

# Knowing God Liturgically

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**Abstract:** In this essay I develop the thesis that one way in which a person can come to know God is by learning to participate in Christian liturgical enactments. After analyzing some ordinary examples of practical knowledge yielding knowledge of things or substances, I turn to the knowledge of God yielded by the acquisition of practical liturgical knowledge. Pervasive in Christian liturgical enactments is address to God. So, while acknowledging that one can come to know God liturgically by listening to the reading of Scripture and to the sermon, I focus on coming to know God by learning to address God in certain ways. I argue that it is especially by what one takes for granted when addressing God, and by the addressee-identification terms that one learns to employ, that one comes to know God by learning the Christian practice of addressing God.

There are several ways of coming to know God: by reading Holy Scripture, by experience of various sorts, by reasoning, by testimony. The thesis that I will articulate and defend in this essay is that learning to participate in the social practice of engaging God liturgically, and then doing so, is also a way of coming to know God and of sustaining that knowledge.

The sort of liturgical participation that I will focus on is what I shall call *non-dissenting* participation. A person's participation in some liturgical enactment is *dissenting* participation if he performs all of the prescribed verbal, gestural, and auditory actions but does so with the intention, with respect to at least some of those actions, that he not thereby perform the acts of worship that are prescribed to be performed thereby. For example, he says the words "Thanks be to God," but he does so with the intention that he not thereby thank God. If one's participation is not dissenting, then it is, of course, non-dissenting.

Dissenting participation comes in degrees, depending on how many of the prescribed acts of worship the person dissents from. What I have to say about coming to know God liturgically applies not only to non-dissenting participants but also to dissenting participants at those points where they do not dissent. Our discussion will flow more easily, however, if I focus my attention exclusively on those who do not dissent at all, rather than each time introducing the explanations necessary for showing how what I say applies to dissenting participants at those points where they do not dissent.

Coming to know God liturgically is a way of coming to know God that has received little attention in the philosophical and theological literature.<sup>1</sup> I'm not sure why that is. Perhaps writers have assumed that participating in liturgical enactments is not a way of coming to know God but is, rather, a way of expressing and putting into practice knowledge of God already acquired in some other way. What will emerge from our discussion is that, for many people, participating in liturgical enactments is the way they first come to know God. Whether it is structurally parasitic on other ways of coming to know God, resembling, in that way, coming to know God by testimony, is a question that I will not be addressing.

## Types of Knowledge

Let me begin by providing an epistemological context for our discussion of the topic. The philosophical discipline of epistemology is commonly described as "theory of knowledge." The discipline, as it has developed, deals with much more than knowledge. What is the case, however, is that theory of knowledge has been, and remains, at the center of the discipline.

The sort of knowledge on which philosophers in the modern analytic tradition have focused most of their attention is *propositional* knowledge. Propositional knowledge comes in two forms: knowledge *that so-and-so*, usually called *de dicto* knowledge, and knowledge *about* something, *that it is so-and-so*, usually called *de re* knowledge. An example of the former is my knowledge that my home city of Grand Rapids is located in the state of Michigan. An example of the latter is my knowledge, about Grand Rapids, that it is located in the state of Michigan. To see that these are indeed two distinct kinds of knowledge, suppose that a visitor to Grand Rapids knows, about the city in which he finds himself, that it is located in the state of Michigan, but does not know that that city is Grand Rapids; he has never even heard of Grand Rapids. Then, though he knows, *about* the city in which he finds himself, namely Grand Rapids, that it is in the state of Michigan, he does not know *that* Grand Rapids is in the state of Michigan.

Though analytic philosophers have devoted the lion's share of their attention to propositional knowledge, they have occasionally identified two other forms of knowledge. Of these, the one more often identified and discussed consists of knowing how to do something: for example, knowing how to start one's car, or knowing how to unlock the front door. Call this form of knowledge, *practical* knowledge. Given that philosophers have devoted most of their attention to propositional knowledge, it's no surprise that, when discussing practical knowledge, they have often devoted a good deal of attention to the question whether practical knowledge is just a species of propositional knowledge.<sup>2</sup>

The other form of knowledge that has occasionally been identified and discussed consists of knowing some person, thing, or substance; for example, my knowing my next-

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<sup>1</sup> Terence Cuneo addresses the topic in his essay "Ritual Knowledge," included in his collection, *Ritualized Faith* (2016). One theologian who has addressed the topic is Sarah Coakley; see her essay, "Beyond 'Belief': Liturgy and the Cognitive Apprehension of God," in (Greggs, Muers, and Zahl 2013, 130-45). Coakley's approach to the topic, though quite different from mine, is compatible.

<sup>2</sup> For an example of the attempt to reduce practical knowledge to propositional knowledge, see (Stanley and Williamson 2001, 411-44).

door neighbor, or a potter's knowing clay. Call this form of knowledge, *object-knowledge*. The sort of knowledge that I am calling "object-knowledge" is not just of those entities that we would ordinarily call "objects" but also of persons, animals, plants, substances, and so forth.

It is object-knowledge of God that I have in mind when I claim that learning to participate in the social practice of acknowledging God liturgically, and then doing so, is a way of coming to know God. When the object of one's object-knowledge is a person, one has *personal* knowledge. It is personal knowledge of God that I will be discussing.

Analytic epistemology of religion of the past forty years has followed the lead of analytic epistemology in general in that almost all discussions of knowledge of God have focused on propositional knowledge of God.<sup>3</sup> Alvin Plantinga's magisterial three-volume work on warrant is a prime example of the point. In the first two volumes of the series (1993) Plantinga developed a general theory of propositional knowledge; in the third volume (2000), titled *Warranted Christian Belief*, he applied his general theory of doxastic knowledge to the special case of beliefs about God.<sup>4</sup>

## Stump on object-knowledge

The only substantial recent discussion of object-knowledge that I know of is that by Eleonore Stump in her book, *Wandering in Darkness* (2010). What I call doxastic knowledge, she calls "Dominican knowledge"; what I call object-knowledge, she calls "Franciscan knowledge." She assigns them these names because she judges that the sort of knowledge of God that St. Dominic sought to induce in his hearers was doxastic knowledge, whereas the sort of knowledge that St. Francis inspired in his followers was object-knowledge of himself and of Christ.

Stump spends considerable time arguing that not all knowledge is doxastic, that there are clear cases of object (Franciscan) knowledge. She concedes that she is "not able to say what all these cases have in common (except for the one negative feature of irreducibility to [doxastic knowledge])." She does not "know how to give a set of necessary and sufficient conditions that will capture all the kinds of Franciscan knowledge there might be" (47-48). I find myself in the same position as Stump. I too think there are clear cases of object-knowledge; and I too find myself unable to offer a set of necessary and sufficient conditions that cover all the cases.

Early in the twentieth century Bertrand Russell distinguished between what he called "knowledge by acquaintance" and what he called "knowledge by description." Russellian knowledge by acquaintance is a species of object-knowledge. What Russell primarily had in mind by "knowledge by acquaintance" is the knowledge one has of one's mental states by being directly aware of them – being aware of one's toothache, being aware of the red patch in one's visual field, and so forth.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> A signal exception is William Alston's *Perceiving God* (1991).

<sup>4</sup> Oxford University Press published the first two volumes in 1993, the third volume in 2000.

<sup>5</sup> Stump notes that "philosophical discussion of what we are supposed to know by acquaintance is sparse and underdeveloped" (50). For references to discussions of Russell's doctrine, see (Stump, 498-99, fn. 24). It's worth noting that Russell's identification of what he called "knowledge by acquaintance" was not without antecedents – though I doubt that he was aware of them. Consider, for example, the following passage from

Stump argues persuasively that what one knows in such cases cannot be parsed out into doxastic knowledge: “knowing a color is a candidate for a kind of knowledge which is not knowing *that*.” She goes on to give examples of object-knowledge of one’s experiences “that are equally difficult to capture as knowledge *that* or as the object of a propositional attitude. What it is like to be in pain, what it is like to feel lonely, what it is like to feel at home, and myriad other experiences involving qualia of some sort are . . . examples” (51).

Notice the switch in these sentences from “knowing a color” to knowing “what *it is like* to be in pain, what *it is like* to feel lonely, what *it is like* to feel at home.” Stump doesn’t make a point of this linguistic shift, from speaking of knowing an object, namely, color, to speaking of knowing what some experience is like. The shift is natural, however; it reflects reality. Object-knowledge always consists, so far as I can see, of knowing what something is like. The point will prove important later.

Stump’s main concern in her chapter on Dominican and Franciscan knowledge is not object-knowledge in general but object-knowledge of *persons*; she argues that object-knowledge of another person cannot be reduced to doxastic knowledge.<sup>6</sup> For the full argument, along with responses to possible objections, I refer the reader to Stump’s book. Let me confine myself to presenting the centerpiece in her argument.

Stump asks us to imagine a person, Mary, who knows all the propositions that are to be known about her mother but who “has never had any personal interactions of an unmediated and direct sort with another person. She has read descriptions of human faces, for example, but she has never been face-to-face with another conscious person” (52).

Now imagine that Mary is united with her mother. “Although Mary knew that her mother loved her before she met her, when she is united with her mother, Mary will learn what it is like to be loved. And this will be new for her. . . . Furthermore, it is clear that this is only the beginning. Mary will also come to know what it is like to be touched by someone else, to be surprised by someone else, to ascertain someone else’s mood, to detect affect in the melody of someone else’s voice” (52). I find Stump’s use of the example persuasive.

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John Locke: “Thus the mind has two faculties, conversant about truth and falsehood. First, knowledge, whereby it certainly perceives, and is undoubtedly satisfied of the agreement or disagreement of any ideas. Secondly, judgment, which is the putting ideas together or separating them from one another in the mind, when their certain agreement or disagreement is not perceived, but presumed to be so (*Essay on the Human Understanding*, IV.xiv.4). What Locke here calls “judgment” in other passages he calls “belief.”

The view that Locke expresses in this passage (and others) is very nearly the opposite of how present-day epistemologists think about these matters. Locke does not recognize doxastic knowledge; he does not think of certain beliefs as having the status of knowledge. Knowledge, for him, is the mind’s direct awareness – he calls it “perception” – of facts, for example, direct awareness of the fact,  $3+2=5$ . To what extent Locke’s doctrine, that knowledge is object-knowledge rather than doxastic, reflects a prior tradition, is a matter on which I am not able to speak with any authority, nor am I able to pinpoint when object-knowledge virtually disappeared from the attention of philosophers.

<sup>6</sup> Stump’s discussion of object-knowledge of persons is preparation for her extended discussion of object-knowledge of God. Her book, along with Alston’s *Perceiving God*, are the two major exceptions to the focus of analytic philosophers of religion on doxastic knowledge of God. In her book, Stump is mainly interested in object-knowledge of God acquired from narratives. She does not explicitly discuss liturgically acquired knowledge of God.

## Knowing paint by painting

A common phenomenon in human affairs is that, by acquiring and employing the know-how of a social practice for engaging things or substances of a certain sort in a certain way, one comes to know those things or substances themselves. So, too, we come to know our fellow human beings by acquiring and exercising the know-how of engaging them in certain ways. Liturgically acquired knowledge of God is just one instance of this much more general phenomenon.

Common though the phenomenon is, of gaining object-knowledge of something by acquiring the know-how of engaging that entity in a certain way, it has not drawn the attention of philosophers. Accordingly, rather than turning immediately to liturgically acquired knowledge of God, let me provide some context for our analysis by looking at a couple of other examples of the phenomenon. I judge them to be paradigmatic examples. They are very different from practical liturgical knowledge yielding object-knowledge of God; nonetheless, I judge that analyzing these two examples will aid our understanding of what happens in liturgy by illuminating the general phenomenon with which we are dealing.

Obviously not all ways of engaging entities yield object-knowledge of those entities. It would be desirable to have a general characterization of those ways of engaging entities that do yield object-knowledge of those entities in distinction from those ways that do not. But I am unable to offer such a general characterization. We will have to make do with paradigmatic examples.

James Elkins, in *What Painting Is*, offers an engrossing discussion of painting as done by artists (1999). Let me present some of what he says, my presentation consisting, in good measure, of quotations.

Elkins is an art historian; but before taking up art history he was a painter. He writes that he knows "from experience how utterly hypnotic the act of painting can be, and how completely it can overwhelm the mind with its smells and colors, and by the rhythmic motions of the brush" (6). I will focus first on what Elkins says about the practical know-how that the painter acquires, and then on what he says about the object-knowledge of paint that this know-how yields. In Elkins's discussion these topics are interwoven, as are the phenomena themselves in life; to some extent, they will unavoidably be interwoven in my presentation as well.

One of the most fascinating features of Elkins's discussion is his use, throughout the book, of alchemy to illuminate painting. Alchemy, he says, "despite all its bad press, and its association with quackery and nonsense, . . . is the best and most eloquent way to understand how paint can *mean*: how it can be so entrancing, so utterly addictive, so replete with expressive force, that it can keep hold of an artist's attention for an entire life-time. Alchemists had immediate, intuitive knowledge of waters and stones, and their obscure books can help give voice to the ongoing fascination of painting" (7). I will have to neglect Elkins's analysis of alchemy.

The practice of painting, says Elkins, "takes place outside science and any sure and exact knowledge. It is a kind of immersion in substances, a wonder and a delight in their unexpected shapes and feels" (193). "Its materials are worked without [scientific] knowledge of their properties, by blind experiment, by the feel of the paint. A painter knows what to do by the tug of the brush as it pulls through a mixture of oils, and by the look of

colored slurries on the palette. . . . Artists become expert in distinguishing between degrees of gloss and wetness -- and they do so without knowing how they do it, or how chemicals create their effects" (9). Elkins shows no interest in the chemistry of paint.

On Elkins's description, only a small part of the know-how of the painter consists of beliefs that he holds. Most of it is sub-doxastic, located primarily not in his mind but in his eye and in the muscles of his fingers, wrist, and arm. It is located in his acquired ability to make fine intuitive discriminations in the look and feel of paint and in his ability to interpret the significance of those differences. "A painter knows [how to mix colors] by intuition -- that is, by the memory of successful mixtures, by the look of the painting, by the scratchiness of the canvas's warp and woof, by the make and age of the paints, by the degree of fraying in the brush. It can just barely be taught, and it can never be written down" (18).

Elkins notes that it was traditionally thought that there were rules for painting and that those rules could be taught; it was the project of art academies to teach the rules to initiates. One of the effects of the emergence of modernism was the waning away of the academies. Elkins notes that "a fundamental anxiety . . . has accompanied modernism since the final decay of the academies at the end of the nineteenth century: it is no longer clear that painting is something that requires a body of knowledge that can be learned and studied. It may be stepless, beyond the reach of any routine education. Painting and alchemy are arts, backed by massive literature on technique and tradition, but they feel like they might collapse at any moment into ruleless experience" (177). Painting, on Elkins's account, is in fact beyond the reach of any "routine education." His point is not, of course, that there is nothing about the know-how of painting that can be taught by routine education. His point is rather that much if not most of the know-how of the painter does not consist of following rules that were formulated and taught to him by some teacher.

Let us move on from Elkins's description of the practical know-how of the painter to his description of the artist's object-knowledge of paint that his know-how gives him. "Painters learn substances," says Elkins. "Long years spent in the studio can make a person into a treasury of nearly incommunicable knowledge about the powderiness of pastels, or the woody feel of different marbles, or the infinitesimally different iridescences of ceramic glazes. That kind of knowledge is very hard to pass on, and it is certainly not expressed well in books on artist's techniques. . . . But it is a form of knowledge"(22-23).

"Painters know paint by their bodies," he says (104). By itself, the sentence is ambiguous. It could be used to make the point that a painter's object-knowledge of paint is located in his eyes and muscles. In another passage Elkins says that the artist's knowledge of paint is located in "what the body knows, as opposed to what the mind memorizes" (101). That is not, however, the point he was making with the sentence, "painters know paint by their bodies." It's the body of the *paint* that he was referring to, not the body of the painter. This is how the passage continues: "'body' is a standard painter's term for the heft of the paint, its resilience and sturdiness. Paint that has no body is 'thin' or 'lean,' and apt to disappear into the crevices of the weave. . . . Other paint is called 'fat,' and it adheres to the canvas in lumps and pats, reminding even the most absentminded viewer that the object is a painting, and not a landscape" (104).

"There is so much to learn about even the simplest substances," says Elkins (34). "Each paint [has] its particular feel, its quirks and idiosyncrasies, or it cannot take its place in the mixtures and blendings" of the painter (67). Paint offers "a lifetime of things to learn," and the tradition of painting offers "generations of wisdom to absorb: after all, the

substances are impossibly complex" (180). A lifetime of learning is not enough; "paint can [never] be entirely understood" (146).

Why then do painters keep at it? Not "because it can create illusion, because every medium does that. No: painters love paint itself, so much so that they spend years trying to get paint to behave the way they want it to, rather than abandoning it and taking up pencil drawing, or charcoal, or watercolor, or photography. It is the paint that is so absorbing, so deeply attractive, that a life spent in the studio can be a bearable life" (192). "Science has closed off almost every unsystematic encounter with the world. Alchemy and painting are two of the last remaining paths into the deliriously beautiful world of untamed substances" (199).

Elkins offers a flurry of detailed descriptions of what it is about paint that painters learn. The common thread in these descriptions is that the knowledge of paint that painters acquire is knowledge of the character of different paints, what different paints are like, how different paints act and react, their powers and dispositions. But words cannot capture what it is that a painter knows when he knows what a certain paint is like; poetic though many of Elkins's descriptions are, one does not, by reading them, come to know paint as Elkins knows paint. His object-knowledge of paint is largely sub-doxastic – as is his practical knowledge of how to paint. Many of those who take painting lessons in the hope of becoming painters never acquire the requisite know-how and consequently never get to know paint, except in the most elementary way. Knowing paint eludes them. So, they move on to something else, or they beat their head against the wall.

Before moving on, let me give a personal example of sub-doxastic practical and object-knowledge. I know how to type using all ten fingers and without looking at the keyboard. But I could not possibly fully articulate my typing know-how in words; it is largely sub-doxastic. The fact that I know how to type without looking at the keyboard implies that I know the layout of the keyboard. I possess that object-knowledge. But I am unable to describe or sketch the layout of the keyboard; I do not possess the beliefs concerning the relative location of the keys that would enable me to do that. Perhaps when learning to type I memorized the layout of the keyboard; I don't remember. I would then have had doxastic knowledge of the relative location of the keys. But if so, that memory disappeared long ago. My knowledge of the layout of the keyboard is now entirely sub-doxastic object-knowledge, lodged in my fingers.

## **Knowing corn by growing and closely observing corn plants**

Let's turn to another example of practical knowledge yielding object-knowledge in which both are largely intuitive and sub-doxastic. In 1983, Barbara McClintock was awarded the Nobel Prize for her lifetime of research on corn (maize). The results of the research for which she was awarded the prize had been published by her in scientific journals and presented in lectures; it was doxastic scientific knowledge about the micro-structure of corn. But there was another side to McClintock's knowledge of corn than the scientific side; it's that other side that is relevant for us here.

What she learned over the years, said McClintock, is that one must have the patience to "hear what the material has to say to you," the openness to "let it come to you." Above all,

you must have "a feeling for the organism." You must understand "how it grows, understand its parts, understand when something is going wrong with it. [An organism] . . . is constantly being affected by the environment, constantly showing attributes or disabilities in its growth. You have to be aware of all that. . . . You need to know those plants well enough so that if anything changes, . . . you [can] look at the plant and right away you know what this damage you see is from – something that scraped across it or something that bit it or something that the wind did" (Keller 1983, 198).

McClintock is not talking about knowledge of corn in general but about a "feeling" for individual corn plants. "No two plants are exactly alike. They're all different, and as a consequence, you have to know that difference." "I start with the seedling," says McClintock, "and I don't want to leave it. I don't feel I really know the story if I don't watch the plant all the way along. So I know every plant in the field. I know them intimately, and I find it a great pleasure to know them." "I have learned so much about the corn plant that when I see things, I can interpret [them] right away" (198). The practice of close observation that she had developed over the years enabled her to know the character of each plant in her patch, what it was like, how it acted and reacted, its powers and dispositions. She called herself a "mystic" (204).

McClintock regarded the intuitive knowledge of corn that she acquired by close observation of individual plants as indispensable for her scientific research. She reflects, in one passage, on "the kinds of things that made it possible for me to be creative in an unknown way. *Why* do you know? Why were you so sure of something when you couldn't tell anyone else? You weren't sure in a boastful way; you were sure in what I call a completely internal way. . . . What you had to do was put it into their frame. Wherever it came in your frame, you had to work to put it into their frame. So you work with the so-called scientific methods to put it into their frame *after* you know" (203).

As this passage suggests, McClintock did not regard the worth of her intuitive knowledge of corn plants, gained by her practice of close observation, as consisting simply in the contribution it made to her scientific knowledge. It was, in her view, a superior form of knowledge. Science does not give us "real understanding," she said. "It gives us relationships which are useful, valid, and technically marvelous; however, they are not the truth" (201). Scientific knowledge is "lots of fun. You get lots of correlations, but you don't get the truth. . . . Things are much more marvelous than the scientific method allows us to conceive" (203).

We can safely infer that it was not only McClintock's view that much of her intuitive knowledge of corn could not be stated in scientific terms; it was her view that much of it could not be put into language at all. It was intuitive sub-doxastic knowledge of corn, acquired by employment of the know-how she had developed over the years for noticing subtle differences and interpreting the significance of those differences. That know-how was also, in good measure, sub-doxastic; it was ocular rather than mental.

## Knowing God liturgically

Coming to know God by learning to participate in the social practice of engaging God liturgically, and then doing so, is obviously very different from coming to know paint by



painting and from coming to know corn plants by observantly tending them. Whereas the painter comes to know paint by acquiring a feel for paint, we do not come to know God by acquiring a feel for God; and whereas McClintock came to know her corn plants by closely observing them, we do not come to know God by observing God.<sup>7</sup> Nonetheless, as we now take up the topic of knowing God liturgically, I think it helps to have in mind these examples of the general phenomenon of coming to know something by learning to engage it in certain ways.

There are a number of ways in which we come to know God liturgically. One of the main theses of Eleonore Stump's book that I referred to earlier in this chapter is that one of the ways in which we come to know a person, including God, is by reading or listening to narratives in which that person is engaged with other persons. By being presented with the narrative, we become acquainted with the person, learn what he or she is like. Prominent in Christian liturgical enactments are readings of narrative passages from Scripture in which God and human beings engage each other. The prayer of thanksgiving that introduces the Eucharist rehearses some episodes from those passages; sermons often rehearse some of the episodes, the hymns that are sung sometimes do. Thus one of the ways in which we come to know God liturgically is by listening to the reading of biblical narratives and by listening to the liturgical rehearsals of some of the episodes in those narratives.

It would be desirable to have a comprehensive discussion of the ways in which we come to know God liturgically; such a discussion would identify and analyze the different ways, and it would show how these different ways interact with each other. I will not be attempting a comprehensive discussion, nor will I be summarizing what Stump has to say on the role of narrative in coming to know God. Instead, I will focus on liturgical acts of addressing God.

Prominent in all liturgical enactments are acts of addressing God in speech and song: blessing God, praising God, thanking God, interceding with God, confessing sins to God, asking God to hear, asking God to send the Spirit, and so forth. My thesis is that one of the ways in which one can come to know God liturgically is by learning to engage God in the form of addressing God.

Let me say, once again, that it is not my aim here to be comprehensive. The way of coming to know God that I will discuss, plus the way Stump identifies, are not the only ways of coming to know God liturgically; one can also, for example, come to know God by listening for God's address to us. And there are yet other ways. But given the pervasiveness in liturgical enactments of addressing God, this way of coming to know God liturgically is obviously important.

It goes without saying that addressing God is distinctly different from speaking about God. In the sermon, the preacher addresses the congregants and speaks *about* God; in confessing our sins, we speak *to* God. It also goes without saying that addressing God is distinctly different from declaring what one believes when, for example, one recites the creed. To speak *to* God is not to declare what one believes *about* God.

I suggest that it is by virtue of two distinct features of engaging God in the mode of addressing God that one can come to know God by learning to address God and by learning certain ways of doing so: one comes to know God by virtue of taking for granted, in one's

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<sup>7</sup> That said, there is a fascinating body of literature on the so-called "spiritual senses." These were thought to give us something like sensory apprehension of God and Christ. See (Gavrilyuk and Coakley 2013).

address, what God is like in certain respects; and one comes to know God by learning to use the appropriate “addressee-identification terms,” as I shall call them. Let me discuss these in the order of mention. A question hovering in the wings is, but doesn't one have to know God already in order to address God? My answer is “No.”

## Learning by taking for granted

Let me introduce what I have to say on the first topic with some brief comments on the general phenomenon of *taking something for granted* in what one does. Every human being who lives past infancy has been socialized. Socialization consists, in good measure, of learning how and when to perform certain actions and of learning how and when to engage in certain social practices. Anyone who performs those actions and engages in those practices takes for granted a vast number of things about the world, herself, and her fellow human beings. Not everything that we take for granted about reality is the way things really are. But if they are as we take them to be, then, in taking them for granted in what we learn to do, we gain knowledge of the world, ourselves, and others. All of us, for example, know the world as existing before we were born. We did not acquire this knowledge by being told that the world existed before we were born and then believing it. We acquired it by learning to perform a wide variety of actions in which we took it for granted.

Some of what we take for granted in our actions is also explicitly believed by us. Much of it is not; it remains sub-doxastic. It never crosses the mind of most people that the world existed before they were born; they just take it for granted in what they do. If the question is put to them whether they believe this, they would say they do – with the possible exception of a few highly sophisticated philosophers.<sup>8</sup> But most people are never asked.

I am not aware that any philosopher, myself included, has ever developed a theory of what it is to take something for granted in what one does. So, we will have to content ourselves with an intuitive grasp of the idea and with some paradigmatic examples as our guide. Rather than presenting my own examples, let me present a few of those that Wittgenstein offers in his little book, *On Certainty* (1972).

The jottings that comprise *On Certainty* were reflections by Wittgenstein on some essays by G.E. Moore in which Moore cited certain items of knowledge on his part as a refutation of skepticism. Moore said he knew that he had two hands, that he had never been far from the surface of the earth, and that the world had existed for some time before he was born. Wittgenstein found this an odd use of the word “know.” But rather than dwelling on that oddity, he was led by Moore’s comments to reflect on the fact that whenever we act, we take things for granted, and that the things we take for granted are exempted from our doubt when we are performing the action. They are, in that way, *certain* for us at the time. Here are some of Wittgenstein’s examples:<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Those highly sophisticated philosophers who deny that they believe this might nonetheless take it for granted in their everyday lives. Not only do we all take things for granted that we do not hold as beliefs; one can believe the negation of something that one takes for granted.

<sup>9</sup> I have numbered the paragraphs as they are numbered in the text.

88. *All enquiry on our part* is set so as to exempt certain propositions from doubt, if they are ever formulated. They lie apart from the route travelled by enquiry.

143. I am told, for example, that someone climbed this mountain many years ago. Do I always enquire into the reliability of the teller of this story, and whether the mountain did exist years ago? A child learns there are reliable and unreliable informants much later than it learns facts which are told it. It doesn't learn *at all* that that mountain has existed for a long time: that is, the question whether it is so doesn't arise at all. It swallows this consequence down, so to speak, together with *what* it learns.

211. Now it gives our way of looking at things, and our researches, their form. Perhaps it was once disputed. But perhaps, for unthinkable ages, it has belonged to the *scaffolding* of our thoughts. (Every human being has parents.)

204. The end is not certain propositions striking us immediately as true, i.e., it is not a kind of *seeing* on our part; it is our *acting* which lies at the bottom of the language-game.

135. But do we not simply follow the principle that what has always happened will happen again (or something like it)? What does it mean to follow this principle? Do we really introduce it into our thinking? . . . It is not an item in our consideration.

The point I want to take from these observations by Wittgenstein is not his point about certainty but rather the point that, in learning to perform various actions, we take for granted what the world is like in certain respects. We take for granted that the mountain existed years ago. And if the world is as we take it to be, then we have gained object-knowledge of the world.

## Coming to know God by taking for granted what God is like when addressing God

Over and over in Christian liturgical enactments the congregants and their leaders address God as *you*: "we bless you, O God"; "we praise you, O God"; "we thank you, O God"; "we confess to you, O God"; "we petition you, O God." The participants engage God in second-person address. In doing so, they take God to be the sort of being whom it is appropriate to address. They take God to be a "thou," a person. Nobody declares that God is a person and hence the sort of being whom it is appropriate to address. They just address God, and in so doing take God to be a person and hence appropriate to address. Add now that God is in fact the sort of being whom it is appropriate to address – that God is a person. Then in learning to address God as "You" they acquire some knowledge of God – some knowledge of what God is like.

In liturgically addressing God the participants also take for granted that God is capable of listening, that is, capable of apprehending what they say. Addressing God as they do would make no sense if God could not apprehend what they say.<sup>10</sup> Nobody explicitly declares that God can listen; in addressing God, the participants just take for granted that God is capable of listening. Add now that God is in fact capable of listening. Then in learning to address God, the participants come to know God as capable of listening. They come to know something of what God is like. At some point some of them may form the explicit belief that God is capable of listening. But they need not. Their knowledge of God as capable of listening may remain sub-doxastic, as may their knowledge of God as the sort of being whom it is appropriate to address as “you.”

God is addressed in a number of different ways in liturgical enactments; in these different ways, different things are taken for granted. Whatever the way, the participants take for granted that God is a ‘thou’ whom it is appropriate to address and that God is capable of listening. But when addressing God in praise and adoration, they take for granted different things about God than when addressing God in confession.

When addressing God in praise and adoration, one takes God to be worthy of praise and adoration for being who God is and for doing what God has done. Addressing God in praise and adoration would make no sense if God were not worthy of praise and adoration. Usually there is no explicit declaration that God is worthy of praise and adoration; the participants simply take it for granted. Add now that God is in fact worthy of praise and adoration. Then in learning to address God in praise and adoration one comes to know God as worthy of praise and adoration. One comes to know something of what God is like. At some point one may form the explicit belief that God is worthy of praise and adoration. Then again, one may not; one’s knowledge of God in this respect may remain sub-doxastic. And in any case, if from youth up one is taught to address God in praise and adoration, one will come to know God as worthy of praise and adoration before the thought ever occurs to one.

In the enactment of all traditional Christian liturgies the participants address to God their confession of individual and communal sins. They confess to God that they have sinned against God. To sin against God is to wrong God. So, in confessing to God one’s sins against God, one takes God to have been wronged. Confessing to God one’s sins against God would make no sense if God had not been wronged. Seldom in any Christian liturgy is it explicitly said that God has been wronged; usually the worshippers just take it for granted. Add now that God has in fact been wronged. Then in learning to address God in confession one comes to know God as one who has been wronged. At some point one may form the explicit belief that God has been wronged. Then again, the thought may never cross one’s mind.

Or the thought may cross one’s mind and one may reject it. A good many theologians and philosophers have rejected the proposition that God can be wronged. The knowledge of God that one acquires by learning to address God liturgically is not only different from that acquired in systematic theology classes in that it is object-knowledge (Franciscan) rather than doxastic knowledge (Dominican); it may conflict with what one is taught about God in theology classes. I realize, of course, that the theologian who holds that God cannot be

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<sup>10</sup> In my *The God We Worship* (2015) I distinguish what I call “strong address” from what I call “weak address.” In strong address one takes one’s addressee to be capable of apprehending what one is saying; in weak address, one does not. An example of weak address would be a child saying to his goldfish, “You sweet little things.” I assume that liturgical address to God is strong address.

wronged is likely to contest my contention that in confessing our sins to God, we are taking God to have been wronged.<sup>11</sup>

My general point will now be obvious; it would be tedious to multiply examples. To participate in engaging God liturgically in the form of addressing God is to take God to be a 'thou' whom it is appropriate to address, to take God to be capable of listening, to take God to be worthy of praise and adoration, to take God to have been wronged, and more besides. If God is as one takes God to be in one's address to God, then, in learning to engage God by participating in liturgically addressing God, one comes to know God in those respects.<sup>12</sup>

Before we move on, let it be noted that it is by no means only when addressing God that liturgical participants take God to be a certain way. In kneeling for the prayers and closing their eyes, they take God to be a certain way. In receiving the Eucharistic elements, they take God to be a certain way. And so forth. Whatever they take God to be like when performing the actions of the liturgy, if God is in fact that way, then by learning to perform those actions and performing them, they come to know God as being that way. Running throughout liturgy is the phenomenon of coming to know God by taking God to be a certain way. One of the tasks of liturgical theology is to bring to the level of explicit belief what those who participate in liturgical enactments take God to be like.

## Coming to know God by learning to use certain addressee-identification terms in addressing God

When the participants in Christian liturgical enactments address God, they usually incorporate into their address terms identifying the one to whom they are addressing their praise, their thanksgiving, their confession, their petitions, and so forth. They use the term "God," of course, but also "almighty," "creator of heaven and earth," "merciful," and a great many others. Let me call such terms, *addressee-identification* terms. One can use these terms to make declarations about God. But that's not how they are used when they are incorporated into address to God; they are used to identify the one addressed. Let's have a few examples.

In the present-day Catholic mass liturgy the confession opens with the priest and the people saying, "I confess to almighty God. . . ." When saying these words, the priest and the people are not *declaring that* God is almighty; they are using the addressee-identification term "almighty God" to *identify* the one to whom they are addressing their confession.

In "The Holy Eucharist: Rite One" of the Episcopal Church, one of the options for the prayer of confession, spoken by the priest and the people together, opens with the words, "Almighty God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, maker of all things, judge of all men. . . ." When saying these words, the priest and the people are not *declaring that* God is almighty, father of our Lord Jesus Christ, maker of all things, and judge of all men. They are using the

<sup>11</sup> Alternatively, such a theologian might argue that we should stop confessing to God that we have sinned against God, since to do so is to take God to be what God is not.

<sup>12</sup> In my book, *The God We Worship*, I discuss in much more detail than I have here the understanding of God implicit in Christian liturgy. Though it now seems obvious to me that learning to participate in Christian liturgical enactments is a way of coming to know God, that thought had not occurred to me when I wrote *The God We Worship*.

addressee-identification terms “almighty God,” “Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,” “maker of all things,” and “judge of all men,” to *identify* the one to whom they are addressing their confession.

In the Orthodox Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, the prayer that the priest offers just before the public liturgy begins incorporates a flurry of addressee-identification terms:

O heavenly King and Comforter, Spirit of truth, which art in all places and fillest all things; Treasure of goodness and Giver of life: come and abide in us, and cleanse us from all that defileth.<sup>13</sup>

When saying these words, the priest does not *declare that* God is in all places, fills all things, and so forth; he *identifies* the addressee of his prayer the one who is in all places and fills all things. Parenthetically, what these examples show is that the addressee-identification terms incorporated into liturgical address to God come in a variety of grammatical forms. Some are adjectives: “almighty,” “merciful.” Some are nouns: “Father,” “King.” Some are verbal nouns: “creator of heaven and earth,” “giver of life.” Some are who- or that-clauses: “who art in heaven,” “that takest away the sins of the world.”

Suppose, now, that the addressee-identification terms employed in some liturgical address to God do in fact fit God; then in learning to address God in that way one comes to know God. One comes to know something of what God is like. If one of the addressee-identification terms employed is “almighty” and that term fits God, then in learning to employ that term in addressing God one comes to know God as almighty. If another addressee-identification term employed is “creator of heaven and earth” and that term fits God, then in learning to employ that term in addressing God one comes to know God as creator of heaven and earth.

I am assuming, of course, that the person who learns to employ the terms “almighty” and “creator of heaven and earth” in addressing God has some grasp of what those terms mean. If he says the words but has no grasp of what they mean – because he’s a small child, or because he doesn’t know English – then in learning to employ the words he is not coming to know God.

Grasping the meaning of the terms “almighty” and “creator of heaven and earth” comes in degrees, as does grasping the meaning of most terms. One has a better grasp as an adult than as a child; one adult has a better grasp than another adult. The better one understands the meaning of the addressee-identification terms used when addressing God liturgically, the deeper one’s knowledge of God – assuming that the terms fit God. A liturgical neophyte learns to employ the term “creator of heaven and earth” in addressing God. At first

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<sup>13</sup> This flurry pales, however, before the flurry of addressee-identification terms in the anaphora of the so-called *Testamentum Domini* (probably fifth century): “Holy God, strengthener of our souls, giver of our life, treasure of incorruptibility, Father of your only-begotten, our Savior.” The prayer then addresses Christ: “[G]race of the nations, knowledge, true wisdom, the exaltation of the meek, the medicine of souls, the confidence of us who believe, . . . the strength of the righteous, the hope of the persecuted, the haven of the buffeted, the illuminator of the perfect, the Son of the living God.” The prayer then returns to addressing God the father with an additional flurry of addressee-identification terms: “founder of the heights, king of the treasuries of light, visitor of the heavenly Zion, king of the orders of archangels, of dominions, praises, thrones, vestures, lights, joys, and delights, father of kings.” Quoted from R.C.D. Jasper and G.J. Cuming, *Prayers of the Eucharist: Early and Reformed* (1987, 139.)

the knowledge of God that he acquires thereby is very shallow. As he understands better what he is saying, his knowledge of God as creator of heaven and earth deepens.

Must one already know God in order to address God? Is addressing God the expression and application of knowledge of God acquired in some other way? No; one can come to know God by learning to engage God in the mode of addressing God and by learning to do so in certain ways.

## Cuneo on knowing God liturgically

My thesis has been that one way in which one can come to know God is by learning to participate in the liturgical practice of addressing God in certain ways. By learning to engage in the practice one comes to know what God is like in certain important respects. The acquisition of practical liturgical knowledge yields object-knowledge of God.

In his essay "Ritual Knowledge" Terence Cuneo develops a thesis closely related to mine but slightly different (2016). He states his thesis thus: "knowing how to engage in ritualized activity is, when all goes well, a way in which we know God" (148). He explains that the sense of the term "knowing someone" that he has in mind "is not easy to articulate, but it is probably best described as *being in rapport* with someone" (148). He then remarks, "When one is in rapport with someone, one does not simply enjoy some sort of privileged epistemic contact with that person. One also knows how to engage the person and, often, what the person cares about. . . . Under this understanding, then, the dictum that knowing God is a species of practical knowledge is the claim that knowing God (in the sense just specified) consists in (although is not exhausted by) knowing how to engage God" (148-49). Knowing God, in the sense explained, "is fundamentally a practical activity" (148).

I think it's true that knowing someone in the sense of being in rapport with the person includes knowing how to engage that person in distinctive and appropriate ways. So, suppose one's knowledge of God takes the form of being in rapport with God. Then knowing how to address God properly is a component of one's knowledge of God. My point has been that one can come to know God by coming to know how to address God properly. Cuneo's point is that knowing how to address God properly is itself a component of knowing God.

## Love-infused knowledge

What comes through powerfully in Elkins's discussion of painting is that, if all goes well, painters not only come to know paint but to love it. Knowledge engenders love. Or better: the knowledge acquired is love-infused knowledge. What likewise comes through in McClintock's discussion is that she not only came to know her corn plants but to love them; in her case too, it was love-infused knowledge that was acquired. In both cases, the mode of love was love as attraction to something of worth.

When all goes well, the knowledge of God gained by learning to address God liturgically is like Elkins's knowledge of paint and like McClintock's knowledge of corn in that it too is love-infused knowledge.

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