

KNOWING GOD
The Attributes of God
Banska Bystrica, 25th October 2015

<p>...הַשְּׂכֵל וְיָדַע אוֹתִי כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה עֹשֶׂה ...חֶסֶד מְשַׁפֵּט וְצִדְקָה בְּאֶרֶץ...</p>	<p>Jer 9:24 ...let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD.</p>
<p>...ἵνα γινώσκωσιν σὲ τὸν μόνον ἀληθινὸν θεὸν...</p>	<p>John 17:3 And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.</p>
<p>Dan 11:32 וּמְרַשְׁעֵי בְרִית יִחַנְיף בְּחִלְקוֹתָ וְעַם יִדְעֵי אֱלֹהֵיו יִחְזְקוּ וְעָשׂוּ</p>	<p>Dan 11:32 He shall seduce with flattery those who violate the covenant, but the people who know their God shall stand firm and take action.</p>
<p>Διὸ ἀναζωσάμενοι τὰς ὀσφύας τῆς διανοίας ὑμῶν νήφοντες τελείως ἐλπίσατε ἐπὶ τὴν φερομένην ὑμῖν χάριν ἐν ἀποκαλύψει Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.</p>	<p>1Pt 1:13 Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.</p>

OUTLINE

0. INTRODUCTION: GOD AND THE MIND OF FAITH

- 0.1. SECULARIZATION OF THE LIVING SPACE
- 0.2. WHAT IS "GOD" FOR YOU?
- 0.3. KNOWING GOD AND EVANGELICALS
- 0.4. THREE PARTS SERIES

1. HUMILITY → SUBMISSION

- 1.1. PRIDE – A HINDRANCE TO KNOWING GOD
- 1.2. HUMILITY – A CONDITION OF KNOWING GOD

2. WORSHIP → WISDOM

- 2.1. A RELATIONSHIP OF TRUSTING SUBMISSION
- 2.2. A RELATIONSHIP OF JOYFUL LOVE

3. ADMIRATION → PRAISE

- 3.1. DEUS SEMPER MAIOR
- 3.2. THE MIRACLE/MYSTERY OF FREEDOM

4. TO REMEMBER

0. INTRODUCTION: GOD AND THE MIND OF FAITH

- God is NOT a *religious* idea!
- man: an incurable worshiper → creating gods
- PACKER *Knowing God*; TOZER *The Knowledge of the Holy*;

0.1. SECULARIZATION OF THE LIVING SPACE

- [social psychologist S. KANEKAR] "...the error of attributing the creation of the universe and human beings to a Creator rather than to natural forces could aptly be labeled the fundamentalist attribution error [*fundamentalistický omyl prisúdenia*]."¹
- LAPLACE [to Napoleon]: "Sire, I do not need that hypothesis" (maybe apocryphal story)

[Gejza VÁMOŠ 1928] Nad vrstvami večného mieru, na povrchu zeme [však] panoval božský rozmar. Ten Rozmar stvoril život a život je spád. ...Rozkázal [tedy] buňkám, aby stvorily kľbká, aby zostaly pohromade v prapodivných útvaroch. Tak prišli na svet zvieratá nižšie a vyššie. Maly divné, nemožné tvary. A čím byly složitejšie, tým bol ich život ťažší...Rozmar sa kochal v mukách tých tvorov, ako zúfale sa snažily udržovať na žive. Ako sa trepaly semtam v boji o život. Na nohách behajúce, po zemi bez nôh sa plaziace, na krídlach lietajúce a vo vodách plávajúce žalúdky a rozmnožovacie ústroje, čo chcú byť stále naplnené a čo sa chcú stále množiť. A žerú i plodia húževnate, ako keby to malo nejaký smysel. A nemilosrdný Boh kochá sa v mukách týchto bytostí, svojich výtvorov, ktorým dal nepatrnú iskierku svojej nesmrteľnej podstaty: život.²

- [HUME] "...the science of man is the only solid foundation for the other sciences..."³
- [KANT] "Even if we therefore cannot prove the simplicity of the soul, or the beginning of the world in time, or the existence of God, we may nevertheless consider the soul as if it were simple, the world as if it had a beginning in time, and God as if he existed."⁴
- ["*the sublime*"] "A **content**-driven theology would examine religious texts for ideas about God, salvation, ultimate reality, etc., but a formal or **form**-driven theology could read other texts, including philosophical texts, and pressure their arguments with issues of "ultimate concern," "importance," "meaning," and others."⁵

[WISSE] Christianity and Christian theology in the West are in crisis; at least this is how many people feel. This crisis is of course a multifaceted phenomenon and it is both caused and influenced by many different factors. A primary factor causing a sense of crisis, however, seems practical. Perhaps more than at any other time in history or anywhere else in the world it is now thought to be natural to have a secular reality in which God, gods or supernatural powers play no role. Until the 1950s, religion could hardly be avoided even by those not intensively practising a religious life. Even after the so-called return of religion in Western society – Islam but also forms of 'free-floating' spirituality – a life without a specific devotion for a specific God from a specific tradition is something that seems obvious to many people. Life can be lived without God; it is a happier life since it requires fewer obligations and it puts less pressure on us, since we don't have to ask ourselves if what we do is good or whether we need penitence or the forgiveness of sins. God has become superfluous and most people do not even care about that.⁶

0.2. WHAT IS "GOD" FOR YOU?

- [FORSYTH]⁷ I am sorry that young people are left to pick up convictions out of gossip, novels, newspapers, and light magazines...
- *an improved god?* → Marcus BORG *The God We Never Knew* (panentheism) ↔ Robert MORRIS *The God I Never Knew: how real friendship with the Holy Spirit can change your life* (revelation)
- **Cosmology** → physics; **Nature** → evolution; **Society** → economics (consumerism); **Ethics** → biology, **Religion** → psychology; **Values** → celebrities; advertising...
- **Ps 10:4** In the pride of his face the wicked does not seek him; all his **thoughts** are, "There is no God."

¹ www.scienceandculture-isna.org/july-aug10\04 Suresh Kanekar.pdf (24/10/2015)

² VÁMOŠ, G. *Atomy Boha*, Bratislava : L. Mazáč, 1936. p. VIII.

³ HUME, D. *A Treatise of Human Nature*, London : Longmans, Green and Co., 1898, p. 308.

⁴ HOLZHEY, H. – MUDROCH, V. *A – Z of Kantianism*, Lanham : The Scarecrow Press, 2010, Entry "As If" (*Als ob*).

⁵ CROCKETT, C. *A Theology of the Sublime*, London : Routledge, 2001, p. 3.

⁶ WISSE, M. *Trinitarian Theology Beyond Participation*, London : T&T Clark International, 2011, p. 1.

⁷ FORSYTH, P. T. *The Charter of the Church*, p. 8

0.3. KNOWING GOD AND EVANGELICALS

[CHAMBERS] In new birth God does three impossible things, impossible, that is, from the rational standpoint. The first is (1) to make a man's **past** as though it had never been; the second, (2) to make a man **all over again**, and the third, (3) to make a man as certain of God as God is of Himself. New birth does not mean merely salvation from hell, but something more radical, something which tells in a man's actual life.⁸

0.3.1. EVANGELICAL CONCERNS/SPECIFICS

- the real knowledge of God – through the Atonement *only* ... → soteriology

Evangelical churches, however, hold out the breathtaking possibility of having a direct and personal relationship with God. You can sense it in their prayers and especially in their songs, which bear a strange resemblance to the kind of love songs you hear on Top 40 radio stations — only with the words addressed to God, not to a human lover.⁹

- Christology → evangelism (Acts 4:12)
- Pneumatology → sanctification; power; perfection...
- preaching God's *love* – but less God's *wisdom*... → the need for *theology proper* (the study of God and His attributes)...

0.3.2. A MIND OCCUPIED BY GOD

- **2Cor 10:4-5** ...We destroy arguments (λογισμοὺς)⁵ and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God (πάν ὑψώμα ἐπαυρόμενον κατὰ τῆς γνώσεως τοῦ θεοῦ)...

[SPURGEON] IT has been said by someone that “the proper study of mankind is man.” [Alexander POPE¹⁰] I will not oppose the idea, but I believe it is equally true that the proper study of God's elect is God. The proper study of a Christian is the Godhead. The highest science, the loftiest speculation, the mightiest philosophy which can ever engage the attention of a child of God is the name, (1) the **nature**, (2) the **Person**, (3) the **work**, (4) the **doings** and (5) the **existence** of the great God whom he calls his Father. There is something exceedingly improving to the mind in a contemplation of the Divinity. It is a subject so vast, that all our thoughts are lost in its immensity—so deep that our pride is drowned in its infinity. → [PACKER] In Spurgeon's day, we know, people found theology interesting, but I find it boring. Why need anyone take time off today for the kind of study you propose? Surely a layperson, at any rate, can get on without it? After all, this is the twentieth century, not the nineteenth! ...The questioner clearly assumes that a study of the nature and character of God will be **unpractical** and **irrelevant** for life. In fact, however, it is the most practical project anyone can engage in. Knowing about God is crucially important for the living of our lives.¹¹

0.4. THREE PARTS SERIES

- (1) God in Himself, (2) God and creation → cosmology, (3) God and humanity
 - (1) God in Himself → worship
 - (2) God in the world → wisdom
 - (3) God in the Atonement → love

1. HUMILITY → SUBMISSION

- Humility is to know your place given by God and faithfully occupy it...

1.1. PRIDE – A HINDRANCE TO KNOWING GOD

- **1Pt 5:5** "God opposes the **proud** but gives grace to the humble." **James 4:6** "God opposes the **proud**, but gives grace to the humble." **Pr 3:34** Toward the scorers (אִם-לִצְיָיִם) he is scornful, but to the humble he gives favor (→ Ps 1)

⁸ CHAMBERS, O. *The Place of Help*, Complete Works, p. 1041.

⁹ STAFFORD, T. *Personal God*, Grand Rapids : Zondervan, 2008, p. 10

¹⁰ *An Essay on Man*, 1734.

¹¹ SPURGEON, C. H. *Sermons The Immutability of God*, (7th Jan 1855) → PACKER *Knowing God*,

- “Be more than man, or thou’rt less than an ant.” (John DONNE)
- dignity of man in reflecting God (*imago Dei*)
- → thinking man = a child in a safe place *or* a criminal escaping authorities?

1.2. HUMILITY – A CONDITION OF KNOWING GOD

- knowing God by *submission* ↔ knowing nature by *control*...

1.2.1. THE KNOWLEDGE TO BE RECEIVED BY REVELATION

- God cannot be fully known from the nature → **Rom 1:20** For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power (ἀίδιος αὐτοῦ δύναμις) and divine nature (θεϊότης), have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made.

[CHAMBERS] Let us get this fundamental distinction clearly in our minds: we cannot penetrate the things of God and understand them by our intelligence: the only way we can understand the things of God is by the Spirit of God. Every Christian unquestionably is mentally agnostic; that is, all we know about God we have accepted by revelation, we did not find it out for ourselves. We did not worry it out by thinking. Or work it out by reasoning. We did not say, “Because so and so is true in the natural world, therefore it must be true in the spiritual world.” *We cannot find out God in that way*. Jesus said, “If you would know My doctrine,” i.e., My logic, My reasoning and My thinking, “first do My will, believe in Me, commit yourself to Me, obey Me; then you will know whether My doctrine is of God, or whether I speak of Myself” (see John 7:17).¹²

1.2.2. THE KNOWLEDGE TO BE APPLIED BY CAUTION

[CALVIN] ...those two titles that I have used [immeasurable and spiritual] he both banishes stupid imaginings and restrains the boldness of the human mind (zaháňa hlúpe predstavy a obmedzuje opovážlivost’ ľudskej mysle). Surely, his **infinity** ought to **make us afraid** to try to measure him by our own senses. Indeed, his **spiritual** nature forbids our **imagining anything earthly** or carnal of him. For the same reason, he quite often assigns to himself a dwelling place in heaven. And yet as he is incomprehensible he also fills the earth itself.¹³

2. WORSHIP → WISDOM

2.1. A RELATIONSHIP OF TRUSTING SUBMISSION

- **Pr 1:7** The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.
- worship → in *spirit* – we have to adjust to Him – He became incarnated to make it possible...
- **Is 26:3** You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you. (יְצַר כְּמוֹד תִּצַּר שְׁלוֹם שְׁלוֹם כִּי בָּךְ בְּטוּחַ)

2.2. A RELATIONSHIP OF JOYFUL LOVE

- communion with God (Owen; Newton)

[OWEN] How few of the saints are experimentally acquainted with this privilege of holding immediate communion with the Father in love! With what anxious, doubtful thoughts do they look upon him! What fears, what questionings are there, of his good-will and kindness! At the best, many think there is no sweetness at all in him towards us, but what is purchased at the high price of the blood of Jesus. It is true, that alone is the way of communication; but the free fountain and spring of all is in the bosom of the Father.¹⁴

- future (hope)

¹² CHAMBERS, O. *Biblical psychology*, Complete Works p. 200.

¹³ CALVIN, J. *Institutes*, p. 121.

¹⁴ OWEN, J. *Works II*, New York : Robert Carter & Brothers, 1851, p. 32

3. ADMIRATION → PRAISE

3.1. DEUS SEMPER MAIOR

- **Rom 11:33-36** Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! ³⁴ "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?" ³⁵ "Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?" ³⁶ For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.

...church fathers had a statement that they regularly invoked in discussions of matters like these. Their default assessment of mind blowing ideas was to declare "Deus Semper Maior", which translated from the Latin means "God is always greater". In other words, they resorted to declaring that no matter how hard we try to fathom and sum up the nature of God's immensity, we will forever fall short of comprehension and description and must therefore surrender to profound mystery.¹⁵

- → every family its name (otherwise it is one big dance...)

3.2. THE MIRACLE/MYSTERY OF FREEDOM

-
- the problem of freedom (*Screwtape*):

Celá filozofie Pekla spočívá na uznání toho axiomu, že jedna věc nemůže být jinou věcí, a obzvlášť, že jedna bytost není jinou bytostí. Moje dobro je jenom moje a Tvoje dobro zase jenom Tvoje. Co jeden získává, to druhý Ztrácí. Dokonce i neživý předmět je tím, čím je, jen proto, že zabraňuje, aby jeho prostor zaujalo něco jiného; zvětšuje-li se, pak ostatní předměty odstrkuje nebo pohlcuje. A s bytostmi je tomu stejně. U zvířat má pohlcování formu požívání; pro nás to znamená, že silnější bytost vysaje vůli a svobodu ze slabší bytosti. „Být“ znamená „soupeřit“. – A Nepřítelova filozofie není nic jiného, než jediné trvalé úsilí, jak se této očividné pravdě vyhnout. Snaží se dosáhnout něčeho, co nedává smysl. Věci mají být různé, ale přitom i nějak jednotné. To, co prospívá jednomu člověku, by mělo prospívat i ostatním. Tuto nemožnost nazývá Nepřítel Láskou a tento jednotvárný všelék se dá zjistit ve všem, co On dělá, a dokonce i ve všem, čím On je – nebo za co se prohlašuje. A tak ani Jemu samotnému nestačí být absolutní matematickou jednotkou; říká o sobě, že je zároveň „Tři“ i „Jeden“, jen aby ten nesmysl jménem Láska našel oporu v Jeho vlastní povaze. ↔ ↔ The whole philosophy of Hell rests on recognition of the axiom that one thing is not another thing, and, specially, that one self is not another self. My good is my good and your good is yours. What one gains another loses. Even an inanimate object is what it is by excluding all other objects from the space it occupies; if it expands, it does so by thrusting other objects aside or by absorbing them. A self does the same. With beasts the absorption takes the form of eating; for us, it means the sucking of will and freedom out of a weaker self into a stronger. 'To be' means 'to be in competition'. Now the Enemy's philosophy is nothing more nor less than one continued attempt to evade this very obvious truth. He aims at a contradiction. Things are to be many, yet somehow also one. The good of one self is to be the good of another. This impossibility He calls love, and this same monotonous panacea can be detected under all He does and even all He is—or claims to be. Thus He is not content, even Himself, to be a sheer arithmetical unity; He claims to be three as well as one, in order that this nonsense about Love may find a foothold in His own nature.¹⁶

4. TO REMEMBER

- Be aware, that the world is forcing its ideas about God on you. (What sort of God they do *not* believe in?)
- As a Christian you need to add to your salvific knowledge of God as your Father (regeneration) the knowledge of God as the Ultimate and Infinite Reality of being (practical faith).
- Knowing God comes through his word illumined by the Holy Spirit, and is evidenced by humility, worship and admiration.

¹⁵ <http://kentdelhousaye.com/2010/01/06/the-immensity-of-god/> (24. 10. 2015)

¹⁶ LEWIS, C. S. *Screwtape Letters*, p. 94.