

**The Pohle-Preuss
Manual of
DOGMATIC THEOLOGY**

**BOOK ONE
VOLUME ONE**



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Volume 1 - God: His Knowability, Essence, and Attributes
Volume 2 - The Divine Trinity
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Volume 4 - Christology
Volume 5 - Soteriology
Volume 6 - Mariology
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GOD:

HIS KNOWABILITY, ESSENCE, AND ATTRIBUTES

A DOGMATIC TREATISE

**PREFACED BY A BRIEF GENERAL INTRODUCTION
TO THE STUDY OF DOGMATIC THEOLOGY**

BY

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GOD

HIS KNOWABILITY, ESSENCE, AND ATTRIBUTES

PREFATORY REMARKS

Here below man can know God only by analogy; hence we are constrained to apply to Him the three scientific questions: *An sit*, *Quid sit*, and *Qualis sit*, that is to say: Does He exist? What is His Essence? and What are His qualities or attributes? Consequently in theology, as in philosophy, the existence, essence, and attributes of God must form the three chief heads of investigation. The theological treatment differs from the philosophical in that it considers the subject in the light of supernatural Revelation, which builds upon and at the same time confirms, supplements, and deepens the conclusions of unaided human reason. Since the theological question regarding the existence of God resolves itself into the query: Can we know God?—the treatise *De Deo Uno* naturally falls into three parts: (1) The knowability of God; (2) His essence; and (3) His divine properties or attributes.

PART I
THE KNOWABILITY OF GOD

CHAPTER I

HUMAN REASON CAN KNOW GOD

Human reason is able to know God by a contemplation of His creatures, and to deduce His existence from certain facts of the supernatural order.

Our primary and proper medium of cognition is the created universe, *i. e.*, the material and the spiritual world.

In defining both the created universe and the supernatural order as sources of our knowledge of God, the Church bars Traditionalism and at the same time Atheism, though the latter no doubt constitutes a splendid refutation of the theory that the idea of God is innate.

SECTION I

MAN CAN GAIN A KNOWLEDGE OF GOD FROM THE PHYSICAL UNIVERSE

ARTICLE I

THE POSITIVE TEACHING OF REVELATION

In entering upon this division of our treatise, we assume that the reader has a sufficient acquaintance with the philosophic proofs for the existence of God, as furnished by theodicy and apologetics.¹ As against the attempt of atheists and traditionalists to deny the force and stringency of these proofs, Catholic theology staunchly upholds the ability of unaided human reason to know God. Witness this definition of the Vatican Council:² "*Si quis dixerit, Deum unum et verum, creatorem et Dominum nostrum, per ea quae facta sunt, naturali rationis humanae lumine certo cognosci non posse, anathema sit*—If any one shall say that the one true God, our Creator and Lord, cannot be certainly known by

¹ Cfr. Hontheim, S. J., *Theodicea s. Theol. Naturalis*, Friburgi 1893; Fr. Aveling, *The God of Philosophy*, London 1906; C. Gutberlet, *Theodicee*, 2nd ed., Münster

1890; B. Boedder, S. J., *Natural Theology*, 2nd ed., London 1899; J. T. Driscoll, *Christian Philosophy: God*, New York 1904.

² *Sess. III, de Revel., can. i.*

the natural light of human reason through created things; let him be anathema." Let us see how this dogma can be proved from Holy Scripture and Tradition.

I. THE ARGUMENT FROM SACRED SCRIPTURE.

—a) Indirectly the possibility of knowing God by means of His creatures can be shown from Rom. II, 14 sqq.: "*Cum enim gentes, quae legem non habent,³ naturaliter ea quae legis sunt faciunt,⁴ eiusmodi legem non habentes ipsi sibi sunt lex: qui ostendunt opus legis,⁵ scriptum in cordibus suis, testimonium reddente illis conscientia ipsorum et inter se invicem cogitationibus,⁶ accusantibus aut etiam defendentibus, in die cum iudicabit Deus occulta hominum secundum Evangelium meum, per Iesum Christum*—For when the Gentiles, who have not the law, do by nature those things that are of the law; these having not the law are a law to themselves: who shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness to them, and their thoughts among themselves accusing, or also defending one another, in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel."

The "law" (*lex, νόμος*) of which St. Paul here speaks, is identical in content with the moral law of na-

³ ἔθνη τὰ μὴ νόμον ἔχοντα.

⁴ φύσει τὰ τοῦ νόμου ποιῶσιν.

⁵ ἔργον νόμου.

⁶ τῶν λογισμῶν.

ture;⁷ the same which constituted the formal subject-matter of supernatural Revelation in the Decalogue. Hence, considering the mode of Revelation, there is a well-defined distinction, not to say opposition, between the moral law as perceived by unaided human reason, and the revealed Decalogue. Whence it follows, against the teaching of Estius, that "*gentes*," in the above-quoted passage of St. Paul, must refer to the heathen, in the strict sense of the word, not to Christian converts from Paganism. For, one who has the material content of the Decalogue "written in his heart," so that, without having any knowledge of the positive Mosaic legislation, he is "a law unto himself," being able, consequently, to comply "naturally" with the demands of the Decalogue, and having to look forward on Judgment Day to a trial conducted merely on the basis of his own conscience,—such a one, I say, is outside the sphere of supernatural Revelation.⁸

From this passage of St. Paul's letter to the Romans we argue as follows: There can be no knowledge of the natural moral law derived from unaided human reason, unless parallel with it, and derived from the same source, there runs a natural knowledge of God as the supreme law-giver revealing Himself in the conscience of man. Now, St. Paul expressly teaches that the Gentiles were able to observe the natural law "*naturaliter*"—"by nature"—*i. e.*, without the

⁷ Cfr. Rom. II, 21 sqq.

⁸ Cfr. the commentaries of Bisp- ing and Aloys Schäfer on St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans. On the ex-

egetical difficulties raised by St. Augustine and Estius, see Franzelin, *De Deo Uno*, thes. 4.