

## Christian Thought and the Christian Life: Loving God with All Our Mind

‘everyone who loves is born of God and knows God’ (1 John 4.7)

‘He [God] may well be loved, but not thought.

By love may He be gotten and holden; but by thought never’

*The Cloud of Unknowing*, trans. Evelyn Underhill (London: JM Watkins, 1922), ch. 6

### *Bringing Philosophy Home*

Bishop Alan, Fr Jeffrey, I am delighted to be here as your new canon philosopher, with this opportunity to think in the company of the diocese about the intellectual heritage of our Christian faith. Your canonry draws attention to the place of philosophy in Christian history and in present day mission. That’s unusual in today’s church, and it’s very welcome.

We’re thinking about philosophy in the cathedral, and in churches in the diocese, and in that we are bringing philosophy home. After all, so much of the philosophical tradition of the West is the work of religious believers, especially going back more than a few centuries, often written in a religious setting.<sup>1</sup>

In fact, even working with pre-Christian philosophy in church – Greek and Roman philosophy – isn’t a departure but a homecoming, since many of the classical philosophers were involved in something like a religious project. I expect that they might well feel more at home in a cathedral today than in a contemporary university philosophy department. Pierre Hadot led the way here in his groundbreaking book *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*.<sup>2</sup> As he put it

Each [ancient philosophical] school, then, represents a form of life defined by an ideal of wisdom. The result is that each one has its corresponding

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<sup>1</sup> Our focus is on Christian philosophy, which was itself sometimes worked out in dialogue with Jewish and Islamic thinkers.

<sup>2</sup> Published in French in 1981; English translation in 1995 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995).

fundamental inner attitude... above all every school practices exercises designed to ensure spiritual progress toward the ideal state of wisdom, exercises of reason that will be, for the soul, analogous to the athlete's training or to the application of a medical cure. Generally, they consist, above all, of self-control and meditation.<sup>3</sup>

For Hadot, classical philosophy deserves direct comparison, in its practices, to the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius of Loyola in the sixteenth century.<sup>4</sup> Those traditions aren't exactly the same: of course not; Christian philosophy thinks in the aftermath of Christ and in the light of scriptural revelation. The ancient philosophical schools had practices of meditation, self-examination and asceticism, but they didn't all practice prayer or worship: although some did, and especially those closest to the Platonic lineage. All the same, whether Abrahamic in inspiration, or classical, so much philosophy belongs in a religious setting.

*Introduction to this Lecture: Ideas and Enthusiasm – Knowing and Loving*

I'd be the first person to say that there is more to Christianity than Christian ideas, but Christian ideas are my remit, and it's also worth saying that there's so much more to the Christian tradition of philosophy than many Christians appreciate.

That being so, over my time as Canon philosopher I want to share some of what I find so appealing and compelling about that Christian intellectual tradition. I hope not simply to pass on ideas but also my enthusiasm for them.

And with that statement – the ideas and delight for the ideas – I have the topic of my lecture this evening in a nutshell. There is an *intellectual* tradition, and it is *appealing*; there are *ideas*, and we might *delight* in them; there is *knowing* and *loving*. That is my topic: knowing and loving, and their relation. Aristotle opens his *Metaphysics* with the words 'By nature, all people long to know':<sup>5</sup> they *long* to know.

It's there in the very word *philosophy* itself: *sophia*, or wisdom, and *philia*, or love. *Philosophia*, means simply a love for wisdom. This evening, slightly unusually, I'm

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<sup>3</sup> Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, p. 59.

<sup>4</sup> Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, p. 82.

<sup>5</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 980a, translation amended from Hugh Lawson-Tancred (London: Penguin, 1998).

going to put as much emphasis on the injunction to love, as on the wisdom itself that we love.

I might interject an aside at this point to say that I'd be pleased to be guided by you, by people in the diocese, over what I might talk about in the years to come, or help organise for others to contribute on, whether that is in person or by making web resources. You will find my email on the Divinity Faculty website, and I'd be glad to hear from you.

### *The Place of the Intellect in Christian Mission*

It has become a byword in Christian mission that love has priority: people don't so much espouse faith, or return to the church, because of arguments, but rather because of the attractiveness of a good example. That is obviously true, and goodness and love have first place in the mission of the church. But I'd like to ask, all the same, whether our mission and evangelism currently underplays the role of the intellect. Or, to put it another way, perhaps one of the things that's so loveable about Christianity is its intellectual tradition.

Or to put it a yet different way, isn't it an absolutely central part of Christian mission today to present and embody accounts of what it means to be human that are attractive, sane and wise? Wouldn't that involve, among other things, presenting and embodying a Christian account of what it means to *think* that is attractive, sane and wise?<sup>6</sup> An attractive, sane and wise account of reason, embedded in an attractive, sane and wise account of being human, is more at a premium than ever.

### *Large Scale Witness*

Let me add some comments about how a love of the church's intellectual tradition bears upon mission in a few other ways. On the largest scale, on the national stage, keeping traditions of Christian philosophy alive and healthy means that they are available and heard in our public life. Again, it's not the whole of Christian mission, but it is part. Sometimes we need to remind ourselves, before we can remind anyone

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<sup>6</sup> When I think of a vision of humanity and reason that is those things – attractive, sane and wise – I naturally gravitate towards the writings of G. K. Chesterton.

else, that the Christian intellectual tradition has things to say – indeed, I would say, that it is a source of boundless wealth. We would do well, as a church, to remember that so much of our shared intellectual framework as a nation, for instance in politics, comes from the Christian philosophical tradition, whether that concerns the limitations to war, or the notion of rights, or the framework for international law. And being more familiar with those treasures from the past, we will be better able to rearticulate them, and develop them, in the present and for the future.

### *Small Scale Witness*

There's a place for Christian philosophy in mission on the large scale, on the public stage. But most of the time, the debates are smaller and the stage is local, and I'd like to celebrate the uncountable ways in which the church, to this day, demonstrates a love of thought and learning – whether that is in schools, colleges and universities, or in parishes. Day by day, Christians all over the world demonstrate an affection for thought: in institutions that the church runs, or founded, or in institutions that have nothing formally to do with the Church, but where how they conduct their work is a Christian endorsement of learning. It is an endorsement that we are created in the image of God who is *Logos* – word or reason – and that we live in world whose order and lucidity bears witness to this *Logos*, who enlightens everyone who comes into the world. Our parishes also provide many opportunities for this – not least in our work with children and young people, but also in work with adult literacy. I ended up doing a lot of youth work in my curacy, to my surprise (I thought that I wouldn't be hip enough for it, but it turns out not to be necessary – you just have to take them seriously and be prepared to sit on the floor), and I tried never to waste an opportunity to demonstrate to those kids that the Christian faith loves learning, that it is unafraid to think thought any question, any challenge or problem, that it rejoices in science for instance, or that it has wise things to say about economics.

And it's not just that we witness to the value of knowledge; we can also helpfully 'put it in its place'. Christians and Christian institutions also link thought with love when they place learning within a large picture of human life. Educational chaplains, Christian schools, and Christian teachers, college and university chapels – they all seek to *situate*

the intellectual pursuit within a larger picture.<sup>7</sup> They suggest that the human intellect, and its pursuits, finds its best fulfilment in the context of a widely flourishing life, whether of the individual or of the community. I rejoice in the wisdom of the founders of my college, for instance, and of its later architects, drawing on monastic models, when they set a dining hall for communal meals, and a chapel for daily worship, alongside the library in our front court. Knowledge and the quest for knowledge are set within the context of a bigger project for the human life.

*The Intellectual Life of the Church: Beyond a Head / Heart Division*

This integration of thought with wider human life, and vice versa, is not always in a good state in our church. Our themes of knowing and loving, and their relation, should force us to address some tensions within the church. We are probably all used to the convenient but ultimately destructive distinction between a religion of the heart and a religion of the head, between a Christianity of the heart and a Christianity of the head: one primarily of loving and the other primarily of thinking. However, if what I'm saying in this lecture has any bearing, with its contention that knowing and loving are intrinsically interwoven for the Christian, then this kind of specialism, this division of Christians into those who live primarily in their heads and those who live in the hearts, is ill formed.

One way to bridge this gap is to look to the examples of figures down Christian history, and in our own time, who outwit any such head-heart distinction. I think of St Augustine of Hippo, for instance, who was a virtuoso of both the mind and heart, both a philosopher and a mystic. He is, on the one hand, the theological touchstone for Western Christians, whether Anglicans, Roman Catholics or Protestants, and an intellectual of the first order. But, on the other hand, his distinctive symbol in art is a heart wreathed in flames of fire. (Having mentioned Augustine, I'd like to give a plug for the reissued *Augustine Synthesis* by Erich Przywara, which is a magnificent anthology of passages from his writings, recently republished by Wipf and Stock.)<sup>8</sup>

Augustine stands as an example of the integration of the head and the heart from the patristic period. In our own time we might think of Jean Vanier, the founder of the

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<sup>7</sup> So, for instance, Aquinas both praises studiousness and warns against intellectual vices, such as what he calls *curiositas* (*Summa Theologiae* II-II.166 and 167 respectively).

<sup>8</sup> Erich Przywara (ed.), *An Augustine Synthesis* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2014).

L'Arche communities. Here is a man who magnificently exemplifies the spirit of Christian love: his life's work has been in fostering communities of love and friendship, where people with severe mental disabilities and those who are more fortunate in that regard live together. He is a towering example of the Christian love, who listened to his heart. But what gave him the perspective, the insight, to realise what was needed? Immersion in the scriptures, no doubt, but also something else, which I only found out a few weeks ago. Before he founded the L'Arche communities, Vanier studied theology and philosophy in Paris, and completed a doctorate, entitled 'Happiness as Principle and End of Aristotelian Ethics'. There is a hidden, but vital, intellectual backstory.

If we want to get beyond the head-heart dichotomy, we might think about the examples of Christians who transcend that boundary. We might also think about how it represents a faulty account of Trinitarian theology.

Since at least the time of Augustine, the doctrine of the Trinity has been discussed in terms of an analogy with the human psyche, and the triad of memory, intellect and will. With good scriptural warrant, the Son has been associated with the Word, with *Logos* and the intellect, and the Holy Spirit has been associated with love: the love of God poured into our hearts, the fellowship that is of the Holy Spirit.

In that case, the head-heart distinction maps onto prioritising either the Word or of the Spirit. It's a distinction that comes up time and time again. We might think of the half-caricature of St Helen's Bishopsgate vs Holy Trinity Brompton, of Puritanism vs Pietism, of Dominicans and Franciscans, or of dry liberalism vs other, more indulgent forms.

In contrast, good Trinitarian theology will compel us to move beyond any such prioritising of the Word or the Spirit, of the intellect or of love and the emotions. You will hear plenty from me about Thomas Aquinas in the years to come, as the consummate Christian philosopher, and he is right on target in his insistence that the truth of the Son leads to love and the love of the Spirit leads to truth. Of the Son he writes that 'the Son is the Word, not any sort of word, but the one Who breathes forth Love.'<sup>9</sup> The Son was sent, Aquinas goes on, not just to teach us in any old fashion,<sup>10</sup> but rather specifically to enlighten our minds with the truth in the way that 'breaks forth

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<sup>9</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I.43.5 ad 2 (London: Burns, Oates and Washbourne, 1912-36).

<sup>10</sup> 'Thus the Son is sent not in accordance with every and any kind of intellectual perfection'.

into the affection of love'. And then, in his *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, Aquinas points out that the Holy Spirit is called the 'Spirit of Truth' because, as Aquinas puts it, 'he proceeds from the Truth and speaks the Truth... And he proceeds from it, he also leads to the Truth [which is to say Christ] who says "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life"' (John 14:6).'<sup>11</sup>

### *Mission and the Christian Account of Reason*

In an essay of mine in the book *Imaginative Apologetics*, I argued that a distinctive understanding of reason is part of what Christianity offers in the gospel, and I went on to relate reason to community.<sup>12</sup> If, as Wittgenstein said, 'Words have meaning only in the stream of life',<sup>13</sup> any invitation to Christian belief must be an invitation to membership of the Christian community, and any exploration of ideas must also be an invitation to the life of the Church.

I very much stand by that proposal. I've already suggested that a central part of Christian mission today is to present and embody an understanding of what it means to be human that is attractive, sane and wise, and that this involves, as not its least part, presenting and embodying a Christian account of what it means to *think* that is attractive, sane and wise.

I suggested in that essay that this will involve an account of the intellect where it is entwined with love: a thick account of reason, not a thin one. Six or so years on, and I am all the more convinced that this is right. One reason is the growing prominence of reductive neuroscience, which to varying degrees seeks to rid us of such troublesome categories as the mind, or the person. The book to read on that is Raymond Tallis's *Why Your Mind is not a Computer*.<sup>14</sup> The other reason comes from reading, for review in *Church Times*, books by the New Atheist critics of religion. I have been struck by

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<sup>11</sup> Aquinas, *Lectures on the Gospel of John*, XIV, 17, lect. 4, n. 1916. I am grateful to Mr Edward Stroud for drawing my attention to these passages.

<sup>12</sup> Andrew Davison, 'Christian Reason and Christian Community in Andrew Davison (ed.), *Imaginative Apologetics: Theology, Philosophy and the Catholic Tradition* (London: SCM Press, 2011), pp. 12-28.

<sup>13</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*, ed. G. E. M. Anscombe, G. H. von Wright and Heikki Nyman, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, C. G. Luckhardt and M. A. E. Aue, 2 vols (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980), vol. 2, p. 687.

<sup>14</sup> Raymond Tallis, *Why Your Mind is not a Computer* (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2004).

just how much the anti-theological vision from these authors goes hand-in-hand with a denuded implicit account of what it means to think.

I might point to two common aspects. The first is the sense that thought is a cold, abstract business without any connection to prior commitments, or at least that it should be. On this view, while the religious person thinks in the light of religious commitments, the New Atheist *just thinks*, unencumbered by commitments. A. C. Grayling, for instance, in *The God Argument*, finds theological conclusions inadmissible because they are elaborated within ‘the premises and parameters’ of their system.<sup>15</sup> That is a very odd thing to say, since *every conceivable* system of thought, and every conceivable subject matter is elaborated within ‘the premises and parameters’ of its system, including mathematics and logic. Or, we might think of Mitchell Stephens’ recent whig history of triumphant atheism, *Imagine There’s No Heaven*.<sup>16</sup> He contrasts religion, with its ‘whole metaphysical system’ with a scientific outlook, which is grounded simply in experience and the desire to test things.<sup>17</sup> But science-as-arbiter-of-truth has metaphysics; they’re just not acknowledged.

Now, one might half forgive the scientifically trained New Atheists for thinking this – although the suggestion of the possibility of such a position of uncommitted neutrality has been a *faux pas* for vast swathes of Western thought for more than half a century – but it’s all the more astonishing to find philosopher critics of religion writing that way.

As a second angle, consider the claim that religious thought is somehow clouded by emotion, whereas real thinking is somehow emotionless. As Grayling has it, ‘most religious people’ have not been convinced by an argument, but – if they have turned to God in later life – then ‘the impulse for it is almost wholly emotional rather than rational’.<sup>18</sup> He later contrasts these ‘emotions’ with ‘rationality’: they include ‘psychological needs of various and importunate kinds’.<sup>19</sup>

In other words, reason is about argument, and neither reason nor argument have anything to do with emotion. Or, consider Mitchell Stephens’ complaint that human beings have ‘a tendency to hanker after some sort of meaning’, which is why religion

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<sup>15</sup> A. C. Grayling, *The God Argument* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 66.

<sup>16</sup> Mitchell, *Imagine There’s No Heaven* (New York: Plgrave MacMillan, 2014).

<sup>17</sup> Mitchell, *Imagine There’s No Heaven*, p. 225, as also with the statement that ‘love is all you need’, as if that didn’t involve metaphysics either.

<sup>18</sup> Grayling, *The God Argument*, pp. 68-98.

<sup>19</sup> Grayling, *The God Argument*, p. 237.



beguiles them.<sup>20</sup> The sort of reason he values, this implies, would be one cut off from any quest (or mere ‘hankering’) after meaning.

The problem with religious people, it seems, is that they can’t really think, because their reason is harnessed to emotions, psychological needs and the quest for meaning. In other words, the religious person’s problem is that she mingles thinking with loving, the intellect with the will. Religion is ‘wishful thinking’. To this I respond ‘hurray’.

Now, I want to proceed rather cautiously on this topic, because I don’t want to be recorded as dismissing religion as wishful thinking, in a derogatory way. Rather, I want to propose that all thinking, if it is healthy, human, and broad, has to have a certain ‘wishfulness’ about it, if I can reclaim that term. If wishful thinking involves reasoning in tandem with feelings and passion, with a response to psychological needs, and involving the quest for meaning, then let thinking be properly wishful. Here that well-known atheist Aldous Huxley far outstripped his contemporaries for insight about how human reason works, when he wrote that ‘We can only love what we know, and we can never know completely what we do not love. Love is a mode of knowledge’.<sup>21</sup> I call it inhuman to seek for a reason that is without desire, without imagination, which seeks for facts without meaning.

### *The True and the Good*

The central Christian insight here, at least from the middle ages, is to approach this question in terms of the good and the true. That is to say, it defines our two categories – knowing and loving – in terms of two ‘objects’, or two matters they deal with. The intellect deals with the *true*, and the will deals with the *good*. That is what they seek; that is what they are about. The intellect is after truth and the will inclines towards the good. When our faculties are functioning properly, the intellect latches onto what is true and the will is drawn to that which is good: it loves what is good.

From the time of the ancient Greeks, philosophers had seen a profound congruence between goodness and truth.<sup>22</sup> They saw that truth is good, and they saw a sort of truth about goodness. Christian philosophers fell upon this with relish, and offered an

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<sup>20</sup> Stephens, *Imagine There’s No Heaven*, p. 222. Stephens seems similarly to leave no room for desire in epistemology in his discussion on pp. 110-111.

<sup>21</sup> Aldous Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy* (London: Fontana, 1958), p. 91.

<sup>22</sup> As also with a handful of other categories, such as being and beauty.

account of why it might be so. Any goodness and any truth are creaturely likenesses of God, who is perfectly good and true, who is goodness itself and truth itself.<sup>23</sup> And since in God, truth and goodness are perfectly at one – indeed we might approach them through the perfect unity of the Son and the Spirit – it’s no surprise that we find such a profound congruence between goodness and truth in the world.

Aquinas wrote with particular clarity about this matter, observing, for instance, that ‘Truth and good include one another; for truth is something good, otherwise it would not be desirable; and good is something true, otherwise it would not be intelligible.’<sup>24</sup> On this view, it makes no sense to talk about an intellectual search that is not also drawn on by love. The compass needle of reason swings round to the truth, not least in its goodness.<sup>25</sup> So, whether the New Atheists are right or wrong about religion, I think they are wrong in the way they understand reason as cold, dispassionate, uncorrelated with my psychological longings or search for meaning. Reason is drawn to truth, but that means in part that it is drawn to the goodness of the truth, and the truth of goodness.<sup>26</sup>

### *Faith*

One important way in which intellect and will work together is in faith. I take faith to be a basic category of human life and reason, not the sole preserve of religion. I might illustrate that one evening with a talk on the place of faith in the practice of science, if that isn’t trespassing on Canon Wilkinson’s territory.

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<sup>23</sup> I will explore themes such as these in my *Participation: A Study in Christian Metaphysics* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2014).

<sup>24</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I.79.11 *ad* 2. As he puts it at slightly greater length in *On Evil*, ‘good itself, insofar as it is a comprehensible form, is included in the true as something true, and the true itself, insofar as it is the end [or goal] of intellectual activity, is included in the good as something good’ (*Disputed Questions on Evil*, 6, *reply*. Trans. Richard Regan, New York: Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 258).

<sup>25</sup> Notice that I am not saying that something is true just because it is attractive, or because it appeals to us, but I am saying that what is true is also likely to be both attractive and appealing.

<sup>26</sup> This seems to me one way in which the New Atheist critique fails to take full account of science, although its claims to be based on science, in that the entanglement of the true with the good, not least in terms of beauty, is so much part of the working experience of the scientist.

Faith involves both the recognition of the truth and the recognition of the good. As Aquinas put it, ‘an act of faith is related both to the object of the will, i.e. to the good and the end [or goal], and to the object of the intellect, i.e. to the true’.<sup>27</sup>

According to this way of thinking, the intellect is fundamentally receptive, while the will is the faculty for reaching out. Faith involves both intellect and will: both knowing and loving in just this way. Faith is both receptive, through the intellect, and an active reaching out, through the will. That makes faith a sort of *active reception*, which is why it can be so aptly described in terms of *assent*. Think about the business of saying the Creed – it is both a matter of reception, of taking up and taking in something that we are taught – and a matter of active choice, of declaring one’s love, we might say: it begins ‘I believe’ or ‘We believe’ – active verbs. The Creed is full of ideas, engaging the intellect, but it is also expressive of the will, of love for those ideas and for the one they ultimately relate to, which is why the Creed has so appropriately been set to music.

The subject matter of faith deserves a talk of its own. My point for this evening is that knowing and loving join together in the confession of faith. It is receptive with the intellect and active with the will. Faith is both accepting a gift and giving a pledge in response.

### *Knowing and Loving God*

I want to end with some thoughts about knowing and loving God. You will hear a good deal from Thomas Aquinas in anything that I do in the diocese, principally because I take him to be the consummate Christian philosopher. As I’ve already hinted, according to his vision, knowledge is already quite close to love, in that it is a reception of the known into the knower. Knowledge is a union. In this, it finds biblical precedent in the Hebrew use of knowing as a description of sexual intimacy: Adam knew Eve, and so on.

Aquinas thought of knowledge as a reception, a reception of the truth that is known into the knowing mind. It is as if the mind is supremely plastic, like a slab of warm wax, that can bear the imprint of anything pressed upon it.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* II-II.4.1

But the point is also that what is impressed is known through its impression. We know the impress, not exactly the thing, at least not in its own native mode. I can know an apple and, in a sense, the reality of the apple itself comes to dwell in my mind – its form, Aquinas would say – and yet, all the same, the apple is present in my mind in a mental way. Contrast that with how the apple is in itself: supremely physical, not mental. That is a good thing: I'm glad that the apple is in my mind in a mental way, not in my brain in a physical way: but all the same, there is a difference, a gap, between how the apple is present in my mind, and the way the apple is in itself, in the fullness of its applehood.

That outlines the greatness of the mind, for Aquinas, and its limitation: on the one hand, that the mind can really receive, in its mental way, any and all things: the apple, and the pear, and the apricot. On the other hand, I can know things only as assimilated to my mind and its condition. I know anything according my mind's mental mode.

My mind is mental, finite, temporal, created, so on. So, I can only know physical things mentally, timeless things temporally, even God, who is uncreated, I know in my creaturely way, who is infinite, in my finite way.<sup>29</sup>

Aquinas contrasted this with love. Let's return to the apple. I know a physical apple mentally. There is a my mental unity with what I know, but also a gap. I know the apple but not in the fullness of its own appleish way. In contrast, what marks love out is that we love things in and for the fullness of the way they are. I love the apple in the fullness of its applehood, for all that always lies beyond me. As Aquinas put it,

Knowledge is perfected by the thing known being united, through its likeness, to the knower. But the effect of love is that the thing itself which is loved, is, in a way, united to the lover, as stated above. Consequently the union caused by love is closer than that which is caused by knowledge.<sup>30</sup>

Maybe I should shift from an apple to a mountain. Yes, I can know a mountain by a sort of assimilation. As a baroque commentator on Aquinas put it, anyone 'who knows

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<sup>28</sup> On that basis, he writes, following Aristotle, the mind, or soul, is 'in a fashion all things' – or it can be.

<sup>29</sup> 'Everything that is known is comprehended not according to its own nature, but according to the ability to know of those who do the knowing', Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. Victor Watts (London: Penguin, 1999), V.4.24.

<sup>30</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I-II.28.1 *ad* 3.

a stone is a stone':<sup>31</sup> but only mentally – 'the intellect which knows a stone is a stone in an intelligible way.' *And yet*, my love for the mountain is stirred also – maybe especially – by all that pertains to the mountain that can't be in my mind: its physicality, the way that its vastness evades being seen and known all at once, the way it keeps itself in reserve, so that when I think I've climbed to its summit, it has more to give.

And that is the difference between knowing and loving, for Aquinas. And how much more does all that apply, beyond the mountain, to knowing and loving a person: it is precisely everything about the person that can't be assimilated to my mind, contained by me, that inspires my love for him or her: her physicality, the way he evades being known all at once, the way they she keeps herself in reserve, so that when I think I've got her understood, she has more to give.

And then, even more, all of this characterises our knowledge of God, who is beyond us and boundless and inexhaustible. Knowledge of God might be *in us*, but that also means that it is human knowledge, and human knowledge falls short most of all in respect of God.<sup>32</sup> In contrast, love reaches out, but to 'the very existence which that thing has in itself.'<sup>33</sup> (For those who are interested, I've reproduced a portion of his discussion from *Summa Theologiae* II-II.27.4, and from *On Truth* 22.11, at the end.)

Even if our knowledge of God is radically limited and he is only now known by us, as Aquinas puts it, 'through other things', not face to face – through the scriptures, people, traditions, encounters, traces in the world – even if God is barely known, as through a mirror darkly (1 Cor. 13.12), what we know about him arouses our love. Indeed, I will *never* know God as God is in himself, not the infinite depths of divinity. I will always know God humanly, because I am human, and yet I love God for all that he is, not just what I have or can grasp.<sup>34</sup>

'Love is the end of knowledge', he writes – love is where knowledge is leading us – 'and consequently, love can begin at once where knowledge ends, namely in the thing

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<sup>31</sup> Franciscus Sylvesteris, *In Contra Gentes* I.44, Quoted by Josef Pieper, 'Reality and the Good', in *Living the Truth* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1993), p. 131.

<sup>32</sup> I should add that this 'falling short' is in terms of human knowledge measured against the God as an object of knowledge. In another way, and on its own terms, it is no failure of human knowledge to be human, or finite. On this, see my forthcoming book on finitude.

<sup>33</sup> Aquinas, *Disputed Questions on Truth*, 22.11 *resp.*

<sup>34</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* II-II.27.4 *obj.* 1 and *ad* 1.

itself which is known through another thing.<sup>35</sup> For now, we can usefully think about all that leads us there – all that can be usefully thought, among which, Christian philosophy plays a part – but ultimately we are not pursuing thoughts but seeking God himself: ‘the believer’s act of faith is not brought to fulfillment in a proposition but in God’, and not simply in knowing, but even more in loving.<sup>36</sup>

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Canon Philosopher of St Albans Cathedral

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From *On Truth*, 22: ‘The intellect can accordingly be compared to the will in three ways: (1) Absolutely and in general, without any reference to this or that particular thing – in this way the intellect is more excellent than the will, just as it is more perfect to possess what there is of dignity in a thing than merely to be related to its nobility. (2) With regard to material and sensible things – in this way again the intellect is simply nobler than the will. For example, to know a stone intellectually is nobler than to will it, because the form of the stone is in the intellect, inasmuch as it is known by the intellect, in a nobler way than it is in itself as desired by the will. (3) With reference to divine things, which are superior to the soul – in this way to will is more excellent than to understand, as to will God or to love Him is more excellent than to know Him. This is because the divine goodness itself is more perfectly in God Himself as He is desired by the will than the participated goodness is in us as known by the intellect.’<sup>37</sup>

From *Summa Theologiae*, II-II.27.4: It would seem that God cannot be loved immediately in this life, ‘since the “unknown cannot be loved” as Augustine says (*On the Trinity*, 10.1). Now we do not know God immediately in this life, since “we see now through a glass, in a dark manner” (1 Cor. 13.12). Neither, therefore, do we love Him immediately.’<sup>38</sup> [And yet, in fact], ‘although the unknown cannot be loved, it does not follow that the order of knowledge is the same as the order of love, since love is the end of knowledge, and consequently, love can begin at once where knowledge ends, namely in the thing itself which is known through another thing.’<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* II-II.27.4, *reply to objection 1*.

<sup>36</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* II-II.1.2, slight paraphrase.

<sup>37</sup> *Disputed Questions on Truth*, 22.11 *resp.*, trans. Robert W. Schmidt (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1954).

<sup>38</sup> *Summa Theologiae* II-II.27.4, *objection 1*.

<sup>39</sup> *Summa Theologiae* II-II.27.4, *reply to objection 1*.