

## **«Per Speculum et in Aenigmate»: 1 Corinthians 13:12 in Augustine and Anselm**

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1 Corinzi 13:12(a): *Videmus nunc per speculum et in aenigmate, tunc autem facie ad faciem* è il principale testo biblico sul quale è stata fondata la speculazione cristiana riguardo alla possibilità da parte dell'uomo di conoscere Dio. Questo testo ricorre spesso in Agostino di Ippona e meno spesso, ma non per questo in modo meno rilevante, in Anselmo di Canterbury. Nell'interpretazione di questa frase esistono somiglianze e differenze fra i due autori. Mentre l'interpretazione definitiva di Agostino indica l'impossibilità di qualsiasi sapere umano rispetto al divino, Anselmo considera il testo di Paolo come una conferma del fatto che, anche se l'uomo è capace di speculare sulla necessità di certe verità intorno alla natura divina, in definitiva rimane un mistero come queste verità possano essere spiegate. Con questa interpretazione, Anselmo rappresenta quindi una figura di passaggio da Agostino a Tommaso d'Aquino.

In investigating the limits of human knowledge of God's existence and nature, two texts, among others, have stirred considerable interest. One is found in Plato's *Timaeus* 29c:<sup>1</sup> «The Father of the universe is past understanding, and if one can understand him, past all telling». The other is found in Paul's 1 Corinthians 13:12(a): «*Videmus nunc per speculum et in aenigmate, tunc autem facie ad faciem*». This text occurs often in Augustine of Hippo, less often, but no less significantly, in Anselm of Canterbury. Anselm's familiarity with Augustine's use of this text is apparent. Similarities and differences in interpretation of this phrase indicate similarities and differences between the thought of these two closely aligned western thinkers. In *Epistula de incarnatione verbi*,<sup>2</sup> when discussion turns to intra-trinitarian relations, Anselm says that Augustine «has contemplated» Trinitarian processions *per speculum et in aenigmate* since God is not able to be seen «as he is» in this life. Anselm himself, so the text continues, has argued (*disputavi*) about the same matter in *Monologion*. For further theologoumena on this questions, Anselm then refers the reader to «the same little book». Anselm gives us the implicit impression that his use of this Pauline phrase reflects Augustine's usage in *De trinitate*. Elsewhere I have argued that *Monologion* is best understood as a precis, and

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<sup>1</sup> *Timaeus* 29c.

<sup>2</sup> *Epistula de incarnatione Verbi* 16.

at times an *Erweiterung*, of *De trinitate*.<sup>3</sup> In the same piece, I suggested that Anselm's use of 1 Corinthians 13:12(a) depended on Augustine, but that Anselm's understanding of it differed. No doubt, 1 Corinthians 13:12(a) is a key scriptural text lying behind Anselm's discourse on the human ability to know God. Surprisingly, he never cites the text in its entirety. Anselm's manner of using this text provides an excellent example of Scripture as the foundation of his thought, but without formal citation.

In *Monologion* LXIV, Anselm attempts to reconcile God's utter transcendence, and consequent incomprehensibility and ineffability, with his previous sixty-three chapters. It suffices, Anselm says, for one seeking something incomprehensible to arrive by reason to certitude even if he is unable to penetrate how this matter is so. We adhere by certitude of faith to those matters which are asserted by necessary proofs, reason notwithstanding, even if these matters can not be explained because of an incomprehensibility due to their nature. Inability to be explained Anselm calls ineffability. The prior pages of *Monologion* have dealt with God's nature as supreme being. His existence and nature have been asserted by necessary reasons, but not penetrated by human intelligence. Man knows God by necessary reasons, but his existence and nature can not be explained. Nevertheless, divine incomprehensibility and his consequent ineffability should not shake man's certitude. The nature of wisdom's knowledge of both creation and his own nature, and the generation of the Son by the Father, remain unspeakable. «Who will speak of his generation?»<sup>4</sup> According to Anselm then, man adheres by faith to those incomprehensible and inexplicable truths proved by necessary reasons.

If an ontological gulf between God and creation constitutes the metaphysical foundation for God's incomprehensibility and consequent ineffability to the human mind, what is the status of the first sixty-three chapters of *Monologion*? Is it true that incomprehensibility entails ineffability? Do words used of other natural things have the same meaning when applied to God? If the common sense of words does not apply to God, has Anselm really said anything about the divine nature? Has Anselm discovered anything about God?

To solve these difficulties, Anselm proposes a distinction between discovering something incomprehensible on the one hand, and perceiving it on the other.<sup>5</sup> Often men use expressions not properly expressive of things as they are. We speak *per aliud*, through something else. Such expressions are *per aenigmate*. Often we do not see something as it is in itself, but through a similitude or image, for example looking at a face in a mirror. A mirror made of burnished metal in the ancient and medieval world produced a dis-

<sup>3</sup> F. VAN FLETEREN, *The Influence of St. Augustine's De trinitate on Anselm's Monologion*, in C. VIOLA - F. VAN FLETEREN (edd), *Saint Anselm: A Thinker for Yesterday and Today. Anselm's Thought Viewed by Our Contemporaries*, New York 2001, pp. 411 ff.

<sup>4</sup> Is 53:8.

<sup>5</sup> *Monologion* LXV.

torted image unfamiliar to those accustomed to contemporary glass mirrors. Anselm's distinction is between something seen or said *per proprietatem suam* or *per aliud*. Nothing prohibits man from saying something about divine nature as long as he realizes that he speaks not *per proprietatem*, but *per aliud*. In thinking of the meaning of words, men usually conceive created, not transcendent, reality. Man's concepts are distant from the divine. For example, *sapientia* and *essentia* express the divine reality *per aliud*, not *per proprietatem*. So, there is no contradiction between ineffability and human speech about God – since human words do not express God precisely as he is.

This distinction draws upon 1 Corinthians 13:12(a). Anselm only explicitly cites the passage later on, and then not its entirety. Anselm defines *in aenigmate* and *per speculum* very broadly. *Aenigma* refers to words, *speculum* to sight. *Per speculum* refers to divine incomprehensibility, *in aenigmate* to his ineffability. To students of St. Thomas or indeed Cajetan, Anselm possesses an incipient doctrine of analogy, *non expressis uerbis*. Every being (*essentia*), in so far as it exists, is similar to the highest being.<sup>6</sup> Some beings have a greater similarity to the highest being than others. The greater the similarity, the more helpful to the human mind in its search for the highest truth. The rational mind is the only created reality which can search for God. Of all created reality, it has the greatest similarity to God. In fact, through knowledge of itself the mind rises to knowledge of God. Neglect of self-knowledge takes the mind away from knowledge of God. Thus Anselm calls the rational mind the mirror, the image of the divine being which it can not see «face to face».<sup>7</sup> The image of the ineffable Trinity that man's mind bears within it is the mind's ability to remember, understand, and love itself and to remember, understand, and love the greatest of all beings. Nothing else bears such a resemblance to the divine.

Anselm is not satisfied with an ontological image. The rational creature should desire to express this image impressed upon him through voluntary deeds.<sup>8</sup> By his rational power, man can discern just from unjust, true from false, good from evil, and indeed various degrees of goodness. Consequent upon and in accord with this intellectual judgement, man must act. His very purpose is to discern the good from the bad and act accordingly. He should love the highest being for himself and other things on his account. He is goodness itself and all other goods are so through him. To love entails remembering and understanding. Man's entire purpose is expend his entire capacity (*posse*) and will (*velle*) to remembering, understanding, and loving the highest good, the cause of his existence. Anselm continues by proving by «necessary reasons» that such a purpose entails an unending life<sup>9</sup> and

<sup>6</sup> *Monologion* LXVI.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>8</sup> *Monologion* LXVIII.

<sup>9</sup> *Monologion* LXIX.

that God will reward one loving him.<sup>10</sup> It would be unfitting for God to take away life, or allow life to be taken away, from one destined to, and actually, love him. Likewise it would be unfitting that God not reward one loving him by anything other than himself. At that time the rational soul will no longer see *per speculum et aenigmate*, but *facie ad faciem*. This vision will endure without end. In these chapters, Anselm has given us what he set out to do in *Monologion* LXIV, the «necessary reasons» for the certitude of faith.

«Therefore the certitude of faith must no less be given to those things which are asserted by necessary proofs with reason notwithstanding, even if these matters can not be explained because of the incomprehensibility of its own natural height».<sup>11</sup>

Are there sources for Anselm's exegesis of 1 Corinthians 13:12(a)? According to *Epistula de incarnatione verbi* and other direct references to Augustine in Anselm, *De trinitate* must be numbered among them. In his notes to Anselm's *Omnia opera*, Schmitt suggests many parallels from Augustine's works, including several from *De trinitate*. Generally he suggests *De trinitate* VIII-XV as the source for *Monologion* LXIV-LXV. To my mind *De trinitate* XIV, viii, 11-XV, xxviii, 51 is of particular interest.

References and allusions to 1 Corinthians 13:12(a) abound in Augustine's works.<sup>12</sup> In works prior to *De trinitate*, the text ordinarily means that man can have only a fleeting glimpse of the divine in this life. According to Augustine prior to 394, an elite few could, with God's help, attain a permanent vision of God. Later, only a few can have a fleeting vision in this life. In *De trinitate* XV, vii, 14-ix, 16, Augustine amplifies his exegesis of 1 Corinthians 13:12(a). *Speculum* refers to a mirror. As we have seen, a mirror was made of burnished metal. In such a mirror an image is not clear. Later on, Augustine notes, in this life we see God *per speculum*, that is through the human mind man can see a distant image of God. Man can understand not only himself, but at his best God through himself. *Aenigma*, Augustine continues, is a species of the genus allegory. Allegory makes something known through something else. *Aenigma* is an obscure allegory. Both words are Greek in origin with no accustomed Latin equivalents. Augustine's theory of semiotics is deeply indebted to ancient Greco-Roman grammarians.<sup>13</sup> Semiotic theory was common place among ancient grammarians and rhetors, but Quintilian and Cicero may have influenced Augustine directly. Essential additions are taken from Paul. For example, according to Paul deeds and persons can also have allegorical meanings.<sup>14</sup> *Per speculum et in aenigmate* means in

<sup>10</sup> *Monologion* LXX.

<sup>11</sup> *Monologion* LXIV.

<sup>12</sup> For a fuller discussion of Augustine's use of this text, see F. VAN FLETEREN, «*Per speculum et in aenigmate*»: The Use of 1 Corinthians 13:12 in the Writings of Augustine, in «*Augustinian Studies*», 23 (1992), pp. 69-102.

<sup>13</sup> Whether Augustine has a theory of semiotics or merely makes some observations concerning signs, relevant for biblical exegesis, is a *quaestio disputata*. For an up-to-date bibliography and discussion of this question, see the I. BOUCHET's remarks in *De doctrina christiana*, BA 11/2, pp. 483 ff.

<sup>14</sup> See *De uera religione*, p. 99.

Augustinian terms a distant and obscure image. Here on earth, man can have only a distant and obscure image of God. Augustine understands this image of the divine through Genesis 1:26, man made in God's image. God is triune. Therefore in man there is a distant and obscure image of the triune God. Augustine also understands this image in terms of 2 Corinthians 3:18, that the glorious vision of God will transform man into his image by the spirit of the Lord. Augustine also cites 1 John 3:2, that we shall see him as he is. Augustine's attempt to understand distantly and obscurely the triune God is partially, if not largely, Johannine. But his semiotics borrows little from John's use of sign.<sup>15</sup> Augustine discusses the nature of the external word, the internal *uerbum*, and their relation extensively. But, nowhere do we find *per speculum* interpreted to refer to sight and *aenigma* to speech, as in Anselm.

In other works, Augustine clearly interprets 1 Cor 13:12(a) as a statement concerning man's knowledge not merely of God, but of truth in general.<sup>16</sup> Because of sin, man can no longer directly intuit divine ideas, present to every man through the enlightening presence of Christ.<sup>17</sup> For this reason, divine revelation through Christ and Scripture is necessary. Even here, God can speak to man only through sign and symbol, through allegory in its widest sense. The role of the theologian is biblical exegesis, that is interpretation of the divine allegories.

In what does this image consist? From *De trinitate VIII* onward, Augustine has examined various triads in an attempt to reach some understanding of the divine. Investigation of these triads has served as an *exercitatio animae* for the human mind.<sup>18</sup> In *De trinitate XIV*, viii, 11-xii, 15, Augustine established the seventh and final triad which could represent an image of the divine. This trinity lies in the human mind:

«Therefore, this trinity is an image of God not because of the fact that it remembers, understands, and loves itself, but since it can remember, understand, and love by whom it was made».<sup>19</sup>

In *De trinitate XIV*, Augustine turns the mind from knowledge of things exterior to things interior to the mind itself and then to knowledge of God. When this takes place under divine grace, man attains the highest image of God possible in this life. Such a method of interiority and consequent ascension, though obviously not in the same detail, is integral to Augustine's thought since reading *Enneads I,6* in June 386.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>15</sup> On this point, see F. VAN FLETEREN, *Principles of Augustine's Hermeneutics*, in F. VAN FLETEREN - J. SCHNAUBELT (edd), *Augustine: Biblical Exegete, Collectanea Augustiniana*, New York 2001, pp. 1 ff. Very instructive on the sources for Augustinian hermeneutic is the redent work of Karla Pollmann.

<sup>16</sup> See *supra*, note 3.

<sup>17</sup> Jn 1:9.

<sup>18</sup> Faith also has a purificatory role in the Christian life.

<sup>19</sup> *De trinitate XIV*, xii, 15.

<sup>20</sup> *Confessiones VII*, ix, 13 ff.

In the last half of *De trinitate* XV Augustine expands upon this image. His principal concern is indicating similarities and differences between the trinity in the human *mens* and the divine triune nature. Augustine wants to preserve divine unity while maintaining a trinity of persons. The mind producing a thought of God from its memory and the love between both arises in one person. In God each person distinctly is the entire divine memory, the entire divine understanding, and the entire divine love. Yet these three functions of the human *mens* concerning God under grace is the closest human image, however distant, of the divine here on earth. This knowledge of God will reach perfection in the next life; man's happiness will consist in this perfected knowledge.

From this all too brief precis of *Monologion* LXIV-LXX and *De trinitate* XIV, viii, 11-XV, xxviii, 51, we may conclude that Anselm was quite familiar with *De trinitate* XIV-XV. Anselm's entire analysis is framed by *De trinitate*. He intends to find a divine image in man. Anselm's project is Augustinian also in a wider sense, seeking an understanding of the truths of faith. In both Augustine and Anselm, the *quaerere* of the believer is strong. In particular, the following may also be noted: (1) Anselm borrows the image of human remembrance, understanding, and loving the highest good as an image of the triune God from *De trinitate* XIV-XV; (2) the analysis of the human *mens* as consisting of *memoria*, *intelligentia*, and *uoluntas* owes something to *De trinitate* XIV-XV; (3) the use of *essentia*, *uoluntas*, *memoria*, *mens* among other terms is thoroughly Augustinian; (4) both speak of the incomprehensibility and ineffability of God; (5) both use 1 Cor 13:12(a) in explaining both the possibility and difficulty of the human mind attaining knowledge of the divine; (6) the *beata uita* attainable only in the next life will consist in a direct vision of God. This list could be expanded.

Despite these similarities, several differences are remarkable. Anselm's understanding of the relation between of faith and reason differs somewhat from Augustine, as found in *De trinitate*. According to Augustine, faith sets an agenda for reason. Faith inspires the pursuit of understanding. This pursuit will have only partial results *in statu peregrinationis* – in the next life, full knowledge and full happiness. Anselm's project differs somewhat. For Anselm like Augustine, faith sets the agenda for man's search. The human mind searches for knowledge of the divine. By reason man can reach certain knowledge of God. This knowledge constitutes the necessary reasons of which Anselm speak so often. But the human mind can not understand how these matters are true. For example, man can attain knowledge of a triune God by reason, three persons in one God. But the human intellect can not understand how this can be. Here faith again enters the picture. Man is called upon to believe what he can not understand. Likewise, man can reason that God is both just and merciful in the highest degree. How these fit together belongs to faith. In Anselm, faith precedes the *quaerere*, but the *quaerere* also inspires faith; in Augustine faith inspires the *quaerere*. Both see vision of the triune God as the ultimate end for man.



Anselm's understanding of 1 Corinthians 13:12(a) differs somewhat from Augustine's. For Augustine, both *per speculum* and *in aenigmate* deal with human intellectual vision. Man can see God only distantly and obscurely in this life. For Anselm, *per speculum* deals with vision, *in aenigmate* with speech. God is incomprehensible to man and can not be seen in this life, he can be seen only *per speculum*. Human language is inadequate to speak of God, he is ineffable. Man can speak of him only *in aenigmate*. Of course, both Augustine and Anselm agree on divine incomprehensibility and ineffability – they disagree merely on details of the exegesis of 1 Corinthians 13:12(a).

What are we to take from this? According to our understanding, despite remarkable similarities between Augustine and Anselm, the latter represents a transitional, or perhaps dialectical figure, between Augustine and Aquinas. According to Augustine, faith precedes reason in both a temporal and logical sense. Faith sets reason's agenda. Faith seeks, reason finds. To Augustine this position is ultimately reasonable. According to Anselm, faith also precedes. Reason's role is to explain, in so far as humanly possible, truths of faith. But for Anselm there is also a sense in which reason precedes faith. Truths of faith may be established by investigating necessary reasons for truths. Reason can not, however, provide insight. Faith must accept what can not adequately be explained by reason or clearly seen by the human intellect. The role of faith is to accept what reason has presented but can not explain. In this enterprise, Anselm is often seen as a rationalist. But in some respects, he may be a forerunner to Aquinas. Thomas sees reason as offering *praeambula fidei*, precursors to faith. Reason may prepare for faith. Of course, Thomas Aquinas expects much less from reason than Anselm. Man can never attain knowledge of the triune God by reason alone. Man can have only a distant and obscure image of the triune godhead. In this regard Thomas resembles Augustine more than he does Anselm. But, at least the level of logic, reason prepares man for faith. Reason goes only so far, then faith takes over. In this matter, Anselm may be seen as a forerunner to Thomas.