

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-02911-7 - Summa Theologiae: Volume 3 - Knowing and Naming God,  
(1a. 12-13)

Herbert McCabe O.P.

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

The *Summa Theologiæ* ranks among the greatest documents of the Christian Church, and is a landmark of medieval western thought. It provides the framework for Catholic studies in systematic theology and for a classical Christian philosophy, and is regularly consulted by scholars of all faiths and none, across a range of academic disciplines. This paperback reissue of the classic Latin/English edition first published by the English Dominicans in the 1960s and 1970s, in the wake of the Second Vatican Council, has been undertaken in response to regular requests from readers and librarians around the world for the entire series of 61 volumes to be made available again. The original text is unchanged, except for the correction of a small number of typographical errors.

The original aim of this edition was not narrowly ecclesiastical. It sought to make this treasure of the Christian intellectual heritage available to theologians and philosophers of all backgrounds, including those who, without claiming to be believers themselves, appreciate a religious integrity which embodies hardbitten rationalism and who recognise in Thomas Aquinas a master of that perennial philosophy which forms the bedrock of European civilisation. Because of this the editors worked under specific instructions to bear in mind not only the professional theologian, but also the general reader with an interest in the 'reason' in Christianity. The parallel English and Latin texts can be used successfully by anybody with a basic knowledge of Latin, while the presence of the Latin text has allowed the translators a degree of freedom in adapting their English version for modern readers. Each volume contains a glossary of technical terms and is designed to be complete in itself to serve for private study or as a course text.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-02911-7 - Summa Theologiae: Volume 3 - Knowing and Naming God,  
(1a. 12-13)

Herbert McCabe O.P.

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

**NIHIL OBSTAT**

**THOMAS GILBY O.P.**

**KENELMUS FOSTER O.P.**

**LAURENTIUS BRIGHT O.P.**

**IMPRIMI POTEST**

**GERARDUS MEATH O.P.**

*Prior Provincialis Angliæ*

die 16 Martii 1964

**NIHIL OBSTAT**

**JOANNES M. T. BARTON S.T.D., L.S.S.**

*Censor deputatus*

**IMPRIMATUR**

✠ **GEORGIUS L. CRAVEN**

*Epus. Sebastopolis, Vic. Gen.*

Westmonasterii, die 9 Aprilis 1964

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-02911-7 - Summa Theologiae: Volume 3 - Knowing and Naming God,  
(1a. 12-13)

Herbert McCabe O.P.

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

ST THOMAS AQUINAS  
SUMMA THEOLOGIAE

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-02911-7 - Summa Theologiae: Volume 3 - Knowing and Naming God,  
(1a. 12-13)

Herbert McCabe O.P.

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

ST THOMAS AQUINAS  
SUMMA  
THEOLOGIAE

Latin text and English translation,  
Introductions, Notes, Appendices  
and Glossaries



Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-02911-7 - Summa Theologiae: Volume 3 - Knowing and Naming God,  
(1a. 12-13)

Herbert McCabe O.P.

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

PIÆ MEMORIÆ

JOANNIS

PP. XXIII

DICATUM

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-02911-7 - Summa Theologiae: Volume 3 - Knowing and Naming God,  
(1a. 12-13)

Herbert McCabe O.P.

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

**ALLOCUTIO**

**PAULI**

**PP. VI**

**MCMLXIII**

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-02911-7 - Summa Theologiae: Volume 3 - Knowing and Naming God,  
(1a. 12-13)

Herbert McCabe O.P.

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

## HIS HOLINESS POPE PAUL VI

WAS PLEASED to grant an audience, on 13 December 1963,  
to a group, representing the Dominican Editors and the  
combined Publishers of the new translation of the *Summa  
Theologiae* of St Thomas, led by His Eminence Michael  
Cardinal Browne, of the Order of Preachers, and the Most  
Reverend Father Aniceto Fernandez, Master General of the  
same Order.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-02911-7 - Summa Theologiae: Volume 3 - Knowing and Naming God,  
(1a. 12-13)

Herbert McCabe O.P.

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

## AT THIS AUDIENCE

THE HOLY FATHER made a cordial allocution in which he first welcomed the representatives of a project in which he found particular interest. He went on to laud the perennial value of St Thomas's doctrine as embodying universal truths in so cogent a fashion. This doctrine, he said, is a treasure belonging not only to the Dominican Order but to the whole Church, and indeed to the whole world; it is not merely medieval but valid for all times, not least of all for our own.

His Holiness therefore commended the enterprise of Dominicans from English-speaking Provinces of the Order and of their friends; they were undertaking a difficult task, less because the thought of St Thomas is complicated or his language subtle, than because the clarity of his thought and exactness of language is so difficult to translate. Yet the successful outcome of their efforts would undoubtedly contribute to the religious and cultural well-being of the English-speaking world.

What gave him great satisfaction was the notable evidence of interest in the spread of divine truth on the part of the eminent laymen concerned, members of different communions yet united in a common venture.

For these reasons the Holy Father wished it all success, and warmly encouraged and blessed all those engaged. He was happy to receive the first volume presented to him as a gesture of homage, and promised that he would follow with interest the progress of the work and look forward to the regular appearance of all the subsequent volumes.



Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-02911-7 - Summa Theologiae: Volume 3 - Knowing and Naming God,  
(1a. 12-13)

Herbert McCabe O.P.

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## VOLUMES

### PRIMA PARS

- 1 Theology (1a. 1)
- 2 Existence and Nature of God (1a. 2-11)
- 3 Knowing and Naming God (1a. 12-13)
- 4 Knowledge in God (1a. 14-18)
- 5 The Will and Power of God (1a. 19-26)
- 6 The Trinity (1a. 27-32)
- 7 Father, Son, and Holy Ghost (1a. 33-43)
- 8 Creation (1a. 44-9)
- 9 Angels (1a. 50-64)
- 10 Cosmogony (1a. 65-74)
- 11 Man (1a. 75-83)
- 12 Human Intelligence (1a. 84-9)
- 13 Man Made to God's Image (1a. 90-102)
- 14 Divine Government (1a. 103-9)
- 15 The World Order (1a. 110-19)

### PRIMA SECUNDÆ

- 16 End Happiness (1a2æ. 1-5)
- 17 Human Acts (1a2æ. 6-17)
- 18 Principles of Morality (1a2æ. 18-21)
- 19 Love and Desire (1a2æ. 22-30)
- 20 Pleasure (1a2æ. 31-9)
- 21 Fear and Anger (1a2æ. 40-8)
- 22 Dispositions for Human Acts (1a2æ. 49-54)
- 23 Virtues (1a2æ. 55-67)
- 24 Gifts and Beatitudes (1a2æ. 68-70)
- 25 Sin (1a2æ. 71-80)
- 26 Original Sin (1a2æ. 81-5)
- 27 Effects of Sin (1a2æ. 86-9)
- 28 Law (1a2æ. 90-7)
- 29 The Old Law (1a2æ. 98-105)
- 30 The Gospel of Grace (1a2æ. 106-14)

### SECUNDA SECUNDÆ

- 31 Faith (2a2æ. 1-7)
- 32 Consequences of Faith (2a2æ. 8-16)
- 33 Hope (2a2æ. 17-22)
- 34 Charity (2a2æ. 23-33)

\*

ix

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-02911-7 - Summa Theologiae: Volume 3 - Knowing and Naming God,  
(1a. 12-13)

Herbert McCabe O.P.

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

- 35 Consequences of Charity (2a2æ. 34-46)
- 36 Prudence (2a2æ. 47-56)
- 37 Justice (2a2æ. 57-62)
- 38 Injustice (2a2æ. 63-79)
- 39 Religion (2a2æ. 80-91)
- 40 Consequences of Religion (2a2æ. 92-100)
- 41 The Social Virtues (2a2æ. 101-22)
- 42 Courage (2a2æ. 123-40)
- 43 Temperance (2a2æ. 141-54)
- 44 Parts of Temperance (2a2æ. 155-70)
- 45 Mysticism and Miracle (2a2æ. 171-8)
- 46 Activity and Contemplation (2a2æ. 179-84)
- 47 The Pastoral and Religious Lives (2a2æ. 185-9)

## TERTIA PARS

- 48 The Incarnate Word (3a. 1-6)
- 49 The Grace of Christ (3a. 7-15)
- 50 The One Mediator (3a. 16-26)
- 51 Our Lady (3a. 27-30)
- 52 The Childhood of Christ (3a. 31-7)
- 53 The Life of Christ (3a. 38-45)
- 54 The Passion of Christ (3a. 46-52)
- 55 The Resurrection (3a. 53-9)
- 56 The Sacraments (3a. 60-5)
- 57 Baptism and Confirmation (3a. 66-72)
- 58 The Eucharist I (3a. 73-8)
- 59 The Eucharist II (3a. 79-83)
- 60 Penance (3a. 84-90)

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-02911-7 - Summa Theologiae: Volume 3 - Knowing and Naming God,  
(1a. 12-13)

Herbert McCabe O.P.

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## GENERAL PREFACE

**BY OFFICIAL APPOINTMENT THE SUMMA PROVIDES THE FRAMEWORK** for Catholic studies in systematic theology and for a classical Christian philosophy. Yet the work, which is more than a text-book for professional training, is also the witness of developing tradition and the source of living science about divine things. For faith seeks understanding in the contemplation of God's Logos, his wisdom and saving providence, running through the whole universe.

The purpose, then, of this edition is not narrowly clerical, but to share with all Christians a treasury which is part of their common heritage. Moreover, it consults the interests of many who would not claim to be believers, and yet appreciate the integrity which takes religion into hard thinking.

Accordingly the editors have kept in mind the needs of the general reader who can respond to the reasons in Christianity, as well as of technical theologians and philosophers.

Putting the Latin text alongside the English is part of the purpose. The reader with a smattering of Latin can be reassured when the translator, in order to be clear and readable, renders the thought of St Thomas into the freedom of another idiom without circumlocution or paraphrase.

There are two more reasons for the inclusion of the Latin text. First, to help the editors themselves, for the author's thought is too lissom to be uniformly and flatly transliterated; it rings with analogies, and its precision cannot be reduced to a table of terms. A rigid consistency has not been imposed on the editors of the different volumes among themselves; the original is given, and the student can judge for himself.

Next, to help those whose native tongue is not English or whose duty it is to study theology in Latin, of whom many are called to teach and preach through the medium of the most widespread language of the world, now becoming the second language of the Church.

The Latin is a sound working text, selected, paragraphed, and punctuated by the responsible editor. Important variations, in manuscripts and such major printed editions as the Piana and Leonine, are indicated. The English corresponds paragraph by paragraph and almost always sentence by sentence. Each of the sixty volumes, so far as is possible, will be complete in itself, to serve as a text for a special course or for private study.

THOMAS GILBY O.P.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-02911-7 - Summa Theologiae: Volume 3 - Knowing and Naming God,  
(1a. 12-13)

Herbert McCabe O.P.

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

ST THOMAS AQUINAS  
SUMMA THEOLOGIAE

VOLUME 3  
KNOWING AND NAMING  
GOD  
(1a. 12-13)

Latin text. English translation, Introduction, Notes,  
Appendices & Glossary

HERBERT McCABE O.P.

Introduction by  
THOMAS GILBY O.P.



Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-02911-7 - Summa Theologiae: Volume 3 - Knowing and Naming God,  
(1a. 12-13)

Herbert McCabe O.P.

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo

Cambridge University Press

The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)

Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9780521393508](http://www.cambridge.org/9780521393508)

© The Dominican Council as Trustee for the English Province of the Order of Preachers 1964  
[Excepting Latin text of 'QUOMODO DEUS A NOBIS COGNOSCATUR' and 'DE  
NOMINIBUS DEI']

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception  
and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,  
no reproduction of any part may take place without  
the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

This digitally printed first paperback version 2006

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library*

ISBN-13 978-0-521-39350-8 hardback

ISBN-10 0-521-39350-7 hardback

ISBN-13 978-0-521-02911-7 paperback

ISBN-10 0-521-02911-2 paperback

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-02911-7 - Summa Theologiae: Volume 3 - Knowing and Naming God,  
(1a. 12-13)

Herbert McCabe O.P.

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

# CONTENTS

xvii Notes on the text, translation, footnotes, and references

xix INTRODUCTION

## QUESTION 12. HOW GOD IS KNOWN BY HIS CREATURES

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

## QUESTION 13. THEOLOGICAL LANGUAGE

- 47 Article 1. can we use any words to refer to God?  
 51 Article 2. do any of the words we use express something of what  
 he is?  
 57 Article 3. can we say anything literally about God or must we  
 always speak metaphorically?  
 59 Article 4. are all the words predicated of God synonymous?  
 61 Article 5. are words used both of God and of creatures used  
 univocally or equivocally?

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-02911-7 - Summa Theologiae: Volume 3 - Knowing and Naming God,  
(1a. 12-13)

Herbert McCabe O.P.

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

- 67 Article 6. given that they are in fact used analogically, are they predicated primarily of God or of creatures?
- 71 Article 7. in speaking of God can we use words that imply temporal succession?
- 79 Article 8. does 'God' mean a thing of a certain kind or a thing having a certain operation?
- 81 Article 9. is the name 'God' peculiar to God alone?
- 87 Article 10. when it is used of God, of what shares in divinity, and of what is merely supposed to do so, is it used univocally or equivocally?
- 91 Article 11. is 'He who is' the most appropriate name for God?
- 93 Article 12. can affirmative statements correctly be made about God?

#### Appendices

- 99 1. Knowledge
- 101 2. Causes
- 104 3. 'Signifying Imperfectly'
- 106 4. Analogy
- 109 Glossary
- 113 Index

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-02911-7 - Summa Theologiae: Volume 3 - Knowing and Naming God,  
(1a. 12-13)

Herbert McCabe O.P.

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

# EDITORIAL NOTES

## THE LATIN TEXT

This is taken from the Faucher Edition (Paris, 1886), here corrected, re-punctuated, and paragraphed to match the translation; some Piana or Leonine readings are incorporated, others are indicated in footnotes.

## TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

In this translation I have sought neither elegance of style nor literal exactness; I have tried to reproduce as accurately as possible the argument of St Thomas. For those who wish to consult his use of particular words the Latin text is provided on the left-hand pages. My own opinion is that St Thomas was rather carefree in his use of 'technical' terms and I have not tried to use the same English equivalent for every occurrence of 'species', 'phantasma', 'nomen', etc. At two points I have departed widely from the literal text: for the untranslatable and false etymology of 'lapis' from 'lædens pedem', I have substituted the etymology of 'hydrogen' from 'producing water'—the anachronism should be sufficiently glaring to deceive nobody. Again, St Thomas says that 'sanum dicitur de animali et medicina et urina' but since we do not usually speak in English of healthy medicine or urine, I have said instead that we use 'healthy' of a man, a diet and a complexion.

## FOOTNOTES

Those signified by a superior number are the references given by St Thomas, with the exception of no. 1 to each article which refers to parallel texts in his writings. Those signified alphabetically are editorial references and explanatory remarks.

## REFERENCES

Biblical references are to the Vulgate, bracketed numbers to the Psalms are those of versions based on the Hebrew text. Patristic references are to Migne (PG, Greek Fathers; PL, Latin Fathers). Abbreviations to St Thomas's works are as follows:



Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-02911-7 - Summa Theologiae: Volume 3 - Knowing and Naming God,  
(1a. 12-13)

Herbert McCabe O.P.

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

*Summa Theologiae*, without title. Part, question, article, reply; e.g. 1a. 3, 2 ad 3. 1a2æ. 17, 6. 2a2æ. 180, 10. 3a. 35, 8.

*Summa Contra Gentiles*, *CG*. Book, chapter; e.g. *CG* 1, 28.

*Scriptum in IV Libros Sententiarum*, *Sent.* Book, distinction, question, article, solution or *quæstiuncula*, reply; e.g. III *Sent.* 25, 2, 3, ii ad 3.

*Compendium Theologiae*, *Compend. Theol.*

Commentaries of Scripture (*lecturæ*, *expositiones*): Job, *In Job*; Psalms, *In Psal.*; Isaiah, *In Isa.*; Jeremiah, *In Jerem.*; Lamentations, *In Thren.*; St Matthew, *In Matt.*; St John, *In Joan.*; Epistles of St Paul, e.g. *In Rom.* Chapter, verse, *lectio* as required.

Philosophical commentaries: On the *Liber de Causis*, *In De causis*. Aristotle: *Peri Hermeneias*, *In Periherm.*; Posterior Analytics, *In Poster.*; Physics, *In Physic.*; *De Cælo et Mundo*, *In De Cæl.*; *De Generatione et Corruptione*, *In De gen.*; *Meteorologica*, *In Meteor.*; *De Anima*, *In De anima*; *De Sensu et Sensato*, *In De sensu*; *De Memoria et Reminiscentia*, *In De memor.*; Metaphysics, *In Meta.*; Nicomachean Ethics, *In Ethic.*, Politics, *In Pol.* Book, chapter, *lectio* as required, also for Expositions on Boethius, *Liber de Hebdomadibus* and *Liber de Trinitate*, *In De hebd.* and *In De Trin.*, and on Dionysius *De Divinis Nominibus*, *In De div. nom.* References to Aristotle give the Bekker annotation.

*Quæstiones quodlibetales* (*de quolibet*), *Quodl.*

Main titles are given in full for other works, including the 10 series of *Quæstiones Disputatæ*.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-02911-7 - Summa Theologiae: Volume 3 - Knowing and Naming God,  
(1a. 12-13)

Herbert McCabe O.P.

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## INTRODUCTION

HAVING OUTLINED the character of Christian Theology (Vol. 1) and opened the discussion whether a reasoned conviction can be reached that a divine being exists, inquiry into whose nature need not be left at a question mark (Vol. 2), St Thomas then pauses before pursuing his investigations into divine activity (Vols. 4 & 5). He takes stock of the position he has arrived at and, in two unusually long Questions (to which this Vol. 3 is devoted), considers if there be any kinship between our finite minds and the infinite reality of God (1a. 12), and, if so, whether the words of human thought can truthfully describe it (1a. 13). Accordingly this introduction will be divided into two parts: the first (1-17) follows the argument that the human mind can be carried past reflections of the Creator to the vision of the Godhead; the second (18-31) that in the meantime the imperfect articulations of reason about him can be really relevant to this culmination.

### *The Light of Divinity*

1. Given intelligence, however slight, and at once, if one may put it so, God begins to appear on the map, and in a manner that promises manifest presence, not merely rumour, report, or representation. Aristotle's conclusion that happiness lay in a kind of godlike contemplation,<sup>1</sup> which was meditated on by Dante from St Thomas's philosophical commentaries and held such fascination for humanists of the Middle Ages and after, had seemed to strain human nature beyond its powers. St Thomas, however, presses far past his master. As a Christian theologian he responded to God's self-revelation overshadowing the whole of human history from the beginning, throwing, as it were, an unearthly light on natural things, not indeed eclipsing their rational evidences nor distorting their proper shapes, yet edging more sharply their limitations as objects of final desire.

The human spirit cannot be satisfied by creatures, nor even by the clear perception of their creator integrating its manifold experience, for the heart's desire is not to gaze at the first reason for things, but to be embraced by the living God himself.<sup>2</sup> Anything vicarious or not at first hand falls short of such union, and so at the end ideas about God will not serve; only he himself can hold the mind in a presence direct, seen, and realized through no abstract likeness. We are about to watch how St Thomas literally attributes to this knowledge the requirements of full vision;

<sup>1</sup>e.g. *Nicomachean Ethics*, x, 8

<sup>2</sup>1a2æ. 2, 8; 3, 6-8. cf 2a2æ. 28, 3

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-02911-7 - Summa Theologiae: Volume 3 - Knowing and Naming God,  
(1a. 12-13)

Herbert McCabe O.P.

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

‘those things are said to be seen which by their very selves excite mind or sense to their being known’.<sup>3</sup>

2. Two streams of teaching converge—a rough sketch-map may mark their flow from Jewish and Hellenic sources. For the first God is far beyond our understanding, incomprehensible in his being and unsearchable in his ways; for the second he is the word of reason and the light of the world. On the one hand, the answer to Job; on the other, the play of Wisdom, rejoicing in the habitable part of the earth and delighting with the children of men. No wonder that mystical writings, exemplifying the terse distinction drawn by the *Summa* between *remotio* and *eminentia* (to be touched on later), bear witness that those who search for God are tugged in two directions, towards the path of negation where in a dark cloud of unknowing all distinctiveness is stripped from our conceptions about him and the creature itself is emptied of content, and towards an ascent of affirmation where in a bright cloud like that on the Mount of the Transfiguration his manifold excellence is acknowledged.

3. The *Summa* begins by marking the negative way; ‘we are considering how God is, or rather, how he is not’.<sup>4</sup> For he is not part of our world and cannot be placed in its categories;<sup>5</sup> it will be emphasized throughout that no created mind can sound his depths.<sup>6</sup> Yet the phrase is guarded—‘how he is not’, *quomodo non sit*, rather than ‘what he is not’, *quid non sit*, as though to anticipate what will appear later, that to deny of God a creaturely mode of existence is not to hold him void of the values and noble forms we discover in the world. Indeed the discourse opens by stressing the supreme evidence of God’s being in itself, though not to us,<sup>7</sup> and goes on to show that all that *is* in creatures takes after God, *assimilantur ei in quantum sunt entia ut primo et universali principio totius esse*,<sup>8</sup> and to describe his infinity not by indefiniteness but by very excess of form.<sup>9</sup>

Now it proposes to explore a more positive way, recognizing behind the limited mode of human knowledge a content that is derivatively divine, a beginning to an end still far away, that implies, if not quite a promise, yet still a capacity to be filled by God’s grace and swept to the glory of seeing him ‘just as he is’, *sicuti est, καθώς ἐστιν*.<sup>10</sup> To St Thomas, as to his Augustinian contemporaries, the intelligible universe is bathed in God’s light, though to him the first glimmers we see are not immediately recognized as divine. *Essentia divina totaliter lux intelligibilis est*,<sup>11</sup> God is wholly lucid in himself, yet not to us, creatures of the night, who blink at

<sup>3</sup>2a2æ. 1, 4. cf 1a. 12, 9. The Bampton Lectures for 1928 remain the best general introduction to the subject: *The Vision of God*, the Christian Doctrine of the *Summum Bonum*, by Kenneth E. Kirk. 1st ed. London, 1931

<sup>4</sup>1a. 2. Prologue <sup>5</sup>1a. 3, 5 & 7 <sup>6</sup>e.g. 1a. 12, 7 <sup>7</sup>1a. 2, 1 <sup>8</sup>1a. 4, 3

<sup>9</sup>1a. 7, 1 <sup>10</sup>1 John 3, 2 <sup>11</sup>Quodl. VII, 1, 1

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-02911-7 - Summa Theologiae: Volume 3 - Knowing and Naming God,  
(1a. 12-13)

Herbert McCabe O.P.

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

divine truth like owls in sunshine.<sup>12</sup> What Aristotle had said of rational divinity is still more to the point now that the mystery of the Godhead declared to us drives the mind into the deeper darkness of faith and there exposed to greater uncertainties.<sup>13</sup>

The difficulties arise from our side, although they are not entirely of our own making since they are ordained by divine Providence. The objective truth in creatures is turbid compared with limpid divinity—if only we could see it. Why creatures should exist at all is sometimes hard to grasp, also how they exist, and what they are when they do exist, although the opaqueness in their natures and their tremulous intelligibility usually pass unnoticed because we are at home with them, or think we are. One feels that St Thomas regarded theology as profoundly an ‘easier’ subject than the other sciences, and that he would have us take God less anxiously than we do and that the problems we thrust into our relationship with him are really problems about us—not that these are to be evaded by the simple abandon to God he counsels, for of all the spiritual masters he is the most profoundly Aristotelean in wrestling with the here and now.

4. Question 12 treats of three types of knowing God; first, the immediate vision of him, *scientia beata* (articles 1–11), second, the conclusions inferred about him by reasoning from this world, or natural theology (article 12), and third, Christian Theology or the *sacra doctrina* outlined in the first Question of the *Summa*, which springs from faith cleaving to him without intermediary and yet as unknown (article 13). It is important that the second and the third should not be disconnected from one another, but taken together as parts of a single process that comes to a head in the first: grace is planted in nature and is the seed of glory. It will be noticed that the affective or mystical knowledge of divine things mentioned in the opening Question is not included:<sup>14</sup> this is reserved for later treatment under the gifts and charismata of the Spirit and the life of contemplation.<sup>15</sup>

5. The Question opens in the confidence that God himself can be seen by created minds (article 1), and in a vision that is not a theophany through the intermediary of likenesses or of bodily images (articles 2 & 3). Nevertheless a creaturely element is present, for this act of seeing, though beyond our unaided natural powers (article 4), remains our act of seeing and issues from the mind enhanced by the *lumen gloriae*, which is a new likeness to God (article 5).

Dominated by the Christian conviction that nothing less than God himself is objectively our joy—to say otherwise is foreign to faith’,

<sup>12</sup>‘Owls’, 1a. 1, 5 ad 1: an echo of *Metaphysics* II, 1, 993b10. Elsewhere ‘as blind as bats’; e.g. 1a. 12, 1

<sup>13</sup>cf 2a2æ. 4, 8      <sup>14</sup>1a. 1, 6 ad 3

<sup>15</sup>1a. 43. 1a2æ. 68–70. 2a2æ. 8; 9; 45; 52; 171–5; 179–82

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-02911-7 - Summa Theologiae: Volume 3 - Knowing and Naming God,  
(1a. 12-13)

Herbert McCabe O.P.

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

*alienum a fide*<sup>16</sup>—the study fastens on the subjective requirements of the act elicited in the beatific vision. There the interplay of cognitive and affective factors should be noted. For while St Thomas insists that the decisive act of happiness, *beatitudo*, is an act of knowing, not of loving, that is, an act of mind which, unlike the will, is the power of ‘holding’ an object,<sup>17</sup> he is not an intellectualist in the mentalistic style who sharply separates conscious from biological processes, which may or may not run parallel to one another. On the contrary he regards knowing as an extension of being, an activity of a participant not of an uncommitted spectator, a thrust of life, an effort of freedom breaking out from the solitude of the self into the wide world.<sup>18</sup> Knowing is innermost modulated by loving from its first impulse to its final delight, and accordingly the *Summa* grounds the possibility of the vision of God on the natural desire for it,<sup>19</sup> and measures the degree of the seeing by the intensity of our loving friendship.<sup>20</sup>

6. We have therefore to consider the famous and controversial argument from natural desire.<sup>21</sup> What is in question is the face to face vision of God as he is in himself, not an exalted philosophical contemplation of the divine reasons for things.<sup>22</sup> The matter is delicate because, in the words of a modern scholastic theologian, it concerns the point of insertion, *agitur de puncto insertionis*, of supernatural life into human nature.<sup>23</sup> Does this desire mean that we have a natural aptness, *aptitudo*, to receive grace? What is this capacity or capability to be acted on from a higher plane? It is called a *potentia obedientialis*, but is this purely submissive, like the power of Balaam’s ass to prophesy, or is an active human contribution called for?<sup>24</sup> Does grace become part of us and is our charity really ours? Such questions will be discussed elsewhere.<sup>25</sup> As for the validity of the argument from the natural desire for grace it has been urged that it proves either too much or too little: too much if it suggests that the sight of God can be claimed by created minds as somehow their natural due—which would be forward; too little, if it refers to mere velleity—which would be idle.

<sup>16</sup>1a. 12, 1      <sup>17</sup>1a2æ. 3, 4. A key-article in the *Summa*

<sup>18</sup>cf 1a. 5, 1 & 4; 14, 1; 16, 3; 18, 3      <sup>19</sup>1a. 12, 1

<sup>20</sup>1a. 12, 6. cf 2a2æ. 24, 5, on variations within charity. Also Vol. 1, Appendix 10, *The Dialectic of Love in the Summa*

<sup>21</sup>See also 1a2æ. 3, 8. CG III, 50. *De veritate* VIII, 1

<sup>22</sup>cf 1a2æ. 3, 6 & 7

<sup>23</sup>R. Garrigou-Lagrange, *De Revelatione* I, 12, 4

<sup>24</sup>3a. 11, 1. *Compend. Theol.* 104. *De virtutibus* 10, ad 2, 13

<sup>25</sup>1a2æ. 109 & 110, on natural preparation for grace. 2a2æ. 23, 2, on charity as friendship with God, against Peter Lombard’s view that charity was the Holy Ghost

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-02911-7 - Summa Theologiae: Volume 3 - Knowing and Naming God,  
(1a. 12-13)

Herbert McCabe O.P.

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

There is no dilemma for St Thomas. He is explicit that sharing in God's own life by grace exceeds the natural reach of any creature whatsoever, *supra facultatem naturalem cuiuslibet creaturæ*; it is by wholly undeserved mercy that men are lifted to a higher and supernatural level, born again of the Spirit into a new life, yet this is then their life, and the spontaneous activities that ensue are in no sense forced or unnatural.<sup>26</sup> On the other hand there is no abrupt chasm between nature and grace, and when he sees in natural desire a stretching out to God himself he is not indulging a wish-fulfilment fantasy, which is quite out of keeping with his cast of mind. All he is saying is that the vision is possible, not that it is likely, and that the yearning itself is a prophecy of what can be, not a promise of what will be. For it is not daydreaming or a sophisticated projection, but an inborn and inescapable craving, and this, he holds, cannot be pointless, *inane*, not because his was an optimistic temperament, apt to translate fiction into fact, but because quite dispassionately he reckoned that potentialities and 'intentions' could not be accounted for without corresponding actualities and ends. Nothing would stir in time were there no complete possession of life in eternity: that in one phrase has been the dialectic of the preceding Questions.

7. The meaning of this natural desire is debated. Is it *appetitus naturalis* in the precise or more general sense of the term? Let us recall the vocabulary. *Amor*, *appetitus*, *desiderium*, ὀρεξις, which can be taken here as synonymous, are analogical terms applying to every bent or *inclinatio*. The Scholastics found end-and-object-seeking love in both conscious and unconscious activity, and those who were faithful to the genius of Aristotle and read no outside plot into the world of nature, avoided the pathetic fallacy of ascribing human emotions to non-human things, although their language may be more animist than his, and of course their religion gave them a clearer picture of the history, hierarchy, and purpose of the universe, so that they were more given to offering explanations of why things should act as they do.<sup>27</sup> They were aware that these often amounted only to recommendatory arguments, *ex convenientiis*, not to demonstrations, and their teleology was not committed to any particular theory about the design which linked different things together.<sup>28</sup> Aristotle had described a 'nature' as a principle of motion from within, and this functional development towards completed wholeness was observed principally in living things.<sup>29</sup> From the 'forward-directedness' of acting for an end they inferred that a governing intelligence existed somewhere, but this was not

<sup>26</sup> 1a. 12, 4. cf Vol. 1, Appendix 8, *Natural and Supernatural*

<sup>27</sup> cf Vol. 1, Appendix 2, *Method of the Summa*

<sup>28</sup> cf Vol. 2, Appendix 10, *The Fifth Way*; Appendix 11, *The Single Causal Origin*

<sup>29</sup> cf 3a. 2, 1

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-02911-7 - Summa Theologiae: Volume 3 - Knowing and Naming God,  
(1a. 12-13)

Herbert McCabe O.P.

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

an element within the action; biological appetite was not treated as itself voicing psychic purpose.<sup>30</sup> It could be *appetitus naturalis* in the precise sense of the term, also called *appetitus innatus*, an inborn drive towards completion in things without consciousness and unconsciously at work even in things with consciousness. In sentient and intelligent natures, however, it develops into the desire for an object through perceiving it, and is then called *appetitus animalis* or *appetitus elicited*, manifested in feeling, wishing, willing, and deliberately choosing. Yet voluntary desire is natural as issuing from within the acting subject, and is therefore classed under *appetitus naturalis* or, better perhaps, *desiderium naturale* in its general sense.<sup>31</sup>

Dominic Soto (d. 1560), a master of the Golden Age of Spanish Thomism, seems to take the desire to see God back to a stage behind thought and deliberation. The Franciscan Scotus, the idiosyncratic Dominican Durandus, and the Jesuit Gregory of Valencia are cited in support; these, with Noris and Berti, both Augustinians, represent an impressive conjunction, and we are likelier nowadays than their contemporaries were to warm to their tribute to the unconscious ‘load of immortality’. To the majority view, however, represented by Ferrariensis, Bañez, and John of St Thomas, the desire is conscious, though, apart from grace, conditional and ineffective: ‘were it possible I would want to see God, but as it is the vision is beyond my powers and reasonable claims’. Cajetan, characteristically, refuses to speculate on a hypothetical state of pure nature, and goes straight to the existing situation: God’s providential intervention in human history has appeared from the beginning, and his deeds and promises, *effectus gratiae et gloriae*, awaken a desire for him that is natural given his revealing action, *supposita revelatione talium effectuum*.

8. The discussion then turns from the possibility to the conditions for the face to face vision of God to be realized. The subject of the act is the creature, the object is God. The creature remains, though raised to greater likeness to God by the *lumen gloriae*; the human personality is not extinguished, for its identity with God is not effected by a fusion of substance, but by a complete identity in knowledge and love: of this more later. Yet though God is seen *by* us, that is by what is like him, he is not seen *in* or *through* any likeness; it is he himself who is known and loved in immediate contact.<sup>32</sup>

9. This is a staggering truth, and yet it is all said so quietly. St Thomas gives little hint of his wonder, and we too perhaps follow him best by

<sup>30</sup>1a2æ. 1, 2<sup>31</sup>1a. 6, 1 ad 2; 19, 1; 78, 1 ad 3; 80, 1. 1a2æ. 6, 1; 8, 2 & 3; 10, 1; 13, 3. 3a. 18, 2-4. In *De anima* III, lect. 5<sup>32</sup>1a. 12, 2 & 5

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-02911-7 - Summa Theologiae: Volume 3 - Knowing and Naming God,  
(1a. 12-13)

Herbert McCabe O.P.

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

plodding at the terms of his statements. Since the language of the *Summa* is deceptively simple about the problem of knowledge a preliminary outline may be helpful.

Its theory of knowledge is not an indirect realism according to which impressions from an outside world are the first objects known by the mind, which then may undertake the effort of seeking to establish their correspondence with it. Even so, while not to be compared to a camera which registers the likeness of objects, the human mind does, at least under its present conditions, perform a kind of doubling when the thing which is, *ens*, becomes the thing which is known, *verum*. Ultimately being and knowing are identical, for God *is* his knowing and his knowing *is* what he knows, but in the mixed reality of a creature existence is distinct from essence, and essence from the power of knowing, and the power of knowing from the act of knowing, and the act of knowing from the being known.<sup>33</sup> These are fine distinctions, not splits into separate pieces; they shade the 'dividenceness' suffered in consciousness and which the mind strives to break down by rejoining its beginning and finding its end. We have touched on the *appetitus naturalis* at the spring of knowledge, a Godward bent already in motion before it is knowingly formulated, and at the term of knowledge, as we shall see, the mind is identified with its object in a realization beyond representation. In between St Thomas favours no dissociation in the Cartesian manner, and never loses hold of Aristotle's principle that the knower somehow becomes the known: a hedging 'somehow', *quodammodo*, it may seem, since the human mind is not yet immediately united to the very being of its object.<sup>34</sup>

For we do not literally become stony or wet by thinking of rocks and water, though St Thomas is gentle with the Ionian theory of physical affinity, and indeed echoes it when discussing knowledge through love and sympathy, not merely through notions. What is possessed by the mind is not the natural being of other things, but, more or less imperfectly, their intelligible forms, communicated and shared in after the manner of a representation, likeness, 'look' or *species*.<sup>35</sup>

Such representing can be considered under two aspects: first, as a modification of the knowing subject, and as such, to speak precisely, it is the concern of that part of natural philosophy called psychology; second, as a relation to or signification of the object known, and as such it is the concern of epistemology or the theory of knowledge. Though these two merge into one another, as during the discussion of man's cognitive

<sup>33</sup>cf e.g. Ia. 14, 2 & 4; 79, 1

<sup>34</sup>cf Ia. 14, 1

<sup>35</sup>cf Ia. 12, 2; 56, 3; 84, 1, 2, 6. *In De anima* II, lect. 24



Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-02911-7 - Summa Theologiae: Volume 3 - Knowing and Naming God,  
(1a. 12-13)

Herbert McCabe O.P.

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

powers,<sup>36</sup> they represent distinct considerations. For notice, the form that shapes a bodily thing, the inner idea that makes it intelligible, has there a material manner of being, whereas this form when taken into the mind is invested with a spiritual manner of being. Notice as well, that if we speak of this form as a species, then it exists in the thing as substance, whereas in the mind it exists as a quality. Were we to stay in natural philosophy there would be no joining a thing and a think; were we to treat the predicaments each as the appropriate compartment for entities that were like little absolutes or atoms then this double opposition, namely material-spiritual and substantial-accidental, could not be resolved. But as it is, when we move into the world of 'relation', the difference of merely entitative status between the thing outside the mind and the thing inside the mind sets up no barrier to knowledge. For the identity established between knower and known is not reducible to physical assimilation, and in this identity spirit can possess body and a mental *species*, itself a quality, can contain substance by objective reference.<sup>37</sup>

10. This may become less obscure when we come to consider the identity between God and man in the beatific vision. At this stage we merely note that psychology is one interest and epistemology another, and that St Thomas's theory of knowledge amounts to more than the pieces of his psychological apparatus. Mental *species*, for instance, should not be treated as psychic items resembling non-psychic things. For knowledge their true bearing is as relationships opening out to others, not as events which take place in us, and it is so, as beckonings or stretchings out, *intentiones* (hence the Scholastic term *intentionalis*, weakly translated 'intentional'), not as qualities of a psychological power, that they signify their object or have objective content. A *species* is not that which is known, *id quod intelligitur*, but that by which a thing is known, *ut quo intelligitur*; it is not an idol, but an image on which the mind does not stay but passes through.<sup>38</sup>

Only one of the many refinements on this teaching need be mentioned here. In the quickening of the mind by the object two stages are distinguished, as it were of impregnation and conception, corresponding to the *species impressa*, the form by which the mind comes to perceive, *quo videtur*, and to the *species expressa*, the form in which it perceives the object, *in quo videtur*.<sup>39</sup>

11. Now to apply this outline to the doctrine of the beatific vision. No representation can match the very being of God. Hence all signs are past

<sup>36</sup>Ia. 84-8

<sup>37</sup>cf Ia. 12, 6 ad 2; 13, 12 ad 3; 84, 2; 85, 1 ad 1. Cajetan, *In iam.* 12, 2

<sup>38</sup>Ia. 85, 2. cf 3a. 25, 2

<sup>39</sup>Ia. 79, 2; 87, 1. *De potentia* VIII, 1. *In De anima* III, lect. 7-9

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-02911-7 - Summa Theologiae: Volume 3 - Knowing and Naming God,  
(1a. 12-13)

Herbert McCabe O.P.

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

and done with if we know him face to face even as we are known; then no likeness objectively mirrors him and divinity itself supplies the epistemological rôle of a *species*: of the *species impressa*, for God's very essence clasps the mind closely, *copuletur ei*, and is there the intelligible form, *ipsa essentia divina fit forma intelligibilis intellectus*; and of the *species expressa*, for the mind does not conceive a word of its own, for the divine essence is so united to the mind as to be what is actually seen, through its very self making the mind actually seeing, *ut intellectus in actu per seipsam faciens intellectum in actu*.<sup>40</sup> And so we know, not the last ebb of things in the evening light of our own mental words, but their full tide in the dawn light of the Word of God.<sup>41</sup>

12. The union is immediate, the vision direct, its objective content the uncreated being of God. Yet since by knowing the knower becomes the known without ceasing to be itself, this epistemological union with God blots nothing out. He is not the exclusive One, but the simple cause of the Many, not a devouring flame, but the Father of lights; his zeal, says Dionysius, does not consume, but cherishes. All is God, as known and loved, yet the psychological identity of the creature is not absorbed or destroyed; substance and accidents remain, in a heightened likeness to God, the *lumen gloriae*, which strengthens the creature to see and delight in his presence.<sup>42</sup>

So we return to the distinction between the psychological and the epistemological. The creaturely self is happy by holding another in mind and heart, not by the blank fact of just being itself. It is not born happy, but may become so when its nature is enlarged to possess a life which is not its own; what it is as a thing is subordinate to what it 'has' as happiness, and this derives from what it knows and loves.<sup>43</sup> If we are to put interests in their proper order we should recognize that human physiology is capped by human psychology, and that by a philosophy of the true and the good, and that again by theology. And within theology itself the mechanics should be held in the Gospel light and the scholasticism read in terms of a personal encounter with God who reveals himself as our lover.

13. St Thomas was certainly not one to evade a proximate reality in the name of a remote ideal or to decry the effort of starting with the lower and clambering up to the higher. The very texture of the *Summa's* dialectic is woven from causality, nevertheless it is discerned that causal relationships themselves descend from the non-causal relationships of knowledge and

<sup>40</sup>Ia. 12, 2, c. & ad 3; 5. 3a. 9, 3 ad 3. CG III, 53

<sup>41</sup>Ia. 12, 9; 34, 1; 59, 6      <sup>42</sup>Ia. 12, 2 & 5

<sup>43</sup>cf Ia2æ. 49, 3 & 4; 50, 2: on *habitus* as complements to nature

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-02911-7 - Summa Theologiae: Volume 3 - Knowing and Naming God,  
(1a. 12-13)

Herbert McCabe O.P.

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

love within the Blessed Trinity, and it is into these that we are invited to enter.<sup>44</sup> For happiness is constituted on the plane of knowing and loving, and thence, full measure and pressed, overflows into the psycho-physical organism. This spill from the epistemological into the natural St Thomas calls *redundantia*;<sup>45</sup> he discovers it in the modest functions of daily experience, but the supreme example is the *lumen gloriæ* called for by the vision of God, by which the human physique is transfigured, so that it is no longer vulnerable, lumpish, stiff, or dull.<sup>46</sup> Could there be a closer harmony and fusion of *esse cognitum* and *esse naturale*, of knowing and being in its most physical sense?

14. Some medieval theologians entertained the hypothesis of a *visio clara* in which God might be perceived through some bright appearance of his glory. Yet the *visio beatifica* of Christian teaching surpasses this since God's very essence is seen. Not that he is contained by a created mind, or is known as he knows himself, for he remains incomprehensible; our capacity is limited, and it suffices for happiness that our desire is completely satisfied.<sup>47</sup> The *Summa* respects the venerable Greek tradition that the Godhead cannot be comprehended;<sup>48</sup> yet its forthright Latin statement was ratified by the Apostolic See nearly sixty years later. The blessed see God by no abstractive knowledge but by insight and face to face, *visione intuitiva et etiam faciali*, without intermediary, *nulla mediante creatura in ratione visi se habente*, for the divine esse immediately shows itself nakedly, clearly, and openly, *sed divina essentia immediate se nude, clare et aperte eis ostendente*.<sup>49</sup> Out of reverence Greeks and Armenians were reluctant to claim more than a special vision of God's glory or *refulgentia*, and a tension of moods and terminologies within the Church still persisted a century later, at the time of the Council of Florence (1439-45).

15. A side issue was the nature of the vision granted to St Paul when he was rapt to the third heaven.<sup>50</sup> For St Augustine this seemed more immediate than the Greek divines were disposed to allow. St Thomas touches on the point in this Question, but postpones fuller discussion until later when he examines the miraculous elements that may accompany the life of grace.<sup>51</sup> His instinct is to side with St Augustine, and like other medieval Latin theologians he allowed for an exceptional vision of God having been granted to Moses, St Benedict, and to Enoch and Elias when

<sup>44</sup>cf 1a. 33, 1; 43, 3, 5 & 6      <sup>45</sup>cf 1a2æ. 3, 3; 4, 6. 3a. 45, 2

<sup>46</sup>For the dowry of *impassibilitas*, *subtilitas*, *agilitas*, and *claritas* brought to the body by the vision, see *Supplementum* 82-5

<sup>47</sup>1a. 12, 7 & 8      <sup>48</sup>1a. 12, 1 ad 1. Note the reference to St John Chrysostom

<sup>49</sup>Benedict XII, Constitution *Benedictus Deus*, 1336. Denzinger 530

<sup>50</sup>II *Corinthians* 12, 4

<sup>51</sup>1a. 12, 11. 2a2æ. 175, 3 & 4

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-02911-7 - Summa Theologiae: Volume 3 - Knowing and Naming God,  
(1a. 12-13)

Herbert McCabe O.P.

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

they were swept to heaven.<sup>52</sup> Yet he makes two reservations; first, *no man shall see me and live*, the vision could not be supported so long as a man is committed to the conditions of our present existence;<sup>53</sup> and second, whereas the beatific vision floods the whole man and cannot be lost, St Paul's ecstasy, while momentarily transcending the activity of faith, was only a prophetic anticipation of heaven that left him afterwards still under the necessity of believing.<sup>54</sup>

16. The present Question is not engaged with extraordinary and transitory exceptions, but with the ordinary ways of Providence and with the flowering of the seed of grace into glory; ordinary, not as commonplace, but as conforming to God's general, though wonderful, invitation of all men to himself in a union beyond their unaided powers to achieve. Some may think that St Thomas's humdrum style scarcely rises to the mystery and grandeur of his theme. His was not the rhetoric of St Augustine, though he echoes it here and there, yet perhaps his manner is all the more telling for being so matter of fact.<sup>55</sup> His sobriety is reassuring when he brings home a conclusion that otherwise might strike us as too good to be true, or perhaps as too extravagant to be good.

Plato may seem extreme enough with his teaching that the mind's home is in the heaven of pure Ideas, but St Paul and St John are much more startling. *For now we see through a glass, darkly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then shall I know even also as I am known.*<sup>56</sup> *Beloved, now we are the sons of God, and it doth not appear what we shall be; but we know that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him just as he is.*<sup>57</sup> That this teaching should be literally accepted by a man of St Thomas's hard-headedness is impressive, and not only accepted but taken into the heart of reasoned speculation, the Scriptural language being translated into terms of severe epistemology.

17. The general tenor of the *Summa* is to help us keep our wits about the present rather perhaps than to raise our hopes for the future, and it is in keeping that Question 12 ends by commending, modestly yet firmly, the working knowledge about God obtainable through the senses and reason and carried further by faith.<sup>58</sup> While recognizing its limitations—for by reasoning out our experience of the world God is signified not realized, inferred as a conclusion not directly apprehended, known in his effects not in himself, and by faith, though he speaks to us in person, he is

<sup>52</sup>2a2æ. 174, 4 & 5; 180, 5 ad 3. cf 1a. 102, 2 ad 3. 3a. 49, 5 ad 2. *Genesis* 22, 24. *Hebrews* 11, 5. II *Kings* 2, 11. *Luke* 9, 31

<sup>53</sup>*Exodus* 33, 20. 1a. 12, II <sup>54</sup>2a2æ. 175, 3 ad 2, 3

<sup>55</sup>e.g. 1a. 7, I & 12, 1 ad 2 confronting the objection that infinity does not bear thinking about

<sup>56</sup>1 *Corinthians* 13, 12 <sup>57</sup>1 *John* 3, 2 <sup>58</sup>1a. 12, 12 & 13

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-02911-7 - Summa Theologiae: Volume 3 - Knowing and Naming God,  
(1a. 12-13)

Herbert McCabe O.P.

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

strained to in darkness and clutched at through sacramental images—St Thomas is by no means content to treat the words of theology merely as gestures towards the unknown, which may relieve our feelings yet without having any objective bearing on the truth living there. He thinks half-a-loaf is better than no bread at all, and the two concluding articles introduce us to the next Question, which is a close examination of the relevance of theological thinking and language to the true and living God.

### *Thoughts about Divinity*

18. The Question entitled, *De divinis nominibus*,<sup>59</sup> on the names of God, *περὶ θεονομάτων*, which holds a key-position in the general logic of the *Summa*, like that of the discussion of essential and personal terms in the treatise on the Trinity, and of the discussion of the interchange of terms referring to God and to man, the *communicatio idiomatum*, in the treatise on the Incarnation,<sup>60</sup> asks in effect whether we can make statements that are really theological, not merely anthropological tinged by religious faith or sentiment.

19. The realist theory of knowledge supposed can be roughly indicated as follows: words signify ideas and convey a communicable and intelligible meaning; they do more than express, like a moan, a sensation or emotion arising from a particular situation. Ideas signify things, that is, they are not self-contained but point to a reality outside themselves, at least by implication. When I say, 'I can hear you,' you rightly expect, perhaps after some preliminary adjustments on my part, that I am not talking to myself, or mainly about myself, but that you are the thing I am referring to. Note in passing, that a 'word' as used here may stand for the meaning of a whole sentence, not for an isolated dictionary term; thus 'I can hear you' is one word, not four.<sup>61</sup>

20. St Thomas steers a careful course between the extremes of anthropomorphism and of agnosticism; he speaks of finding a middle mode of community between the simply univocal and the purely equivocal in our use of terms about God and creatures.<sup>62</sup> On the one hand he tacks away from the position of those who would apply words in exactly the same sense in either case, and on the other hand away from those for whom words seem to have so creaturely a meaning that they are empty when applied to God.

21. By his first tack he followed the course set by Scripture and by all

<sup>59</sup>Ia. 13. Treated in more detail by the disputations *De potentia* VII, 3–11 dating from about the same time

<sup>60</sup>Ia. 39 & 3a. 16    <sup>61</sup>Ia. 13, 1; cf 16, 2    <sup>62</sup>Ia. 13, 5

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-02911-7 - Summa Theologiae: Volume 3 - Knowing and Naming God,  
(1a. 12-13)

Herbert McCabe O.P.

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

the *auctoritates* he respected: God infinitely transcends creatures, and in no sense is to be made according to their image, not even in thought and language. Still, images formed from experience of the world about us play a vital part in religion, and his first concern is to chart their bearing. Already the introductory Question of the *Summa* has marked the importance of metaphor and symbolism for *sacra doctrina*:<sup>63</sup> it could scarcely do otherwise considering that its sources are not formal charters or analytic résumés, not even the creeds, but the inspired Scriptures in all their undocketed wealth. It is these that tell us of the revealing act of God's own truth, a truth which cannot be articulated in created words, though in our response to it, in the Christian theology springing from faith, we are bound to make statements, *enuntiabilia*.<sup>64</sup>

These statements, however, are not purely intellectual; they are made by flesh and blood through faith in the Word made flesh. The body is essentially part of us, and even were feeling and love to be left out of account, we would still need imagery in order to be brought to the truth. Here an earthy tang in St Thomas's theology proves a salutary check to the priggishness to which religious philosophism is liable. Living with God is not a matter of an educated taste or elevated thinking, and so the *Summa* accepts the preference of Dionysius for the vulgar instead of the precious as the vehicle of divine truth. The slang of *figura corporum vilium* is less likely to beguile us than the fine writing of *figura corporum nobilium*, and by its unpretentiousness is more reverent to God's mystery.<sup>65</sup>

The Bible lies closer than systematic theology to God's revelation in history; it is, moreover, literature of a kind that the scholastic method does not and should not attempt to write, imaginative and emotive, the record of human prostitution and divine mercy, racy of the soil and lit by the spirit, dreary and exciting, instructive yet able to be careless of human proprieties, and throughout charged with the sacramental power of God's word. It would be an etiolated theology that avoided making pictures of God from the bitter-sweet experience of his world, and that, for example, dealt only with the meaning of omnipotence and neglected the finale to *Job*.

Nevertheless reflection shows that the proper meanings evoked by such images are verified primarily and literally of creatures, and can be extended to God only in a secondary and metaphorical sense, 'as when he is compared to the sun, to the bright and morning star, to fire, water, wind, dew, cloud, to the corner-stone and to the rock'.<sup>66</sup> Can the human mind get closer to the proper meaning of divine things? That was the effort made by St Thomas.

<sup>63</sup>1a. 1, 9      <sup>64</sup>2a2æ. 1, 1, 2, 6 & 9 ad 1.      <sup>65</sup>1a. 1, 9 ad 3

<sup>66</sup>*In De div. nom.* 1, lect. 3. cf 1a. 1, 10 ad 3; 13, 6