CHAPTER FIVE

THE THEOLOGICAL STARTING POINT:
AN INFINITELY FREE RELATIONAL GOD

Chapter four was basically philosophical in its focus, and to a lesser degree it was also theological. Chapter five is basically theological in its focus, and to a lesser degree it is also philosophical. Chapter four began with a centralizing point from the writings of Scotus: “Unless being implies one univocal intention, theology would simply perish.” This chapter also begins with a centralizing point taken from the *Quodlibetales Questiones* of Scotus.

Et ratio est, quia omnis talis intellectio, scilicet per se et propria et immediata requirit ipsum objectum sub propria ratione objecti praesens, et hoc vel in propria existentia, puta si est intuitiva vel in aliquo perfecto repreaentante ipsum sub propria et per se ratione cognoscibilis, si fuerit abstractiva; Deus autem sub propria ratione divinitatis non est praesens alicui intellectui creato, nisi mere voluntarie.¹

I have selected this passage because in it there are three issues of major importance that affect every theology of God. Not only medieval scholars such as Scotus but also contemporary theologians struggle with these three issues, namely:

1. What constitutes a proper understanding of God?
2. Does the human mind have any natural capacity to arrive at some knowledge of God’s existence and God’s nature?
3. How can a human mind and will understand the infinite freedom of God?

The first issue focuses on a proper understanding of God. In the citation above, Scotus stresses this issue through such phrases as *sub propria ratione, in propria existentia*, and *per se et propria ratio*. One can label

---

this issue as the ontological issue since it is focused on a real and objective representation of God’s being or nature.

The second issue focuses on our human intellectual ability to know something about God. We can call this the epistemological issue. In the citation above, Scotus stresses the epistemological factors when he mentions an intuitive intellection of God with its connotation of angelic or intuitive intellection and an abstractive intellection of God with its connotation of human intellection.

The third issue centers on God’s infinite will. In his citation, Scotus mentions a single word, voluntarie, but this single word states something highly significant for any theology of God. Scotus states that God “is not present to any created intellect other than voluntarily.” This means that God must first voluntarily manifest God’s own self to intellectual creatures, before the created intellect has even a possibility of knowing anything at all about God’s existence and essence.

Philosophically, Scotus says: “unless being implies one univocal intention, theology would simply perish.” Theologically, he says: unless we know something about God’s existence and nature, which happens only because God first and voluntarily reveals God’s own self, theology would be meaningless. Centuries later, Karl Barth expressed the same position:

> Only because there is a *veiling of God can there be an unveiling*, and only because there is a *veiling and unveiling of God can there be a self-impartation of God* [to creation]² (Italics added).

These three issues provide the framework for this chapter.

*The first issue in the scotistic text is the God issue*

When medieval Christian scholars such as Scotus wrote about God, what did they understand by the term God? Alexander of Hales, Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas, Bonaventure, and Scotus were all men of Christian faith. All of them believed in God, and as Christian believers they entered into their academic careers. In the passage above, Scotus indicates what his belief in God entails, namely, a correct appreciation of who and what God truly is. As a Christian medieval person, Scotus

---

² Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I/I, 417.