



An Attempt at God's Definition: A Philosophic –Metaphysical Rationalization

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ABSTRACT

Admittedly, God's question is not merely a matter of the intellectual jingoism. In our highly atomized Contemporary world, the tendency is always to prove everything only from the standpoint of reason or through scientific experimentation. But reason and science unaided cannot lead us too far. Reason and science however, can provide interpretation for many different things but cannot give answers and solutions to all questions and every problem. What we cannot see are far more than what we can see through reason and science put together. Such things can only be apprehended possibly through supernatural faith. God's omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence can neither be merely rationalized nor be subjected to more scientific proof. However, Science, reason and faith are not opposed to one another. Instead, they are different aspects of one and the same thing, and, hence should complement each other without any friction. What matters is each being able to know its limitations. There are two companions in our earthly existence and journey: reason and faith. At a point, the reason can still see clearly unaided. Never the less, to some extent, the reason can no longer see clearly. It is at that point in time that faith takes over from reason. However, this very question of God, has eluded philosophers of different epochs. The researcher, therefore, never claims to give an adequate and exhaustive answer to it either. Hence, the writer employed the method of philosophical reflection as well as theological investigation to achieve the purpose of the study. The researcher, therefore, come to a conclusion that God is both all-inclusive and all-exclusive..

Keywords: *God; Incomprehensibility; Mystery; Unchangeable; All-inclusiveness; All-exclusiveness.*

General Introduction

Philosophical argument about the existence of God can only lead us to really accept God's existence. However, at that level, one cannot yet make a quantum leap. One can only merely arrive at a cold type of God. To make a leap from a philosophy-made-God to a personal God, in no small measure demands an act of faith.

In any case, the question at stake is not whether there is God or not. God's existence is self-evidence because God "is a Being who is the question which has become unquestioning, because it has been accepted as His own answer by Him who answers" [1]. Instead, the question here borders on the notion of God. How can we define His Being? Infact, who is this God?

The question of God is an indispensable and fundamental question in human existence. It has eluded many philosophers as well as theologians of different eras even till today. Human reason can explain up to a point and beyond that level is a mystery. God is a mystery. Mystery as Karl Rahner puts it is:

...not something still undisclosed, which is a second element along with what is grasped and understood. This would be a confuse mystery with the still undiscovered unknown. Mystery on the contrary is the impenetrable which is already present and does not need to be fetched: it is not a second element unmastered only provisionally. It is the indomitable dominant horizon of all understanding, that which makes it possible to understand other things by the fact that it is silently there as incomprehensible [1].

God being incomprehensible then even though is known, yet, He is not known as such [2]. In that regard in which God is incomprehensible then, the Igbo do well to call God "*amaama-amacha-amacha*" (he who is known, yet cannot be claimed to be known entirely or comprehensively). God, therefore, is the:

...'Unchangeable', He who simply is – *actus Purus* – who in blessed security, in the self-sufficiency of infinite reality, possesses from eternity to eternity the absolute, unwavering, glad, fullness of what He is. He has not first to acquire what he is [1].

Little wonder then, the only answer Moses could receive when he demanded for knowledge of God's name is – *Ehie ashel ehie* – which translates "I am who I am" or "I will be what I will be" (cf.Ex.3:13-14). God remains God no matter our philosophizing and theologization.

Suffice it to say then that God is incomprehensible and unconceivable. It cannot be adequately accounted for by the world of philosophy. Neither could theology claim any exhaustiveness in it. The question is confrontationally not a case for scientific discovery. It is necessarily over and above laboratory tests and findings; hence, the inexplicability of God. No wonder Nietzsche has to say that: "A thing explained ceases to interest us; this is why God will always interest us" [3].

Dimensionally, of course, the question of God is both metaphysical and anthropological. Hence it is not as easy as it would seem at first glance. It is transcendently metaphysical since it has to do with He whose Being goes over and above the experiential world

of things. According to the scholastics, God is “Supra naturam” and not “contra naturam”. The mystery of God is over and above human reasoning though not against it. He has to be more than rational in order to create rational beings.

On the other hand, God’s question is anthropological without being anthropocentric: it is anthropological from the fact that the question confronts man whose limitations are such that he cannot possibly go directly into the profundity of God’s Essence. Karl Rahner tangentially meant so when he says that:

...we may not think that we could completely understand God’s expression of Himself outside Himself, which is man, so that it, and we too, could see what is behind man except by seeing through him into the blessed darkness of God Himself and then really understanding that this finite being is the finitude of the infinite word of God Himself [1].

Unquestionably however, God can neither be comprehended nor be adequately apprehended by man for “our knowledge of God in this world is a composition of many inadequate concepts, and on account of this composition, it is necessarily limited and imperfect” [4]. St. Augustine of Hippo, pertinently agreed with this very fact when he says that: “More true than our speech about God is our thinking of Him, and more true than thinking is His Being” [5]. God is immense. His immensity overwhelms every created being (both corporeal and spiritual). He “alone has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has ever seen or can see” (1Tim.6:16).

God is more than the totality of all we think or conceive of Him. Hence, God alone,

...possesses a comprehensive knowledge of God; for the infinite Being can be completely comprehended by an infinite intellect only...“God whose Being is Infinite, is infinitely knowable. No created Understanding can however, know God in an infinite manner [4].

God and human knowledge

Admittedly, therefore, for us human, to know and define God accurately and precisely, we have to be eternal like Him. But we are finites standing before the infinite and the Absolute. Furthermore, the question of quidity (what-ness) seems to be very much uncomfortable within the context of God’s question. Hence:

We can establish that God is, we cannot know what He is because, in Him, there is no what; and since our whole experience is about things that have existence, we cannot figure out what it is to be a being whose only essence is “to be” [6].

God revealed Himself to Moses at Mount Sinai as “I AM WHO AM” (Ex.3:14). This very name implicitly bracketed the question of “whatness” as regards God’s question. God is His very being regardless of what we are thinking of Him. He is always the same. “I the Lord do not change; ...” (Mal.3:6). St. Thomas Aquinas is aware of this very fact as he observes that:

...God is the being whose whole nature it is to be such an existential act. This is the reason why his most proper name is, HE IS. After saying this, any addition would be a subtraction. To say that God “is this”, or that He “is that”, would be to restrict His being to the essence of what “this” and “that” are. God is absolutely [7].

God is according to Thomas, Asiety-“He does not just exist but he is existence itself”. It is not enough to say that God is Being, rather, he is what it means to be. He is the fullness of being. Our own existence is by participation or accommodation. Implicitly, God can only be encountered and not experienced because He is not an object of experience. Man’s experience of a particular thing determines the name he gives to such. Hence, “God is unnameable and indescribable; all His names are borrowed either from His attributes or from His work” [6]. We often give God such names as “the Highest”; “the Greatest”; “the Most High”; and numerous other names. But this is just a degradation of God. To say that God is the highest implies setting a limit or paradigm for Him. Obviously, God cannot be fixed to any stereotype behaviour. He is limitless and boundless. God cannot be circumscribed because He is unquantitative by nature. God as well cannot be manipulated for: “a God we can control is not the one God, living and true, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but one we have invented to satisfy our own needs” [8]. We name God according to our own mode of comprehension and apprehension. But human knowledge is not knowledge as such but an analogical type of knowledge.

Human knowledge is basically characterized by its duplicity which in turn is a sign of imperfection. But God is simple. He is not a “*mixtum compositum*” but a “*purus actus*”—a pure act as St. Thomas would have it. Nevertheless, God though:

Unknowingly to Himself, at least to us and in this life, God can be known by man imperfectly, from the consideration of His creatures; Two things at least are known of Him in this way: First, that He is entirely unlike any one of His creatures; secondly, that He is in Himself at least what He has to be in order to be their cause [6].

The imperfectness of man's comprehension of God boiled down to Hugh of St. Victor's conviction that "...God proportioned our knowledge of Him in such a way that we could never either know what He is, or not know that He is" [9]. In agreement with this notion, Rahner affirms that God "is the incomprehensible obvious" [1].

Doubtlessly, therefore, we have nebulously peregrinated around God's question. Nevertheless, having unquestionably admitted that God is to some extent present and perceivable in the created world; does it pantheistically imply that everything is God?

God is all and God is no-thing.

The definition of the world of man evokes God's question-the source of all that exist. This is so, since there are vestiges and traces of God in all his creatures. Hence, a relationship with God is metaphysically crucial in the order of existence. In this Achilles task of God's question, Buber has this to contribute: Of course God is the "wholly other", but He is also the wholly same, the wholly present. Of course He is the "mysterium Tremendum" that appears and overthrows, but He is also the mystery of the self-evident, nearer to me than mine [10].

In God is the unconditioned exclusiveness and unconditioned inclusiveness the same. Following this trend, Heidegger concludes that God is everything and yet He is no-thing. God is such a benevolent Being that He wishes always to communicate and do communicate Himself to man.

However, all that God needs is to be. He cannot and need not be circumscribed. God cannot be manipulated, refashioned or repainted. Hence:

The word of revelation is I am that I am. That which reveals is that which is, and nothing more [10].

Notwithstanding, we do give God different names. On this act of giving various names to God Buber points out that:

...all God's names are hallowed, for in them He is not merely spoken about but spoken to [10].

Nevertheless, we have to be warned, at this juncture that nomination of God evokes the tendency to regard God as a thing. God is not a thing but God is the Being whose existence is impossible to negate. Hence, He is simply the Being that is essentially is.

CONCLUSION

In every question that has to do with God, two extremism or extreme tendencies must be always avoided. On the one hand are those who claim to be atheists. On the other hand are the highly overzealous believers or those that may be called fanatics (fundamentalists). The atheists often commit the ontological sin of denying the obvious in their bid to refute any idea that has to do with God's existence, his omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence. This deliberate deviation from the truth is a clear and blatant degradation of the human dignity and an insult to the human intellect which is truth orientated. More so, the fanatics on the other hand often "build very gigantic mansions" except what God really is, in their struggle to define God and prove his existence. These two extremism must strictly not be allowed to emerge in any treatment of God's question. We should, therefore, understand that irrespective of what we think of God, He is still what He has to be in order to be our Creator. Outside the context of God, the world will unavoidably and blankly turn to chaos and utter meaninglessness. Consequently, life in this passing existence would have been inevitably and invariably lacking in both content and meaning.

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