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Disciplinary Responses to Theology Brief Preview

**LOVE AS A WAY OF KNOWING THE WORLD OPPOSES A DOMINANT
VIEW OF KNOWLEDGE**

Carlos Miguel Gomez

Associate Professor, School of Human Sciences, University of Rosario, Bogota, Colombia

In his Preview on *The Sovereignty of Love*, Professor O'Donovan delineates an argument in favour of the long-standing claim that love is a way of knowing the world. This claim opposes a dominant view of knowledge, particularly strong since the scientific revolution, according to which the only valid and proper way of knowing the world would be that of the natural sciences. This position has evolved in different directions, some of which are commonly grouped under the label of "naturalism". In general terms, naturalism affirms that to explain the world only "natural explanations" count, that is, that no reference to divine wills and agents is needed. In a stronger (but quite common) sense, this means that what is real is that what can be scientifically explained. Causal explanation and mathematical calculation would thus set the limits of reality. Moreover, a corollary of naturalism is that neither love, nor any human appreciation of value or meaning legitimately belong to how things in the world really are. These emotions may be human reactions to a reality devoid of intrinsic meaning and value, emotions that lack any cognitive value.

Accordingly, O'Donovan's claim that love is a way of knowing the world – which I deeply share—would not only challenge naturalism but would set limits to scientific knowledge. Professor O'Donovan goes so far as to claim not only that love has epistemic value, but that it is "the highest way [of knowing] imaginable to human beings". If this is so, no theory, scientific or otherwise, would be either complete or true if it does not somehow incorporate love. This claim demands careful examination and justification. To contribute to this dialogue, I would like to formulate two questions that point to central elements in such a justification:

Firstly, Professor O'Donovan seems to move from true knowledge to true love when he says that given that the former requires "knowing each thing for what it is," thus the latter also must do. Thus, the priority is given here to the epistemic knowledge of particularities and to the attention to differences required in every form of true knowledge. This *attention* has been traditionally defined (even though this definition has been deeply criticized) as a relationship of correspondence (*adaequatio*) between what we believe or say about the world and the way the world is. But in what sense does love contribute to grasping the way things really are in the world? This is, how is it that love could count as an epistemic principle to evaluate our theories? In other words, the argument should move from true love to true knowledge.

Secondly, it seems to me that as Professor O'Donovan presents his claim that love is a way of knowing, there is a prior way of knowledge not directly related to love but presupposed by it. This prior way of knowing is defined as "faithfulness

to the grounding reality of the object”, which is necessary for loving God as “God”, the neighbour as neighbour, etc. It would seem that knowing the difference between objects is the condition for appropriately loving them as they are, without confusion. Should not we rather say that only love allows us to establish such distinctions? That, is, that it is love that makes it possible to discover the “grounding reality” of each object, not only in the sense that they all are created by God, but that something in their way of being as they are, something in their particularities and differences, requires love to be grasped? An affirmative answer to this question would be necessary to really justify the claim that love is our highest way of knowing.

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