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Co-editors: Andy D Potts, Mike L Anderson

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A LITTLE NOTE ON TWO KINDS OF KNOWING: SCIENTIFIC AND PERSONAL
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"Although I'm not trained as a scientist I have never belittled science, and never belittled it for several reasons. One reason is that God mandates science."

Dr. Victor Shepherd is Professor of Historical Theology and Chair of Wesley Studies at Tyndale Seminary, Toronto. This article taken from his website at <http://www.victorshepherd.on.ca/Sermons/newpage14.htm#A> Little Note on Two Kinds of Knowing: Scientific and Personal; used by permission.

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* SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT *

The University of Cape Town offers a new course in Religion & Science

"When we consider what religion is for mankind, and what science is, it is no exaggeration to say that the future course of history depends on the decision of this generation as to the relations

between them." This was said by philosopher Alfred North Whitehead in 1925. The past few decades has seen an increasing realisation of the need for interdisciplinary work in understanding and relating responsibly to the world. So it is with great pleasure that the Graduate School in Humanities announces a new, weekly seminar course for the first semester next year: 'Religion and Science in an African Context.' The aim of the course is to introduce students to the burgeoning religion and science field with special emphasis on issues that have immediate relevance to African, and particularly South African, culture. A limited number of bursaries are available to cover the cost of the course.

A wide range of topics will be covered such as:

- * Creation: the value and purpose of the world
- * Quantum physics, cosmology and complexity theory
- * Evolution, life and artificial life
- * Consciousness and the mind-body relationship
- * The human person in science & theology
- * Environmental science, ecotheology and African tradition

The teaching panel includes Prof. George Ellis (Cosmology), Prof. John de Gruchy, (Religious Studies), Prof. Peter Barrett, (Physics), Prof. Richard Fuggle (Environmental and Geographical Sciences), Dr. Chirevo Kwenda (African Religion), Dr. Augustine Schutte (Philosophy), Dr. Ernst Conradie (Theology) and Dr. Mike Anderson (Evolutionary Biology).

'Religion and Science in an African Context' will form the core component of an M.Phil. degree in 'Religion, Culture and Science' that places special emphasis on African perspectives on the interface between these fields. A scholarship is available; applications for the scholarship should be made by 31st December 2001.

The course is being convened by Prof. J de Gruchy, Graduate School in Humanities. Applications or enquiries should be made to Dr. M L Anderson (Email: andersons@iname.com) or Mrs. Lyn Holness (tel. (021)650-2776).

Wisdom from the Past

GRATITUDE

C. A. Alington

"God left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave you from heaven rain and fruitful seasons, filling your hearts with food and gladness" (Acts 14:7).

St. Paul, like all great preachers, had the art of adapting his sermons to the needs of his hearers. When he was at Athens, where everyone was anxious to hear some new thing, he preached a learned sermon about the purposes of God: when he was at Corinth, that great commercial centre, where men were mainly concerned with making money, he determined to speak of nothing "save Jesus Christ, and him crucified," to remind them of the vanity of earthly things.

Our text was addressed to a very different audience, the

simple people of Lystra - people so ignorant that they took him arid Barnabas for gods-and he chooses as his subject the simplest of all religious themes, the gratitude owe to God for "rains and fruitful seasons" for "food and gladness."

There are many reasons why the simplest themes are often the best: if we are indeed children of God, the first lesson we need to learn and to remember is to be grateful for the love and care which surrounds us - "for our creation, preservation and all the blessings of this life." To be grateful for such things is a natural human instinct, but all of us are the better for being reminded to whom our gratitude is due.

Our Saxon ancestors, when they first invaded this country, brought with them the custom of sacred feasting and drinking accompanied by the sacrifice of cattle or horses, to show their conviction that life was good. Some of the early Christian missionaries were scandalized at such celebrations, and wished to abolish them altogether, but Gregory the Great was wiser: he wrote to the first Bishop of London bidding him remember that "you cannot cut off everything at once from rough natures: he who would climb to a height must ascend step by step, for he cannot jump the whole way." And so, under his guidance, the heathen celebrations were by degrees converted into Church feasts and even "Church ales."

These words of his suggest the right attitude towards Harvest Festivals: there are some who would condemn them as Pagan survivals, and (very reasonably) complain that they are attended by larger congregations than the great festivals of the Church: if and when, that is so, it shows that the congregation concerned is still in an elementary stage of religious life. But no wise man will despise the day of small things or fail to see how much good there is in a simple service of gratitude to God the maker and giver of all good things.

If I may go back again to the early history of our Church, I should like to remind you how the first missionary sent from Iona to Northumbria returned disheartened by the rude manners of the Northumbrian people, saying it was useless "to attempt to convert such people as they are." A monk among those to whom he made his report asked whether he had not perhaps been expecting too much and too soon had not the Apostle said that milk, not meat, was the food for babes? All eyes were turned on the questioner, and all said at once that he was the right man to take up the work. So it was that St. Aidan came to Lindisfarne: he found in the simple nature of the Northumbrian people a foundation on which he could build, and so began the most glorious century in the whole history of the English Church.

We are very right to give thanks for the blessings of the harvest but our service will be very imperfect if it stops there: it should lead us on to give thanks also for "all the blessings of this life," and to remember what those blessings are. We are all in danger of taking them for granted, just as we never remember to be grateful for

our health until we are in danger of losing it or (to take a simpler instance) for our ability to go to sleep until it is taken from us.

What are the chief blessings which all of us enjoy, the blessings which come to us alone of all created things? Let us put first our power of appreciating beauty. All of us at some time or other, have been struck by the beauty of a sunset, of the buttercups in a field, or of the colour of the trees in autumn or in spring. We take our appreciation for granted, but we should do well to remember that it is a pleasure which no animal shares. The next time that you see a cow grazing in a field, or your dog running by your side, you might well remember to give thanks that you have a power which is denied to them.

And beauty, of course, has many other forms equally reserved for us alone, besides the obvious beauties of nature. Music, painting, architecture, all speak, or can speak to us and give us a pleasure of our own, and the whole field of literature, from the lowest to the highest, is full of delights which, in some form or other, we can all share. Here is one of "the blessings of this life" for which we should assuredly give thanks.

And the mention of literature, or books, leads us on to consider another unique possession of our human race. We alone of created beings have the power seeking for truth: we may not use it very wisely, or very consciously, for we are not all philosophers, but every time that you discuss with your friends a question that interests you, remember that you are exercising a power which belongs to man alone. What ever your interests may be, it is from God that they come, and you should not fail to give thanks for a power which means so much to the happiness of your life.

Again, from a somewhat higher point of view, remember that you alone have the capacity to understand something of the ways in which God works. Every discovery of science is a discovery of His methods, just as every appreciation of beauty means that we are seeing things as He sees them. When the world was made, He saw that it was good, and we in some degree can see with His eyes.

And that is still more true when we consider the meaning of our life. We were made, as we believe, in the image of God, and the clearest proof of that lies in the power which we all possess to an astonishing degree of knowing the difference between right and wrong. However ignorant or careless we may be, there is none of us who can admire a coward or a liar or applaud a cruel action. We are still, as we know to our cost, terribly selfish, and it might have been thought that this would give us some prejudice in favour of selfishness. But the exact opposite is the case: we hate selfishness in others: we even hate it in ourselves, however little we may try to conquer it. What clearer proof could there be that, whether or not we have an animal ancestry, we are also in touch with what is divine? And is not that a reason for thanksgiving?

God the New Testament tells us, is love, and it is

hardly too much to say that we alone of created beings know the real meaning of the word: I do not forget the devotion of the dog to his master (though he may have learnt it from his long association with human beings), or the self-sacrifice which other animals show but love. in anything like its proper sense, is the possession of the human race alone. When we remember how much we owe to the love of our parents and our friends and how any love which we may have been able to show lifts our little lives into something nobler and higher than their ordinary level, we shall not fail to give thanks for this greatest of all our possessions.

And so we come to the later words of the General Thanksgiving where we give thanks "above all, for the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ, for the means of grace and for the hope of glory." That is the subject for another sermon, or rather for many sermons which will tell the story of God's love to man, shown in the coming of His Son into the world: of what that Son did or suffered for our sakes: of His triumph over death, and for the glorious hope which He extends to His followers not only the "blessed hope of everlasting life" hereafter but the opportunity and the power of living here on earth a life which will go on with greater knowledge and with fuller meaning after death.

All these things as I say are subjects for later sermons: to-day we have tried to see how the acts of thanksgiving for the blessings of harvest leads onto other things. The same God who gave us "rain from heaven and fruitful seasons" has greater gifts to give: some of them He gave in the mere act of creation: others He will give to those who ask: for He is our Father and it we being evil, know how to give good gifts to our children, our heavenly Father will give, to those who love and follow Him, "good things which pass our understanding."

Dr C.A Alington, Dean of Durham, is a former headmaster of Eton. This is taken from "Festival Sermons," James Clarke & Co., LTD, Carter Lane, UK., pp. 127-132.

HUMOUR FROM THE WEB

Conversations between Tech Support and their customers

from the [avni]

Funny-Files list.

Here are some more conversations which had actually happened between help desk people and their customers.

Tech Support: "Is your computer on a separate telephone line?"

Customer: "No." (clicks the button to log on to our service)

Tech Support: "Well then we can't--"

Customer: "It says 'no dial tone'."

Tech Support: "That's because you're on the line with me right now.
You need to--"
Customer: "No, that's not it. It does this all the time. I just have to try a few times, and it will let me through."
Tech Support: "No, ma'am. It's not even trying to dial right now because you're on the phone with me."
Customer: "It must be busy. I'll try again later."
-+=-
Customer: "I'm having trouble installing Microsoft Word."
Tech Support: "Tell me what you've done."
Customer: "I typed 'A:SETUP'.
Tech Support: "Ma'am, remove the disk and tell me what it says."
Customer: "It says '[PC manufacturer] Restore and Recovery disk'.
Tech Support: "Insert the MS Word setup disk."
Customer: "What?"
Tech Support: "Did you buy MS word?"
Customer "No."
-+=-
Customer: "Do I need a computer to use your software?"
-+=-
Tech Support: "Ok, in the bottom left hand side of the screen, can you see the 'OK' button displayed?"
Customer: "Wow. How can you see my screen from there?"
Tech Support: "Years of training..."
-+=-
Tech Support: "What type of computer do you have?"
Customer: "A white one."
-+=-
Customer: "I'm going to be using Windows NT. Should I get the Server or Workstation version?"
Tech Support: "Well, are you using it as a workstation or as a server?"
Customer: "A server. So, which one do I get?"
Tech Support: "The server version perhaps?"
Customer: "Which one is that?"
Tech Support: "Windows NT Server."
Customer: "Ok, thanks."
-+=-
Tech Support: "Type 'A:' at the prompt."
Customer: "How do you spell that?"
-+=-
Customer: "I can't log in to my account."
Tech Support: "Ok, let's look at your configuration."
Customer: "Ok... but I know that my User ID is case sensitive."
Tech Support: "Yes it is. Ok, what does it say in the 'User

ID'
field?"
Customer: "'Case Sensitive'."
-+=-
Tech Support: "What's on your screen right now?"
Customer: "A stuffed animal that my boyfriend got me at
the
grocery
store."
-+=-
Tech Support: "What operating system are you running?"
Customer: "Pentium."
-+=-
Tech Support: "What version of the Mac OS are you
using?"
Customer: "Word 6.0."
-+=-
Customer: "How do I print my voicemail?"
-+=-
Customer: "I don't need any of that SQL stuff -- I just
want a
database!"
-+=-
Tech Support: "What does the screen say now?"
Customer: "It says, 'Hit ENTER when ready'."
Tech Support: "Well?"
Customer: "How do I know when it's ready?"
-+=-
Customer: "I have a long distance modem."
-+=-
Customer: "I don't have a space bar."
-+=-
Customer: "Do I have to hit 'F' and '8' at the same
time?"

Technical Support have an inhouse term for problems
caused
by the users themselves- PEBKAC which stands for
"Problem
Exists Between Keyboard And Chair [eds.]

NEWS BRIEFS (From the Internet)

* When is a planet a planet?

The largest moon of Jupiter, Ganymede, at a diameter of
5000 kilometers is the largest moon in the solar system.
It is even larger than the planet mercury. Ganymede orbits
Jupiter at 1 million kilometers and has a relatively low
density which suggests that it is made up of half rock
and half ice. Data from the Voyager and Galileo probes
suggest that it's lowlands were formed by flooding by a water-
ice mixture (Nature 1 Mar 01 410:57).

* New hominid fossil discovered supports complexity of
human evolutionary tree

Dated at 3.5 million years, Kenyanthropus platyops, has
been placed in the hominini tribe. It has a unique

combination of characteristics that will make it difficult to place in the human evolutionary tree. It is similar to *Australopithecus africanus* and the chimpanzee in having a small earhole, but has thickly enameled molars like *A. anamensis*. The evidence suggests that hominin evolution occurred through a series of adaptive radiations in which many new species evolve and diversify (Nature 22 Mar 01 410:433, Nature 22 Mar 01 410:419).

* How powerful is the placebo?

The placebo effect denotes a clinically significant response to the administration of a therapeutically inert substance. One classic study found that more than 7 out of 10 patients reported postoperative pain relief after having been injected with saline. A new study finds that placebos have limited effectiveness under specific conditions, namely with continuous subjective outcomes and the treatment of pain. The popular press has widely misreported that the study showed that placebos have no effect (New England Journal of Medicine 24 May 01 344:1594).

* Permafrost in the tropics?

According to the so-called "snowball Earth" scenario, the entire globe was covered by ice in the late Proterozoic (1 billion to 700 million years ago). A new model gaining ground says that there was permafrost in the tropics, but the oceans did not freeze over. Critical to the model is the release of methane into shallow seas which could be gleaned from radioisotope signatures. The adverse conditions may have played a role in stimulating the rise of multicellular life (Science 2001 292:2241, Nature 2000 405:425).

* The secret language of bacteria

Bacteria can "talk" to each other using a chemical "vocabulary." They release, detect and respond to accumulation of specific molecules called autoinducers. This allows bacteria to gauge population density and control gene expression accordingly. The process is called "quorum sensing" (Genes & Development 2001 15:1468).

* Where does the solar system end?

Pluto and its moon Charon are Kuiper belt objects - icy bodies forming an ancient belt at the edge of the solar system. Astronomers have now discovered a large body called KBO(20000) Varuna, at a diameter of 900 kilometers, that is almost the size of Charon. The new object tests the rationale for regarding Pluto as a genuine planet (Nature 2001 411:446).

* The genius myth

How is it possible for a man to marry 20 women without being a polygamist, without divorcing any and with all being still alive? Answer: He is a minister. If you got the answer you probably had an "aha" experience where the solution inexplicably pops into your mind. One theory

says the geniuses had similar reactions. Kekule discovers the benzene ring structure by dreaming of a snake biting its tail. Darwin suddenly discovers evolution by natural selection while visiting the Galapagos islands. Newton discovers universal gravitation from the fall of an apple. There is only one problem with these accounts of the genesis of genius. They are all false (Shermer, M. The Borderlands of Science: Where Sense Meets Nonsense Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK, 2001, p.262)

* Is disease an accident?

Traditional emphases on inter-specific competition in evolutionary theory suggests that microbes evolve to maximal virulence possible without incapacitating the host. This account works for some pathogens, but most infectious agents such as commensal bacteria do not produce symptoms. Symptom-producing infection is rare, often accidental and probably a dead-end for the microbe (Science 6 Apr 01 292:59).

* Extreme living

Extremophiles are organisms that live at the relative extreme of some parameter such as temperature, pressure or acidity. The most hyperthermophilic organism is an archaean prokaryote called *Pyrolobus fumarii* that grows at temperatures up to 113 degrees celsius. Brine Shrimp can withstand extreme dehydration by shutting down all metabolic activity. Water Bears can survive vacuum dessication. The green alga, *Dunaliella salina*, can live for periods in saturated sodium chloride (Nature 22 Feb 01 409:1092).

* A remarkable SOS signal by plants

What can plants do about caterpillars feeding on them? They can't run away. How about alerting predators of the caterpillars? This is exactly what they do using volatile chemicals. This curious ecological relationship between plant, herbivore and predator is called a "trophic triangle." Plants can reduce the herbivore population by as much as 90% by this means (Science 16 Mar 01 291:2141)

* Terrestrial whales discovered

The early origin of whales has been great mystery. Much of the mystery has been resolved with the discovery of two meat-eating, terrestrial whales in Pakistan. They had four legs, were no bigger than a wolf, lived 50 million years ago and were about as amphibious as a Tapir. Called *Pakicetus* and *Ichthyolestes* they have effectively ousted the traditional mesonychids as candidates for the ancestor of whales. Characteristic bones in the their ear cavities identify them conclusively as whales, while evidence from their ankle-bone suggests affinities to even-toed ungulates (Nature 2001 413:277-281, Science 2001 293: 2239-2242).

Spot the Fallacy

THE FALLACY OF EQUIVOCATION OR HOW NORMAL IS NORMAL?

Mike L Anderson

Some dogs are hairy
My dog is hairy
Therefore my dog is some dog!

So goes the classic example of the fallacy of equivocation. "Some dog" is used here in two very different senses.

One term that particularly lends itself to equivocation is "normal." Linda Lindsey says that rape "is a crime perpetrated by a wide spectrum of men" and that it is a "myth" that most rapists are sexually abnormal (1). "Uncritical thinkers," says a commentator "can be led to believe that men must rape women in order to "adhere" to the "masculinity ethic""(2). Indeed, there are those who have argued on this sort of basis that rape is normal (3) or ethically unproblematic (4). There is even a How to rape guide available on the Web!(5) But yes, it is uncritical. Even if Lindsey premise is sound (and there are serious questions about this) it is a great leap to make rape thereby normative. It is committing the fallacy of equivocation by gliding surreptitiously from the statistical meaning of normal to the ethical.

To see this consider the sinking of the Estonia in the Baltic sea in 1996. The majority of survivors were men (6) and according to one account, when questioned why they had not try to save women and children, the response was "Hey, it's survival of the fittest"(7). Apparently the statistically normal behaviour of these men was to save themselves over women. It could be argued that it is also biologically normal. Evolution has moulded self-preservation into an extremely powerful instinct - so much so that the rare exceptions make for outlandishly tragic news. Some are even offering post-humous "Darwin Awards" that salute those who "accidentally remove themselves from the human gene pool in stupid ways"(8).

But was the behaviour of the men on the Estonia morally normal? The men who died on the Titanic would beg to differ. Here only 20% of the men that were on board survived compared to 70% of the women and children. These gave up their lives to save others.

Or consider Jesus. He was well aware of the events that were working against Him in Jerusalem (9). Instead of doing the self-preservation thing and fleeing to Egypt, he "resolutely set out for Jerusalem" and his impending death (10). If His behaviour is humanly unconventional, it was divinely most peculiar - the Eternal, Self-existent one giving up His life. Yet, He was the the most morally normal person of all time and doing it all to save the morally abnormal.

Notes

1. Lindsey, L. (1997) Gender Roles: A Sociological Perspective. Prentice-Hall, New Jersey, USA, p. 239.
2. <http://www.popecenter.org/clarion/2000/mar-apr/wright.html>
3. <http://www.fearus.org/rape.html>
4. <http://www.prospect.org/print/V9/36/purdy-j.html>
5. Cited in <http://www.fearus.org/rape.html>
6. <http://www.balticsww.com/wkcrier/msestonia.htm>
7. <http://www.biblical-counsel.org/ga-01.htm> However, I have not found any independent confirmation of this quotation and the greater survival of young men may be more related to the stormy conditions of the tragedy than self-interest. See (6).
8. <http://www.darwinawards.com/>
9. John 12:23-33.
10. Luke 9:51 NIV.

Feature article

A LITTLE NOTE ON TWO KINDS OF KNOWING: SCIENTIFIC AND PERSONAL

By Victor Shepherd

I: -- Although I'm not trained as a scientist I have never belittled science, and never belittled it for several reasons. One reason is that God mandates science. God commands us to subdue the earth, to have dominion over every creature (every creature, that is, except our fellow-humans.) Another reason I don't belittle science is that I relish intellectual enquiry. Moreover, intellectual enquiry is one aspect of loving God with our minds. Another reason is that I, along with everyone else, have profited immensely from science. When I was still a teenager my grandfather used to say to me, "Victor, never let people tell you about 'the good old days.' They weren't good." We all know what he meant. Can you imagine what it would be like not to be able to have an inflamed appendix removed or a broken leg set? water not rendered fit for drinking? communication by means of smoke signals? helplessness in the face of childhood disease? Yes, I'm aware that in a fallen world there is no scientific development that can't be bent to the service of evil. The kitchen knife (unquestionably a product of technology) can be used murderously as readily as atomic power. But the fact

that evil can co-opt any scientific development doesn't of itself invalidate the legitimacy and glory of scientific investigation.

At the same time, we must recognize that while scientific investigation admits us to one aspect of the creation, it doesn't admit us to all aspects; while it blesses us as only it can, it isn't the only blessing wherewith we are blessed; while scientific investigation yields knowledge, the knowledge it yields isn't the only kind of knowing. Furthermore, not only is scientific knowing not the only kind of knowing within the creation, the kind of knowing it is has nothing to do with knowing him who transcends the creation and is himself most profoundly what the non-human creation isn't: person.

Today we are going to probe both kinds of knowing, the kind that is peculiar to science and the kind that is peculiar to persons; and we are going to probe pre-eminently the knowing that is peculiar to the Person, the living God himself.

II(i): -- Let's start with scientific knowing. Knowing here arises as a subject investigates an object; the subject apprehends a thing; someone who is higher in the order of being investigates something that is lower in the order of being. Think of the scientific research into the properties and uses of the peanut. I assume that no one here today questions the assertion that human beings are higher in the order of being than peanuts.

(ii) Scientific knowing is acquired for the sake of using the object, controlling the object, manipulating the object; ultimately, mastering the object. Scientific investigation of the peanut is undertaken in order to learn all the properties of the peanut and thereby use the peanut as widely as possible: peanut butter, cooking oil, face-cream, sun-tan lotion, animal-food, and so on.

(iii) In sum, the knowing peculiar to science presupposes objectivity, detachment; the scientific investigator stands over against the object, contemplates it from a distance, and manipulates it for the sake of using it.

II(i): -- The knowing that is peculiar to persons is very different. In the first place, in knowing another person we don't keep that person at a distance; we don't maintain a resolute detachment, objectivity. Instead, knowledge of another person arises only through intimacy with that person.

(ii) Personal knowing is never gained for the sake of using another person. To use another person is first to "thingify" that person, reduce her to an object, and therefore not to know her as person at all. To use another human being is to manipulate, and we all recognize this as evil. As for mastering another human being; this amounts to a form of enslavement and is to be repudiated with horror.

(iii) What's most important, to know a person isn't to investigate that person and acquire information about her. Investigating someone and acquiring information about her "thingifies" her, rendering her a non-person; most profoundly, to know a person is to be changed oneself by that person.

In 1923 the German Jewish thinker, Martin Buber, published his small book, *I and Thou*. (A book, I might add, that is surprisingly difficult, despite its easy-sounding title.) In his book Buber made the point that what we know of a person is the difference that person has made to our life. To know my wife isn't to acquire information about her (she's five feet tall, speaks French, and plays the piano); to know my wife is to have been altered through meeting her. If Maureen and I have lived together for 28 years and haven't affected each other so as to make the profoundest difference within each other, then we simply don't know each other, regardless of how much detailed information we have acquired about each other. In sum, to know a person is to be profoundly altered by that person. What I know of a person is the difference that person has made to me in the course of our meeting each other.

Now don't go home complaining that what I've just said can be understood only by those with philosophical training. Philosophers maintain that Buber was a second-rate philosopher. He was a second-rate philosopher; he was also, however, a first-rate biblical thinker. Although Buber gained something of a reputation as philosopher, he was a far better biblical thinker than he ever was a philosopher. Buber grasped the logic of scripture as few others have. In other words, what Buber put forward he didn't invent: it stands writ large on every page of scripture. If it's writ large everywhere in scripture, why do we have such difficulty grasping it? We find it difficult just because we have never been schooled in the logic of scripture. Ever since the 18th century Enlightenment the western world has assumed that scientific knowing is the only kind of knowing there is. But it isn't the only kind; and while it's unquestionably an important kind, it's not the most important kind. Knowing persons is far more important than knowing things, and knowing, the Person, God, is most important of all.

Remember, to know an object scientifically is to investigate that object and acquire information about it. To know a person, however, is to be affected by that person, altered profoundly by that person, made different forever.

When scripture speaks of "knowing God's anger", it doesn't mean that we have information as to what renders God livid. To know God's anger, rather, is to have intimate experience of God's anger and to have been profoundly affected by God's anger, changed, made forever different.

IV(i): -- Needless to say, it's difficult for people like us who are far more exposed to scientific knowing than we are to personal knowing to grasp this point. How

difficult it is is reflected again and again in our everyday conversation. For instance:

- Do you know Jane Smith?

- Yes, I know Jane; I know her well; I know what makes her "tick."

- You do? Tell me what makes her "tick."

- She listens to Beethoven by the hour. Beethoven does something for her. But she can't stand Mahler. Mahler leaves her depressed. Also, she's a vegetarian; she won't eat meat because she thinks that eating meat is tantamount to cannibalism. She likes expensive clothes and wears them well. That's understandable, however, since she's been divorced twice and is looking for a man.

- I see. You know Jane Smith really well, don't you. No! A thousand times no! The speaker doesn't know Jane Smith well; in fact the speaker doesn't know Jane Smith at all. The speaker has 1001 bits of information about Jane Smith. The speaker assumes that as more and more information about Jane Smith is acquired, Jane Smith herself is better and better known. But the person of Jane Smith isn't known in this way. In fact, so far from being known, Jane Smith hasn't even been met. The only person who knows Jane Smith is the person whose encounter with her has left that person different himself.

Let's suppose that one day such a fellow does meet her, even falls in love with her. Little by little he comes to see how she has changed his life. He knows her now, profoundly knows her. One day a friend says, "What kind of clothes does Jane wear?" "Clothes?", the fellow says, "clothes? I've never noticed. But you can't imagine what she's done for me!"

(ii) A minute ago I said that we have enormous difficulty grasping what it is to know a person. We have similar difficulty grasping how we come to know a person. Everyone knows how we come to gain scientific knowledge of an object: we act on the object, dominate it, master it. To come to know persons, however, is entirely different: we come to know a person by exposing ourselves to her, by exposing ourselves to her defencelessly. Domination of an object yields scientific knowledge of that object. Vulnerability before a person, on the other hand, yields personal knowledge of that person. Vulnerability, defencelessness, before a person finds that person altering us; insofar as we are altered in the course of our encounter with her, we know her.

This is precisely the opposite of what we say in everyday speech. We are always saying, "I can't get to know Tom Jones. He's so 'closed.' He never opens up. He never bares his heart. I can't get to know him." If Tom Jones were an object of scientific investigation it would be true to say we couldn't get to know him, so "closed" is he. But if Tom Jones is a person, the reason we can't get to know him isn't that he is closed to us; we can't get to know him, rather, because we are closed to him.

Everyone here today will agree that God knows us. In

fact God knows us better than anyone else knows us. But why does God know us? How? Does God know us better than we know him in that he's a better scientific investigator of us than we are of him? No. God knows us person-to-person; which is to say, God can know us only by being defenceless himself before us. And defenceless he is, for who is more defenceless, more vulnerable, than someone crucified?

But haven't I said that we know another person only to the extent that that person has profoundly altered us? If God knows us, then we must have affected him. Wherein have we altered God? Can we affect him in this way? Yes we can. At the very least we have broken his heart. Sinners that we are -- defiant, disobedient, rebellious, ungrateful -- we have broken his heart. Actually, we have affected him, made the profoundest difference to him, in many respects, so very intimately does he know us. We have provoked his anger and mobilized his judgement. Yet we have affected him even more; most profoundly, we have affected him so thoroughly as to have him delay the day of condemnation and extend the day of grace. According to the prophet Hosea God had said of us, in the face of our defiance and disobedience, "Lo-ammi, Not my people", "Lo-ruchamah, Not pitied." Then in anguished heartbreak God had said, "How can I give you up...! How can I hand you over...! My heart recoils within me, my compassion grows warm and tender." Finally God was heard to say once more, "Ammi, My people; Ruchamah, Pitied." God knows us so very thoroughly not because he's a practised investigator; God knows us just because he's defenceless before us. We affect him most profoundly. What he knows of us is precisely the alteration we have effected in him.

Then what about us? Do we know him? How well do we know him? We know God only to the extent that he has made the profoundest difference to us. Only as we meet him defencelessly; only as we meet him without evasions, without excuses, without false faces, without calculation or self-deception; only in this way do we come to know God. We come to know him only as we approach him like the hymnwriter, crying, "Nothing in my hand I bring; nothing!"

V: -- In the time that remains to us this morning I want to illustrate all that I have said so far with a few instances of personal knowing highlighted in scripture.

(i) Jesus exclaims, according to the testimony of the apostle John, "If you continue in my word...you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." (John 8:32) When Jesus speaks of "continuing in his word" he means "abiding in him", since he himself is the word incarnate. And when Jesus speaks of "knowing the truth", knowing reality, he is speaking of an intimate acquaintance with the truth as we expose ourselves defencelessly to the truth. And when he says that such radical, undisguised exposure to the truth will make us free, he means that we are going to be released from everything that "hooks" us now and inhibits us from

being the son or daughter of God we are meant to be. To know our Lord who is truth is to be altered at the hands of truth; and this is to be freed in such a way that he and he alone tells us who we are; no development within us, no development without us, no institution or ideology or image or "ism" can tell us who we are or make us who we are. He alone does this, and to have him alone do this is to be freed.

(ii) The apostle Paul speaks of "knowing Christ and the power of his resurrection." (Phil. 3:10) The resurrection of Christ is the vindication of him, his gospel, his way, his mission, his promise. To know Christ and the power of his resurrection is to be intimately acquainted with our Lord himself and therein experience for ourselves the profoundest vindication of him and his gospel and his way and his mission and his promise. To know Jesus Christ and the power of his resurrection is to be affected by him in such manner as to have all the assurance we shall ever need that we belong to him because he first appointed himself to belong to us, all the assurance we shall ever need that his grip on us will ever be stronger than our grip on him, assurance that while he never lets us off he will also never let us go.

(iii) Finally, the apostle Paul says that one day we are going to know God even as we are fully known by God now. (1 Cor. 13:12) At present God knows us fully; we however, know him only partially. To be sure, our knowledge of him is real; our knowledge of him is profound; our knowledge of him is immense blessing. Nevertheless, our knowledge of him remains only partial. One day, however, we shall be as transparent before him as he has been transparent before us. One day we shall finally strip ourselves of all our disguises before him as thoroughly as he has already stripped himself before us in the Nazarene who was crucified naked. One day we are going to know God as thoroughly as he now knows us. The day is coming! Don't you long for it with an ache that will be relieved only on the great day itself?

On the day that we know God as thoroughly as he now knows us we are going to be changed; transformed, in fact, so as to need no further transformation. What we know of a person, whether human or divine, is precisely what happens to us when we meet him as a person. It is the mission of the church to exalt such knowledge; and not only exalt, but exemplify it. For the church of Jesus Christ consists of those who know now, albeit partially, and want only to know utterly.

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Little Note on Two Kinds of Knowing: Scientific and
Personal