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(1a. 12-13)

Herbert McCabe O.P.

Excerpt

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Ia. 12. how God is known
(pp. 2–45)

Ia. 13. theological language
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SUMMA THEOLOGIAE, 1a. 12, 1

Quaestio 12. quomodo Deus a nobis cognoscatur

Quia in superioribus consideravimus qualiter Deus sit secundum se ipsum, restat considerandum qualiter sit in cognitione nostra, idest quomodo cognoscatur a creaturis, et circa hoc quaeruntur tredecim:

1. utrum aliquis intellectus creatus possit videre essentiam Dei;
2. utrum Dei essentia videatur ab intellectu per aliquam speciem creatam;
3. utrum oculo corporeo Dei essentia possit videri;
4. utrum aliqua substantia intellectualis creata ex suis naturalibus sufficiens sit videre Dei essentiam;
5. utrum intellectus creatus ad videndum Dei essentiam indigeat aliquo lumine creato;
6. utrum videntium essentiam Dei unus alio perfectius videat;
7. utrum aliquis intellectus creatus possit comprehendere Dei essentiam;
8. utrum intellectus creatus videns Dei essentiam omnia in ipsa cognoscat;
9. utrum ea quae ibi cognoscit per aliquas similitudines cognoscat;
10. utrum simul cognoscat omnia quae in Deo videt;
11. utrum in statu hujus vitae possit aliquis homo essentiam Dei videre;
12. utrum per rationem naturalem Deum in hac vita possimus cognoscere;
13. utrum supra cognitionem naturalis rationis sit in praesenti vita aliqua cognitio Dei per gratiam.

articulus 1. utrum aliquis intellectus creatus possit Deum videre per essentiam

AD PRIMUM sic proceditur:¹ 1. Videtur quod nullus intellectus creatus possit Deum per essentiam videre. Chrysostomus enim exponens illud quod dicitur *Joan. 1, Deum nemo vidit unquam*, sic dicit, *Ipsum quod est Deus, non solum prophetæ, sed nec angeli viderunt, nec archangeli. Quod enim creabilis est naturæ, qualiter videre poterit quod increabile est?*² Dionysius etiam loquens de Deo dicit, *Neque sensus est ejus, neque phantasia, neque opinio, nec ratio, nec scientia.*³

2. Præterea, omne infinitum, in quantum hujusmodi, est ignotum. Sed Deus est infinitus, ut supra ostensum est.⁴ Ergo secundum se est ignotus.

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HOW GOD IS KNOWN BY HIS CREATURES

Question 12. how God is known by his creatures

Having considered what God is in himself we turn now to consider what our minds can make of him; how in fact is he known by his creatures? Here there are thirteen points of inquiry:

1. can any created mind see the essence of God?
2. does the mind see the essence of God by means of any created likeness?
3. can we see the essence of God with our bodily eyes?
4. can any created intellect see the essence of God by its own natural powers?
5. does the created mind need a created light in order to see the essence of God?
6. is the essence of God seen more perfectly by one than by another?
7. can a created mind comprehend the essence of God?
8. does it in seeing the essence of God see all things?
9. is it by means of any likeness that it knows what it sees there?
10. is all that is seen in God seen together?
11. can any man in this life see the essence of God?
12. can we know God through our natural reason in this life?
13. besides the knowledge we have of God by natural reason, is there in this life a deeper knowledge that we have through grace?

article 1. can any created mind see the essence of God?

THE FIRST POINT:¹ It seems that no created mind can see God in his essence. For commenting on St John's words, *God no man has ever seen*, Chrysostom says, *It is not only the prophets who have never seen what God is; neither have the angels or the archangels seen him, for how could created nature see the uncreated?*² Dionysius, too, says: *Sense cannot attain to him, nor imagination, nor opinion, nor reasoning, nor knowledge.*³

2. The unlimited is, as such, unknowable. But we have already shown that God is unlimited,⁴ so he must be in himself unknown.

¹cf 1a. 12, 4 ad 3. 1a2æ, 3, 8; 5, 1. IV Sent. 46, 2, 1. CG III, 51, 54, 57. *De veritate* VIII, 1. *Quodl.* x, 8 (VII, 1, 1). *Compend. Theol.* 104; II, 9-10. *In Matt.* 5. *In Joan.* 1, lect. 11

²*Homil. super Joannem* 15. (*John* 1, 18.) PG 59, 98

³*De divinis nominibus* 1. PG 3, 593. (St Thomas, *lect.* 3)

⁴1a. 7, 1

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SUMMA THEOLOGIAE, 1a. 12, 1

3. Præterea, intellectus creatus non est cognoscitivus nisi existentium. Primum enim quod cadit in apprehensione intellectus est ens. Sed Deus non est existens, sed supra existentia, ut dicit Dionysius.⁵ Ergo non est intelligibilis, sed est supra omnem intellectum.

4. Præterea, cognoscentis ad cognitum oportet esse aliquam proportionem, cum cognitum sit perfectio cognoscentis. Sed nulla est proportio intellectus creati ad Deum; quia in infinitum distant. Ergo intellectus creatus non potest videre essentiam Dei.

SED CONTRA est quod dicitur I *Joan*. *Videbimus eum sicuti est*.⁶

RESPONSIO: Dicendum, quod cum unumquodque sit cognoscibile secundum quod est in actu, Deus, qui est actus purus absque omni permixtione potentiae, quantum in se est maxime cognoscibilis est. Sed quod est maxime cognoscibile in se alicui intellectui cognoscibile non est, propter excessum intelligibilis supra intellectum; sicut sol, qui est maxime visibilis, videri non potest a vespertione propter excessum luminis. Hoc igitur attendentes quidam posuerunt quod nullus intellectus creatus essentiam Dei videre potest.

Sed hoc inconvenienter dicitur. Cum enim ultima hominis beatitudo in altissima ejus operatione consistat, quæ est operatio intellectus, si nunquam essentiam Dei videre potest intellectus creatus, vel nunquam beatitudinem obtinebit vel in alio ejus beatitudo consistet quam in Deo; quod est alienum a fide. In ipso enim est ultima perfectio rationalis creaturæ, quod est ei principium essendi—in tantum enim unumquodque perfectum est in quantum ad suum principium attingit.

Similiter etiam est præter rationem. Inest enim homini naturale desiderium cognoscendi causam cum intuetur effectum—et ex hoc admiratio in hominibus consurgit. Si igitur intellectus rationalis creaturæ pertingere non possit ad primam causam rerum, remanebit inane desiderium naturæ. Unde simpliciter concedendum est quod beati Dei essentiam videant.

1. Ad primum ergo dicendum, quod utraque auctoritas loquitur de divisione comprehensionis. Unde præmittit Dionysius immediate ante verba proposita dicens, *Omnibus ipse est universaliter incomprehensibilis, et neque sensus ejus est*,⁷ etc. Et Chrysostomus parum post verba prædicta subdit, *Visionem hic dicit certissimam Patris considerationem et comprehensionem tantam, quantam Pater habet de Filio*.⁸

2. Ad secundum dicendum, quod infinitum quod se tenet ex parte

⁵*De div. nom.* 4. PG 3, 697. (St Thomas, *lect.* 2)

⁶I *John* 3, 2 ⁷loc cit ⁸loc cit (PG 59, 99)

^acf Appendix 1, *Knowledge*

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3. The created mind only knows what is already there to be known, for the first thing the mind grasps of anything is that it *is* something or other. God, however, is not there: he is beyond what is there, as Dionysius says,⁵ hence he is not intelligible, he is beyond understanding.

4. Since in knowledge the thing known is some sort of perfection of the knower, it cannot be altogether out of proportion to the knower. But there is no proportion whatever between the created mind and God, they are infinitely distant from each other, hence such a mind cannot see the essence of God.

ON THE OTHER HAND we read in 1 *John*, *We shall see him just as he is*.⁶

REPLY: In so far as a thing is realized it is knowable;^a but God is wholly realized—there is nothing about him which might be but is not—and so in himself he is supremely knowable. What is in itself supremely knowable may, however, so far exceed the power of a particular mind as to be beyond its understanding, rather as the sun is invisible to the bat because it is too bright for it. With this in mind some have said that no created mind can see the essence of God.

This view, however, is not admissible in the first place on theological grounds as being inconsistent with faith. The ultimate happiness of man consists in his highest activity, which is the exercise of his mind. If therefore the created mind were never able to see the essence of God, either it would never attain happiness or its happiness would consist in something other than God. This is contrary to faith, for the ultimate perfection of the rational creature lies in that which is the source of its being—each thing achieves its perfection by rising as high as its source.^b

The view is also philosophically untenable, for it belongs to human nature to look for the causes of things—that is how intellectual problems arise. If therefore the mind of the rational creature were incapable of arriving at the first cause of things, this natural tendency could not be fulfilled. So we must grant that the blessed do see the essence of God.

Hence: 1. Both these authorities are speaking not simply of seeing God's essence but of comprehending it. Thus Dionysius introduces the words quoted by saying, *All find it completely impossible to comprehend him, for sense cannot attain to him*, etc.⁷ and Chrysostom, soon after the passage quoted says, *By vision is meant contemplation of the Father and perfect comprehension of him such as the Father has of the Son*.⁸

2. The unlimited in the sense of indeterminate matter not perfected by

^acf Appendix 2, *Causes*. For happiness as an act of mind see 1a2æ. 3, 4; somehow possessing God himself, 1a2æ. 2, 8; 3, 8.

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SUMMA THEOLOGIAE, 1a. 12, 2

materiae non perfectae per formam ignotum est secundum se, quia omnis cognitio est per formam; sed infinitum quod se tenet ex parte formae non limitatum per materiam est secundum se maxime notum. Sic autem Deus est infinitus, et non primo modo, ut ex superioribus patet.⁹

3. Ad tertium dicendum, quod Deus non sic dicitur non existens quasi nullo modo sit existens, sed quia est supra omne existens, inquantum est suum esse. Unde ex hoc non sequitur quod nullo modo possit cognosci; sed quod omnem cognitionem excedat; quod est ipsum non comprehendi.

4. Ad quartum dicendum, quod proportio dicitur *dupluciter*. Uno modo certa habitudo unius quantitatis ad alteram, secundum quod duplum, triplum, et aequale sunt species proportionis. Alio modo quaelibet habitudo unius ad alterum proportio dicitur. Et sic potest esse proportio creaturae ad Deum, inquantum se habet ad ipsum ut effectus ad causam, et ut potentia ad actum: et secundum hoc intellectus creatus proportionatus esse potest ad cognoscendum Deum.

articulus 2. utrum Dei essentia videatur ab intellectu per aliquam speciem creatam

AD SECUNDUM sic proceditur:¹ 1. Videtur quod essentia Dei ab intellectu creato per aliquam similitudinem videatur. Dicit enim 1 Joann, *Scimus quoniam cum apparuerit, similes ei erimus, et videbimus eum sicuti est.*²

2. Praeterea, Augustinus dicit, *Cum Deum novimus, fit aliqua Dei similitudo in nobis.*³

3. Praeterea, intellectus in actu est intelligibile in actu; sicut sensus in actu est sensibile in actu. Hoc autem non est, nisi inquantum informatur sensus similitudine rei sensibilis, et intellectus similitudine rei intellectae. Ergo si Deus ab intellectu creato videtur in actu, oportet quod per aliquam similitudinem videatur.

SED CONTRA est quod dicit Augustinus quod cum Apostolus dicit, *Videmus nunc per speculum, et in aenigmate,* speculi et aenigmati nomine quaecumque similitudines ab ipso significatae intelligi possunt quae accommodatae sunt ad intelligendum Deum.⁴ Sed videre Deum per essentiam non est visio aenigmatica, vel specularis,* sed contra eam dividitur. Ergo divina essentia non videtur per similitudines.

*ms. *vel speculativa*, as a theory in a puzzle

⁹1a. 7, 1

¹cf III Sent. 14, 1, 3; IV, 49, 2, 1. *De veritate* VIII, 1; X, 11. CG III, 49, 51; IV, 7. *Quodl.* VII, 1, 1. *Compend. Theol.* 105; II, 9. *In Joann.* I, lect. 11; 14, lect. 2. *In I Cor.* 13, lect. 4. *In De div. nom.* I, lect. 1. *In De Trin.* I, 2

²1 John 3, 2

³*De Trinitate* IX, 11. PG 42, 969

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form is, as such, unknowable because it is through the form that anything is known. But the unlimited in the sense of a form not confined by matter is in itself supremely knowable. It is in this latter sense that God is unlimited or infinite, and not in the first sense, as is clear from what has been said.⁹

3. God is not said to be 'not there' in the sense that he does not exist at all, but because being his own existence he transcends all that is there. It follows from this not that he cannot be known but that he is beyond all that can be known of him—this is what is meant by saying that he cannot be comprehended.

4. When we say one thing is in proportion to another we can either mean that they are quantitatively related—in this sense double, thrice and equal are kinds of proportion—or else we can mean just any kind of relation that one thing may have to another. It is in this latter sense that we speak of a proportion between creatures and God, in that they are related to him as effects to cause and as the partially realized to the absolutely real;^c in this sense it is not altogether disproportionate to the created mind to know God.

article 2. does the mind see God's essence by means of any created likeness?

THE SECOND POINT:¹ 1. It seems that the created mind sees the essence of God by means of a likeness. We read in 1 *John*, *We know that when he appears we shall be like him and we shall know him just as he is.*²

2. Augustine says, *When we know God a likeness of him comes to be in us.*³

3. Actual thought is the realized intelligibility of what is known, just as actual sensation is the realized sensibleness of what is known.^a But this only occurs when the sense is formed by a likeness of the sensible thing or the mind by a likeness of the intelligible thing. Hence if God is actually seen by the created mind he must be seen through some likeness.

ON THE OTHER HAND St Paul's words, *we see now in a mirror by dull reflection*, Augustine says, *refer to any likeness that may help us to understand God.*⁴ But to see God in his essence is not to see him 'in a dull mirror' but is contrasted with this; hence the divine essence is not seen through any likeness.

⁴op cit xv, 9. (1 *Corinthians* 13, 12.) PG 42, 1069

^cCreatures, as inadequate effects of God, do not display his power to the full. Since the 'form' which is characteristic of God's causality is existence itself, whatever is not sheer existence (i.e. whatever is not God) is potential with respect to God.

^acf Appendix 1.

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SUMMA THEOLOGIAE, Ia. 12, 2

RESPONSIO: Dicendum quod ad visionem tam sensibilem quam intellectualem duo requiruntur, scilicet virtus visiva et unio rei visæ cum visu: non enim fit visio in actu nisi per hoc quod res visa quodammodo est in vidente. Et in rebus quidem corporalibus apparet quod res visa non potest esse in vidente per suam essentiam, sed solum per suam similitudinem: sicut similitudo lapidis est in oculo per quam fit visio in actu, non autem ipsa substantia lapidis.

Si autem esset una et eadem res quæ esset principium visivæ virtutis, et quæ esset res visa, oporteret videntem ab illa re et virtutem visivam habere et formam per quam videret. Manifestum est autem quod Deus et est auctor intellectivæ virtutis et ab intellectu videri potest. Et cum ipsa intellectiva virtus creaturæ non sit Dei essentia, relinquitur quod sit aliqua participata similitudo ipsius, qui est primus intellectus. Unde et virtus intellectualis creaturæ lumen quoddam intelligibile dicitur, quasi a prima luce derivatum, sive hoc intelligatur de virtute naturali sive de aliqua perfectione superaddita gratiæ vel gloriæ. Requiritur ergo ad videndum Deum aliqua Dei similitudo ex parte visivæ potentiæ, qua scilicet intellectus sit efficax ad videndum Deum.

Sed ex parte rei visæ, quam necesse est aliquo modo uniri videnti, per nullam similitudinem creatam Dei essentia videri potest. Primo quidem quia, sicut dicit Dionysius, *Per similitudines inferioris ordinis rerum, nullo modo superiora possunt cognosci*;⁵ sicut per speciem corporis non potest cognosci essentia rei incorporeæ. Multo igitur minus per speciem creatam quamcumque potest essentia Dei videri. Secundo quia essentia Dei est ipsum esse ejus, ut supra ostensum est,⁶ quod nulli formæ creatæ competere potest. Non potest igitur aliqua forma creata esse similitudo repræsentans videnti Dei essentiam. Tertio, quia divina essentia est aliquod incircumscriptum, continens in se supereminenter quidquid potest significari vel intelligi ab intellectu creato. Et hoc nullo modo per aliquam speciem creatam repræsentari potest, quia omnis forma creata est determinata secundum aliquam rationem vel sapientiæ, vel virtutis, vel ipsius esse, vel alicujus hujusmodi. Unde dicere Deum per similitudinem videri est dicere divinam essentiam non videri; quod est erroneum.

Dicendum ergo quod ad videndum Dei essentiam requiritur aliqua similitudo ex parte visivæ potentiæ, scilicet lumen divinæ gloriæ confortans intellectum ad videndum Deum; de quo dicitur in *Psal.*, *In lumine tuo videbimus lumen*.⁷ Non autem per aliquam similitudinem creatam Dei essentia videri potest, quæ ipsam divinam essentiam repræsentet ut in se est.

1. Ad primum ergo dicendum, quod auctoritas illa loquitur de similitudine quæ est per participationem luminis gloriæ.

⁵*De div. nom.* 4. PG 3, 588 (St Thomas, *lect.* 1)

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REPLY: In order to see, whether with the senses or the mind, two things are needed; there must be a power of sight and the thing to be seen must come into sight: for we do not see unless the thing is somehow in our sight. Obviously the visible corporeal thing is not by its essence in the one who sees, but only by its image: we see a stone not because the stone itself is in the eye but because its image is.

If, however, one and the same thing were both the thing seen and the source of the power of sight, then the seer would receive from that thing both the power of sight and the image by which it sees. Now it is clear that God is the author of the power of understanding and also can be an object of the understanding. The power of understanding in the creature (since it is not itself the essence of God), must be a sharing by likeness in the nature of him who is the primordial intelligence. Thus we could call it a sort of intelligible light derived from the primordial light, and we could say this both of the natural power of understanding and of any additional power that comes from grace or glory. It is the power of sight itself, therefore, that needs, in order to be capable of seeing God at all, a certain likeness to him.

When, however, we consider the essence of God as an object of sight, it is impossible that it should be united with the power of sight by any created image. Firstly, because as Dionysius says, things of a higher order cannot be known through likenesses of an inferior order⁵—we cannot even know the essences of incorporeal things through bodily likenesses, much less could we see the essence of God through any kind of created likeness. Secondly, because, as we have said,⁶ the essence of God is to exist, and since this could not be the case with any created form no such form could represent the essence of God to the understanding. Thirdly, the divine essence is beyond description, containing to a transcendent degree every perfection that can be described or understood by the created mind. This could not be represented by any created likeness since every created form is determinately this rather than that, whether it be wisdom, power, existence itself, or anything else. Hence to say that God is seen by means of a likeness is to say that his essence is not seen, which is erroneous.

Accordingly we should say that for the seeing of God's essence some likeness is required on the part of the power of sight, namely the light of divine glory strengthening the mind, of which the *Psalm* speaks, *In thy light shall we see light.*⁷ It is not that God's essence can be seen by means of any created likeness representing him as he is.

Hence: 1. This authoritative text is speaking of the likeness which comes through sharing in the light of glory.

⁵Ia. 3, 4 ⁷Psalms 35 (36), 10

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SUMMA THEOLOGIAE, 1a. 12, 3

2. Ad secundum dicendum quod Augustinus ibi loquitur de cognitione Dei quæ habetur in via.

3. Ad tertium dicendum quod divina essentia est ipsum esse. Unde sicut aliæ formæ intelligibiles, quæ non sunt suum esse, uniuntur intellectui secundum aliquod esse quo informant ipsum intellectum et faciunt ipsum in actu; ita divina essentia unitur intellectui creato, ut intellectum in actu, per seipsam faciens intellectum in actu.

articulus 3. utrum essentia Dei videri possit oculis corporalibus

AD TERTIUM sic proceditur:¹ 1. Videtur quod essentia Dei videri possit oculo corporali. Dicitur enim *Job, In carne mea videbo Deum*, etc.; et *Auditu auris audivi te, nunc autem oculus meus videt te*.²

2. Præterea, Augustinus dicit, *Vis itaque præpollentior oculorum erit illorum* (scilicet glorificatorum), *non ut acutius videant, quam quidam perhibentur videre serpentes vel aquilæ* (quantalibet enim acrimonia cernendi eadem animalia vigeant, nihil aliud possunt videre quam corpora), *sed ut videant et incorporalia*.³ Quicumque autem potest videre incorporalia, potest elevari ad videndum Deum. Ergo oculus glorificatus potest videre Deum.

3. Præterea, Deus potest videri ab homine visione imaginaria. Dicitur enim *Isa., Vidi Dominum sedentem super solium*, etc.⁴ Sed visio imaginaria a sensu originem habet; phantasia enim est *motus factus a sensu secundum actum*, ut dicitur in III *De Anima*.⁵ Ergo Deus sensibili visione videri potest.

SED CONTRA est quod dicit Augustinus, *Deum nemo vidit unquam, vel in hac vita, sicut ipse est, vel in Angelorum vita, sicut visibilia ista quæ corporali visione cernuntur*.⁶

RESPONSIO: Dicendum quod impossibile est Deum videri sensu visus, vel quocumque alio sensu, aut potentia sensitivæ partis. Omnis enim potentia hujusmodi est actus corporalis organi, ut infra dicitur.⁷ Actus autem proportionatur ei cujus est actus. Unde nulla hujusmodi potentia potest se extendere ultra corporalia. Deus autem incorporeus est, ut supra ostensum est.⁸ Unde nec sensu, nec imaginatione videri potest, sed solo intellectu.

1. Ad primum ergo dicendum quod cum dicitur, *In carne mea videbo Deum Salvatorem meum*, non intelligitur quod oculo carnis sit Deum visurus, sed quod in carne existens post resurrectionem visurus sit Deum. Similiter quod dicitur, *Nunc oculus meus videt te*, intelligitur de oculo

¹cf 1a. 12, 4 ad 3. 2a2æ. 175, 4. IV *Sent.* 49, 2, 2. In *Matt.* 5

²*Job* 19, 26; 42, 5

³*De civitate Dei* XXII, 29. PL 41, 799

⁴*Isaiah* 6, 1