a way that there is an innate tendency to believe in Him, or at least to have some sort of inkling of his existence. This would have to be something that doesn't depend on arguments. After all most of the people in the world, for one reason or another, don't pay much attention to philosophers or philosophical arguments. That's certainly a very sad fact, there it is: you'll just have to get used to it.

Now some beliefs are such that you can properly or rationally accept them even if you have no evidence or argument for them. I now believe that there is an annoying itch in my left leg; I'm perfectly rational or sensible in believing that, even though I haven't read it in a book or been told about by someone else. Say that a belief is basic for you if you hold that belief, but don't have any evidence for it; no one else has told you about it, you haven't read anything about it, etc. The belief that I now have an annoying itch in my left leg is a belief of that sort; no one has said to me "Say, did you know that you have an annoying itch in your left leg? Other beliefs are rational or sensible only if you do have some kind of evidence or argument for them. You believe that George Washington was the first president of the United States. Then it is the sort of belief that you have to have evidence for, if you are to be rational in believing it. You have to have been told about it in school, or read it in a history book, or heard about it from your parents – it's not the sort of thing you can just come up with and be rational in believing it. Other beliefs are not like that; they are instead such that you can believe them or accept them even if you don't have evidence for them – even if, that is, you do not believe or accept them on the basis of other things you believe. My belief that I've got that annoying itch in my left leg is of that sort. I can perfectly sensibly believe that even if I don't have evidence for it and even if I don't believe it on the basis of other things I believe. Another belief of that sort is the belief that I exist – that there is such a person as I. I certainly don't believe that by arguing to it from other things I believe; and of course believing it in that way is perfectly sensible, perfectly rational.

Now what I've claimed is that belief in God is like the beliefs of the second kind: it's the sort of belief such that I can be perfectly rational, perfectly sensible in holding that belief, even if I don't have any arguments for it. There certainly are arguments for the existence of God – the so-called theistic proofs; but I don't really need them in order to be rational, sensible, in believing in God.

Now suppose I'm right in all this. The main consequence would be that people who believe in God but don't believe on the basis of arguments – and that would certainly be most of us who believe in God – are perfectly sensible and perfectly OK from an intellectual view in believing in this way.

That's what I've spent most of my life arguing. It may be a small point, but I think it's important.

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