

AFFECTIVE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

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Abstract. Affective knowledge of God is a kind of knowledge which follows human affectivity. This knowledge takes place on two levels: the level of the natural inclination of man towards God and the level of the religious bias of man towards God. What is the nature of affective knowledge of God? It seems there are three problems in question. First of all, as there is a natural inclination towards God in man, one will be restless unless one recognizes or finds God. Secondly, one who loves God has a new deeper knowledge of the divine things through connaturality and inclination. Thirdly, as the result of one's encounter with God and of uniting with Him, man experiences certain subjective states which cannot be expressed by words.

Affective knowledge of God, also referred to as knowledge through connaturality, knowledge by inclination, knowledge through affection, knowledge by unification, knowledge by participation, knowledge through experiencing divine things (*patiens divina*) or experimental knowledge; has been recognised by man for a long time. Biblical, patristic and scholastic tradition provide evidence of that fact.

The purpose of this article is to answer the question what the transition *ex affectu in intellectum* in the man-God relationship is. There are two levels of the knowledge in question: the natural inclination of man to God and the religious bias of man towards God.

I. The natural inclination of man to God and affective knowledge of God

Irrespective of one's being aware or unaware of the following fact, there certainly is a natural inclination to God in man. That inclination, to some extent gropingly, will lead human life towards transcendence. Absolute-

oriented man will recognise, though not always, the inadequacy of what is contingent in relation to the dynamics of one's own being. One will see that all the matters of this world are below one's aspirations. One will search, sometimes chaotically, until (if at all) one finds the absolute – something that will be adequate to one's deepest desires; something that will give a sense of gladness, joy and happiness. Some people exactly in this way – by following their heart's yearning – come to the recognition of God. St. Augustine declares that God created man directed towards his Creator. That is the reason why „restless is our heart until it comes to rest in Thee” (*Confessions* I, 1).

What is more, St. Teresa of Jesus says:

Whoever has God

Lacks nothing:

God alone is enough. (Teresa of Avila 1996, p.114).

II. Religious bias of man towards God and affective knowledge of God

Joseph Ratzinger says that faith is a path, and it is typical of a path that we get to know it by entering it, by following it. What is Christian manifests itself to each person in no other way than as in the experiment of following a path (Ratzinger 2004 p. 117).

The subject of our reflection is now the affective knowledge of God which is the result of a religious life. St. Thomas Aquinas' mystical interpretation of a fragment of *The Gospel of John* is a good introduction to the problem. St. John wrote: „‘Rabbi’ (which means Teacher), ‘where are you staying?’ ‘Come,’ he replied, ‘and you will see’. So they went and saw where he was staying, and spent that day with him” (John 1:38-39). St. Thomas commented on the above fragment as follows:

Mystically speaking He [Christ – P.M.] says: come and see that God's dwelling, either in glory or in grace, cannot be recognised in any other way than through experience (*per experientiam*) and cannot be expressed by words. [...] That is why Christ says: come and see. Come, believing and acting, and see experiencing and understanding (*experiendo et intelligendo*). It is necessary to remark that there are four ways of obtaining that knowledge. First of all, by doing good deeds. [...] Secondly, through rest and liberation of mind. [...] Thirdly, by tasting divine sweetness (*per divinae dulcedinis gustationem*). Finally, by work of

piety. [...] That is why the Lord says in Luke 24:39 ‘touch me and see’ etc.” (*Super Evangelium Johannis*, cap. 1, l. 15).

The motif of tasting the „divine sweetness” appears in St. Thomas’ writing a couple of times. He speaks about affective, therefore experimental, knowledge of God’s goodness or God’s will when one experiences inside oneself the taste of God’s clemency and the liking for God’s will. As an illustration to the above St. Thomas refers to Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite’s text about Hierotheus who learned about the divine things by co-feeling them. Aquinas encourages us to try God’s will and taste His clemency, understood in exactly the same way.¹⁶ It seems he means an invitation to love of charity with God; an invitation to a life according to the divine law. The one who experiences God that way, i.e. who participates in what is divine; experiences, i.e. goes through the positive affective states and experiences them, i.e. becomes aware of them (three different meanings of experience).

The theme of tasting God’s benevolence appears also in the commentary to Psalm 33:8: „Taste and see that the Lord is good” („Gustate et videte, quoniam suavis est Dominus”). According to St. Thomas, the psalmist encourages us to experience both communion with God (*ad experientiam divini consortii*) and His goodness. It is experiencing somebody who is inside of man and, as St. Thomas explains, that is why the term *gustatio* appears. It comes from the sensorial experiencing of things present inside of man. Further on, Aquinas points to the effects of such experience-participation which are the certainty of the intellect (*certitudo intellectus*) indicated by the word *videte* and the security of affectivity (*securitas affectus*) indicated by the word *suavis*. St. Thomas explains that in spiritual matters first comes tasting then seeing. No one will achieve knowledge without tasting it first (*In Psalmos Pars 33 N. 9*).

One of the ways of „tasting” God is contemplation (*Summa theologiae* II-II q. 180 esp. a. 1 and 7; *In III Sent.* d. 35 q. 1 a. 2 A co.). St. Thomas says that contemplation and contemplative life, as far as their essence is concerned, are the act of intellect. However, they rise from the affective order, from will; and end in the affective order as well. It means that affection

¹⁶ „[...] duplex est cognitio divinae bonitatis vel voluntatis. Una quidem speculativa. [...] Alia autem est cognitio divinae bonitatis seu voluntatis affectiva seu experimentalis, dum quis experitur in seipso gustum divinae dulcedinis et complacentiam divinae voluntatis: sicut de Hierotheo dicit Dionysius, II cap. *de Div. Nom.*, quod didicit divina ex compassione ad ipsa. Et hoc modo monemur ut probemus Dei voluntatem et gustemus eius suavitatem” (*Summa theologiae* II-II q. 97 a. 2).

for God is the cause of contemplation and contemplative life. Affection for God (*caritas, dilectio Dei*) generates the desire to see God and His beauty. Contemplation alone, i.e. watching divine things, watching the divine truth; is an act of intellect. Nevertheless, the end of contemplation lies in delight and happiness (*delectatio, beatitudo*) (*Summa theologiae* I-II q. 38 a. 4; q. 3 a. 5). They are the motion of the will, because one is happy to see what one loves. Obviously, contemplation of the divine essence (*divinae essentiae*) alone is reserved for the saved ones in heaven. In the earthly life only the contemplation of the divine truth in an imperfect manner, i.e. „through the looking-glass and vaguely,” is accessible. As such, it is the beginning of a perfect heavenly contemplation (*Summa theologiae* II-II q. 180 a. 4-5). St. Thomas also notices that the joy of contemplation comes not only from its subject (what one contemplates) but also from the act of contemplation itself which is an act typical of human nature. To that twofold joy originating from contemplation St. Thomas relates the words of Psalm 33: „Gustate et videte quoniam suavis est Dominus” (*Summa theologiae* II-II q. 180 a. 7). Contemplation is exactly that „tasting” of God which causes gladness. It is the discernment that the Lord is good and „sweet.”

Gladness, however, is not all. St. Thomas adds that happiness coming from the contemplation of the divine truth leads to even greater intensity of love towards God. The pleasure of watching the beloved thing causes even greater love of it (*Summa theologiae* I q. 64 a. 1; II-II q. 180 a. 1). And that is, according to Aquinas, the perfection of contemplative life: God’s truth is not only observed but also beloved by man (*Summa theologiae* II-II q. 180 a. 7 ad 1).

Affective knowledge of God is also the judgement by way of inclination to what is divine and through connaturality with the divine. By this St. Thomas means knowledge based on a particular condition of the subject. The condition is described by categories like *amor, dilectio, caritas, donum sapientiae, unio ad divina, compassio sive connaturalitas ad res divinas, connaturalitas sive unio ad divina* and *passio divinorum* understood as *affectio ad divina, et coniunctio ad ipsa per amorem* as *affectus circa divina* and *compassio ad ipsa* (*In III Sent.* d. 15 q. 2 a. 1 B co.; d. 35 q. 2 a. 1 C; *In Dionysii De Div. Nom.* cap. 2 l. 4; *De veritate* q. 26 a. 3 ad 18; *Summa theologiae* I q. 1 a. 6 ad 3; I-II q. 22 a. 3 ad 1; II-II q. 45; q. 97 a. 2 ad 2). In *Super Evangelium Ioannis* St. Thomas notices that „the world didn’t recognise Him (God – P.M.) with affective knowledge, because the world hadn’t loved Him.” (*Super Evangelium Johannis* cap. 17 l. 6; *In I Sent.* d. 15 q. 4 a. 2 ad 4; *Summa theologiae* I q. 12 a. 6). What is meant here is the

human condition based on the fact that by loving God man is affectively (*per affectum*) united with God and inclined towards what is divine. Owing to the love that unites man with God, one gains the affinity, connaturality (*connaturalitas*) with God and compassion (*compassio*) with Him. The gift of wisdom is ingrained in that love, but also it is the factor that develops and improves love. Thanks to that gift man achieves new knowledge. What is meant here is the judgement of the divine things which manifests itself in the contemplation of the divine things; and the judgement of the human things in the light of the contemplated divine reasons.¹⁷ It is not the judgement according to the supreme usage of the intellect, but the judgement according to the connaturality with what is divine (*Summa theologiae* II-II q. 45 a. 2) and to the inclination to what is divine (*Summa theologiae* I q. 1 a. 6 ad 3).

Human intellect contemplates divine things, but also according to what is divine judges human things and governs human acts. St. Thomas writes that we have the situation in which the incredible wisdom unites us through love and reveals to us the secrets. the knowledge of which is infused wisdom (*sapientia infusa*). This infused wisdom, which is a gift, is the effect of love of charity. (*Summa theologiae* II-II q. 45 a. 6 ad 2. See also: Maritain 2002, pp. 277-282; Maritain 1951, pp. 473-481; Johnston 2004, pp. 37-42).

III. The nature of affective knowledge of God

What is the nature of affective knowledge of God? What is knowledge through natural inclination or through charity and connaturality with the divine; or through *passio divinorum* based on? What is the transition *ex affectu circa divina in intellectum*? (*In III Sent.* d. 15 q. 2 a. 1 B co).

It seems there are three problems in question.

First of all, as there is a natural inclination towards God in man (the so called *desiderium naturale vivendi Deum*), (*Summa contra Gentiles* III 50. 57) one will be restless unless one recognises or finds God.

Secondly, one who loves God has a new deeper knowledge of the divine things through connaturality and inclination.

¹⁷ „Et ideo sapientiae donum dilectionem quasi principium praesupponit, et sic in affectione est. Sed quantum ad essentiam in cognitione est; unde ipsius actus videtur esse et hic et in futuro divina amata contemplari, et per ea de aliis judicare non solum in speculativis, sed etiam in agendis, in quibus ex fine iudicium sumitur” (*In III Sent.* d. 35 q. 2 a. 1C co).

Thirdly, as the result of one's encounter with God and of uniting with Him, man experiences certain subjective states which cannot be expressed by words.¹⁸

As far as the second problem is concerned, St. Thomas a couple of times refers to the analogy with the knowledge through connaturality typical of a virtuous man. (*In Dionysii De Divinis Nominibus* cap. 2 l. 4; *Summa theologiae* I q. 1 a. 6 ad 3; II-II q. 45 a. 2). A virtuous man, namely, on the basis of the virtue embedded in the will is refined to judge what the subject of that virtue is. This is because one is through that virtue directed towards what has to be done within the scope of that virtue. Man, therefore, judges by following that inclination (*per modum inclinationis*). It is the judgement with regard to the subject's connaturality with what is the subject of the judgement. As Maritain points out, the intellect treats as right that which is in accordance with human inclination and as wrong that which is contrary to that inclination (Maritain 1951, pp. 474, 477-480).

A similar case is that of the man united with God through charity, connatural with the divine (made similar to God) and directed towards what is divine. Such a person – we would say a man of God, a divinised man – thinks in a godly way. One has a proper judgement of various things and a recognition of what one has to do.

St. Thomas gives theological explanation of how it is possible. He says then that the one who loves God receives from Him a gift of wisdom – one of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit, i.e. the efficiency (*habitus*) adjusting man to receiving inspiration from the Holy Spirit and being obedient to that inspiration (*Summa theologiae* I-II q. 68 a. 3). Owing to the gift of wisdom man can judge correctly the divine things (*Summa theologiae* I q. 1 a. 6 ad 3; II-II q. 45 a. 2). St. Thomas speaks about the divine inspiration (*inspiratio divina*) (*Summa theologiae* I-II q. 22 a. 3 arg. 1 and ad 1), about receiving from God the proper judgement of the divine things¹⁹ and of the divine revelation, i.e. about the fact that God reveals supernatural secrets to those who are His friends (*In III Sent.* d. 35 q. 2 a. 1 C co; *De veritate* q. 26 a. 3 arg 18 and ad 18; *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 45 a. 6 ad 2). It seems that he means new, i.e. deeper knowledge which a person already believing and loving God receives as the consequence of the affective relationship with God.

¹⁸ Saint John Vianney says that if one has a pure heart, united with God, one experiences happiness and sweetness that fill one, one experiences light that admirably enlightens (Vianney 1987, p. 1374).

¹⁹ „[...] qui afficitur ad divina, accipit divinitus rectum iudicium de rebus divinis” (*In Dionysii De divinis nominibus* cap. 2 l. 4).

As far as the third problem is concerned, the relation of intimacy with God (affective order; experience as participation in the divine) results in certain states/motions of the intellect and will (experience understood as receiving something by cognitive and affective faculties) which can be the subject of internal experience (experience as an act of direct knowledge of one's own affective states or as reflective knowledge of the intellectually-cognitive content of one's mind).

And so the result of contemplation is joy and happiness (*Summa theologiae* I-II q. 3 a. 5; q. 38 a. 4; II-II q. 180 a. 7). Communion with God and in this sense „tasting”, „trying” what is divine results in the certainty of the intellect and the security of affectivity (*In Psalmos* Pars 33 N. 9). Friendship with God and life according to God's will causes positive motions of the will and the experiencing of likeness in God's will (*Summa theologiae* II-II q. 97 a. 2 ad 2). Through faith and proper action man unites with God – man comes to God. One experiences and understands then what the „dwelling of God in grace” means. What is experienced cannot be expressed by words (*Super Evangelium Johannis* cap. 1 l. 15). It is impossible to put into words some subjective states posing the reaction (*motus*) of man to God's actions. One has to experience it by oneself; one has to try. Christian mystics with great difficulty attempt to describe the feelings they experience by using various metaphors.

Affective knowledge of God is a precious means of knowledge. It is connected with the natural dynamics of the human being. It is available to anyone who enters the path of faith, also to those who did not examine *pre-ambula fidei*. Everyone, regardless of various trials, temptations of doubt, diverse „nights” can attain the certainty of intellect and the security of affectivity. They can also, in a way „instinctively,” not on the basis of the intellectual search, but on the basis of connaturality with the divine; make proper judgements concerning diverse things, also concerning what one should do. Affective knowledge of God provides also something that theoretical knowledge, even faith in revelation cannot give; namely, something that is inexpressible but only possible to experience.

Translated by Dominika Bugno

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