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TOPIC

TALKING ABOUT THE NATURE OF GOD

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ABSTRACT

God's nature remains a mystery in our human mind, God is Transcendent yet he is Imminent.

God is Omnipresent and Omniscient. God is Nameless, yet can be called by many names or titles. God is changeless, yet He was incarnated our finite mind or intellect cannot understand his nature. We need caution and humility in our endeavour to talk or discuss God's nation.

To be able to talk appropriately about God do not do so in literary terms. Use analogous terms, to talk about God, because our notions and Ideas about God fall short of what He really is. "If you understand Him He is not God" (St Augustine. Sermo 52, 16, PL38, 360).

"What man can do is to keep searching for God until the grave when we are privileged with the beatific vision to see God face to face".

Keywords: God, Nature, Talking, Analogy

INTRODUCTION

We are faced with a lot of questions in life that we don't have answers to. There are some questions we do not pose them but they are part of the human life. This work will try to examine one of these questions. "How can the human mind fully understand and speak rightly about God's nature?"

Jesus, the Second Person of the "Most Holy Trinity" has said much about the nature of his father-God, by revealing the father in himself.

God for me remains the timeless truth and this work will try to reveal the truth that God wants to communicate to mankind. Understanding the nature of God is possible through the acquisition of knowledge in the study of theology. This work will focus on talking about the nature of God. First, nature of God will be analyzed. Next, the appropriate manner of speaking about God is emphasized. Finally, conclusion and summary of the conclusion is highlighted.

NATURE OF GOD

God's 'nature' means His **characteristics**, His **attributes**, His **qualities**. Christianity claims that the God of all things is unique in that He alone has the following **divine** characteristics (in no particular order):

1. **SUPREMACY:** The God of Judaism and Christianity is **the** Supreme Being. He is not merely a **different** type of being or a **superior** being but the **Supreme** Being.

1. **SELF-EXISTENT:** God is the only thing that had no beginning, that was not created by something else.
2. **UNIQUENESS:** God is unique. The Bible describes Him in Greek as **monogenesis**, i.e., "one of a kind", "having a unique nature."
3. **OMNISCIENCE:** He knows all things.
4. **ETERNALNESS:** He always has existed and always will exist. He had no beginning and will never cease to exist. (Also see **IMMORTAL** below.)
5. **OMNIPOTENCE:** He is all powerful.
6. **OMNIPRESENCE:** He is everywhere at the same time.
7. **HOLINESS:** Holy means pure, undefiled.
8. **TRIUNE NATURE:** The **one** God is a single "trinity" consisting of three distinct "persons":
 - a. **FATHER**
 - b. **JESUS** - often referred to as the Son or "the Word of God"
 - c. **THE HOLY SPIRIT**

Don't get hung up on the "how can one be three?" issue! Remember--we are imperfect, natural human beings with physical bodies trying to understand a perfect, supernatural spiritual being that does not have a physical body. (Jesus' physical body was created; He did not always have a physical body.) The best we can possibly hope for is just a "working definition". Trying to understand the "triune" nature of God intellectually is like trying to understand intellectually why some things smell nice and some things don't, without actually smelling anything.

9. **THEISTIC:** *Deistic* and *theistic* are adjectives from the field of comparative religion. They describe the relationship between a god and that which it creates. A deistic god is one that would distance itself from that which it creates; one they would not get involved in the activities of the things it created. A deistic god would essentially be an "absentee father" god -- it would create a universe and then sit back and says "I made you, but I don't want to get involved. You're on your own!" The God of the Bible is *theistic*. He does *not* distance Himself from that which He creates. He gets *actively involved* in the activities of the things He created. In fact, the God of the Bible 'micromanages' things.
10. **TRANSCENDENT:** God transcends that which He created, i.e., He "*goes beyond*" that which He created, He is *not limited to*, He is *not bound by* that which He created. For example, in the physical universe it is impossible for a single being to consist of three distinct persons, but God is not limited by physical laws, so *He can* be *one* God and yet consist of *three distinct persons*.
11. Apart from the Christianity view of the *divine* characteristics of God, Christians also believe that, in addition, God shares the following unique characteristics with certain other things:
12. **ALIVE:** The one God is a living being.
13. **PERSONAL:** God is a living person with thoughts, reactions, etc., not an impersonal thing.
14. **SPIRIT:** A spirit is a *living being* that is *incorporeal*, i.e., it does not possess a physical body. Note that Jesus *took on* a physical human body. It is not an inherent part of His nature. By comparison, our bodies are part of our human nature but we put on clothes.
15. **SENTIENCE:** A sentient being has *intelligence*, and also is *aware of its own existence*, and *aware that there is a 'big picture'*. For instance, cats, dogs, and horses have intelligence but probably are not sentient.
16. **IMMORTAL:** God is a being that will live forever.

Note the technical difference between *eternalness* and *immortality*. God is *eternal* because had He had no beginning. He *also* is immortal because He will live forever. Humans, angels, demons, etc., are immortal because we will never cease to exist, but not eternal because we did not always exist.

It is important to realize that in practice *eternal* and *immortal* are often used interchangeably and the technical difference is not always maintained.

17. **SEPARATE:** God is separate from that which He created. The universe itself is not God. (The opposite is *pantheism*. Some "nature" religions believe that the universe itself is god.).

APPROPRIATE MANNER OF SPEAKING ABOUT GOD

Upon being asked what God is, it is natural for some to answer: "I don't know—no one knows. And that's as it should be. God is totally beyond the comprehension of mere finite beings such as ourselves, and we should not go about pretending that we *can* know what God is." There is something paradoxical about this position, namely, if one believes that the nature of God is *totally* unknown, but one nevertheless says that one believes that God exists, then one cannot even say what it is that one is believing in. Suppose a person states; "I believe that trinitis exist, but I have absolutely no idea of what trinitis are." This appears to be nonsensical. At least some minimal conception, therefore, seems required.

Even mystics, who believe that the nature of God is essentially mysterious to human beings, concede that one must have at least a minimal conception of God. If one has anything like a traditional Jewish or Christian belief, for example then in fact one *does* have some conception of what God is: God is an eternally existent spiritual being who created the world, and so forth. Many Christians further affirm: "There is the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, so that there are three aspects to God, and while we may not know the precise meaning of this doctrine (of the Trinity), nonetheless we can know that it is true."

Philosophers know all too well, from dealing with for example the problem of substance and the problem of universals, that general "What is" questions (ti esti questions) give an overly simple appearance to what is in fact a very complex affair. In order for us to fully understand the appropriate manner of speaking about God let us look at the Feminist Theological Discourse:

In the midst of knowledge explosion of the past half century, it is astounding how many have forgotten that the greatest knowledge they could possess is the knowledge of God. In relation to this there are various ways individuals and religious groups seek to know and talk to God. This work will consider the Feminist and other views on how we can speak rightly of God.

Elizabeth A. Johnson a Feminist Theologian gives four topics she outlines on ways we can rightly speak of God from the feminist perspective.

Her first topic is A Crucial Question here she looks at a vignette from the last fourth century which reveals how fascinating the Christian people of that time found the question of right speech about God. She therefore poses the question what is the right way to speak about God? She sees the question as unsurpassed importance, for speech to and about the mystery that surrounds human lives and the universe itself as a key activity of a community of faith. The speech stands as the symbol of God functions as the primary symbol of the whole religious system, the ultimate point of reference for understanding experience, life, and the world. The way in which a faith community shapes language about God implicitly represents what it takes to be the highest good, the profoundest truth, the most appealing beauty which molds the corporate identity and directs the praxis of the community.

From this foundation she came to the point of women who historically have borne primary responsibility for lighting cooking fires and feeding the world women that the society and church has shed and excluded them from everywhere in a world chiefly by men where daily language conveys message: God is male or more like a man than a woman. Which undermines women's human dignity as equally created in the image of God. In view of this she sees new language born as women gather together creatively in solidarity and prayer, engaging in the traditional theological task of reflecting on God and as sister Scholars uncover alternative ways of speaking

about divine mystery that have long be hidden in scripture and tradition. The question return in other form weather the reality of women can provide suitable metaphor for speech about God?

The second topic is focus on the context: Mystery Mediated in History. Hers she sees mystery of God as always mediated through shifting historical discourse. Language about God has a history that can be trace both from scriptural period and throughout history to reveal that there has been no timeless speech about God in the Jewish or Christian tradition. We are face with a question whether it is proper to refer to God as "person" some say the word is not use in scripture others see the word as intelligence which frequently applied to God in scripture. Aquinas state if our speech about God were limited to the very terms of scripture itself, then no one could speak about God except in the original languages of Hebrew and Greek; he also defends the use of extra-biblical language about God on the grounds of historical need.

Here we can speak about the mystery of God from the perspective of women's experiences. The historical open-endedness of talk about God is due not only to its location in time, place, and culture, which is the case with all human speech, but to the very nature of what we are talking about. The reality of God is mystery beyond all imagining.

The third topic is focus on Purpose: Connecting Feminist and Classical Wisdom, now she gives the aim in what follows to speak a good word about the mystery of God recognizable within the contours of Christian faith that will serve the emancipatory praxis of women and men, to the benefit of all creation, both human beings and the earth which is draw on the new language of Christian feminist theology as well as on the traditional language of scripture and classical theology, which codify religious insights.

She moves on to define what Christian feminist theology, to here its mean a reflection on God and all things in the light of God that stands consciously in the company of all the world's women. Which stress that women are equally created in the image and likeness of God, equally redeemed by Christ, equally sanctified by the Holy Spirit; women are equally involved in the ongoing tragedy of sin and the mystery of grace. And that feminist theology is not done for women alone but calls to strengths in women and men. The last topic is focus on Scotosis vs. the Glory of God, here she speaks of the blessing that feminist theological discourse is for the Church, Mary Collins notes, "one of the best gifts for the critical mind and for a living tradition is

the gift of new question. She emphasizes that not everyone sees it this way, she also mentions that the glory of God is women, all women, every woman everywhere, fully alive, and that wherever women are violated, diminished, have their life drained away, God's glory is dimmed and put at historical risk, and the Christian tradition so true as to be able to take account of, illumine, and integrate the currently accessible experience of women.

According to St. Augustine, God's nature is totally spiritual. God is therefore beyond the apprehension of the human mind and human words. God remains a mystery in spite of His self-revelation. He argues that we can by ANALOGY speak about certain perfections of God. This is possible because we are made in the image of God. This seems to support the Christian feminist theology who see themselves created in the image of God which gives them the right to talk about God in their own context. However, we must always bear in mind that in speaking about God, we are doing so Analogously.

Karl Rahner states that we can speak about transcendental experience only by means of what is secondary to it. For this reason we always have to speak about it in the language of "on the one hand... and on the other hand" and "not only ... but also." This way of speaking about God comes from the fact that whenever we make this original, transcendental orientation to God explicit and thematic, we have to speak about God by means of secondary and categorical concepts which are contraries within the realm of the categorical.

He also points to us that because transcendental experience is the condition which makes possible all categorical knowledge of individual objects, it follows from the nature of transcendental experience that the analogous statement signifies what is most basic and original in our knowledge.

CONCLUSION

The focus of this work from the introduction to the conclusion is the issue of the nature of God, the nature of God is about who God is.

As to whether who God is could be fully understood by human mind remains an issue for

consideration. It is important to admit from the word “go” that the nature of God is a theological issue that theologians continue to battle with.

St. Paul has said, “In this life we see dimly as in a mirror”. (ICor. 13:12), and it remains a fact that, the individual could not access the foundation of God, so whatever we say about God is indirect, and they are mediated through our experiences of creation, and the revelation of God in Jesus; We must avoid giving the impression that humanity has direct access to God.

St. Augustine sees God as totally spiritual.

In the words of St. Thomas Aquinas, God can be talked about in an ANALOGOUS terms.

Karl Rrahner, the renowned German theologian has also conceded that God is a Holy Mystery. From a critical look at the views expressed by the above theologians, one can deduce that it is difficult for one to intellectually grasp who God is.

The nature of God in Exodus 3:14 deals with God’s self revelation to Moses, and the only name God gave was, “I am who am”. This has always been explained as, “I am the one who is always present” or “I am the one who lives forever”. It is of great importance from this meaning to admit that the meaning of the name reveals the sort of mystery we are dealing with. The name cannot fully capture the real nature or essence of God.

It is in the light of this, that St.Teresa of Avila describes this search of God as a “mirage”. Like one searching for water in a desert. Of importance is the way the New and Old Testaments present the nature of God in paradoxical terms. God is seen as a vindicator (Deut. 7:1-14), and in another instance he is seen as merciful and loving God, (IJohn 4:8; ITim. 2:4).

A question anyone may or could ask is, why these contradictions, paradoxes, and differences in the Bible in matters of the God question? To react to this question what one can say is that, the nature of God is beyond man’s grasp, hence God remains a Transcendental or a mysterious God to man’s intellectual disciplines.

Because God’s nature has remained a mystery and difficult to talk about, many attributes have been advanced in trying to describe God, but they have some contradictions.

Among these attributes are: TRANSCENTENT, MYSTERY, IMMINENT, OMNISCENT, INEFFABILITY NAMELESS, OMNIPRESENT, OMNINOPOTENCE, GOODNESS, ABSOLUTE.

The main bone of contention among these writers centers about the idea of God as a personal being. It tells the human mind that, though God has revealed Himself to us through the prophets of old and the final and ultimate revelation was in his son (Jesus Christ), yet it is not easy to discuss his full nature. So then, to talk about the nature of God demands Humility and faith.

SUMMARY OF THE CONCLUSION

- a) *God's nature remains a mystery to us, that is human mind*
 - b) *God is Transcendent yet he is Imminent.*
 - c) *God is Omnipresent and Omniscient.*
 - d) *God is Nameless, yet can be called by many names or titles.*
 - e) *God is changeless, yet He was incarnated*
 - f) *Our finite mind or intellect cannot understand his nature.*
 - g) *We need caution and humility in our endeavour to talk or discuss God's nation.*
 - h) *To be able to talk appropriately about God do not do so in literary terms.*
 - i) *Use analogous terms, to talk about God, because our notions and Ideas about God fall short of what He really is.*
 - l) *"If you understand Him He is not God" (St Augustine. Sermo 52, 16, PL38, 360).*
- "What man can do is "to keep searching for God until the grave when we are privileged with the Beatific vision to see God face to face.*

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