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HUMAN KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

The kingdom also works through the Church. The disciples preached the kingdom of God and performed signs of the kingdom (Matthew 10:7-8; Luke 10:9, 17).

The powers of the kingdom were operative in and through them. Jesus said that he would give to the Church the keys of the kingdom of heaven with power to bind and loose (Matthew 16:18-19).

The meaning of the keys is illustrated in Luke 11:52. The scribes had taken away the key of knowledge, i.e., the correct interpretation of the OT. The key of understanding the divine purpose had been entrusted to Israel; but the scribes had so misinterpreted the oracles of God delivered to them (Romans 3:2) that when Messiah came with a new revelation of God's kingdom, they neither entered themselves nor allowed others to enter.

These keys, along with the kingdom blessings, are to be given to the new people who, as they preach the Good News of the kingdom, will be the means of binding or loosing men from their sins.

In fact, the disciples had already used these keys and exercised this authority, bringing men the gift of peace or pronouncing the divine judgment (Matthew 10:13-15). The kingdom is God's deed. It has come into the world in Christ; it works in the world through the church.

The problems of knowledge that are raised by the biblical revelation are chiefly two: first, what is the nature of God's knowledge, and, second, what is man's knowledge, particularly man's knowledge of God?

The main point in considering God's knowledge is His omniscience: "His understanding is infinite" (Psalm 147:5). The items of God's knowledge are made in Scripture in great profusion: events past, "God remembered Rachel" (Genesis 30:22), and "a book of remembrance was written before Him" (Malachi 3:16); events present, "Doth He not see all my ways and count all my steps" (Job 30:4); events future, "In that day there shall be a fountain opened" (Zechariah 13:1), and "He shall reign over the house of Jacob forever" (Luke 1:33).

Not so explicit but more important, God knows Himself. When the apostle says, "The Spirit searches the deep things of God" (I Corinthians 2:11), the word "search," as is also the case in Revelation 2:23, "I am He which searched the reins and heart" (I Chronicles 28:9; Romans 8:27), does not imply that God had been ignorant previous to this search. In these cases ""search" means to know exactly and completely.

Furthermore, that God knows Himself may be deduced from His omnipotence, His blessedness, and perfection, all of which are expressed in sundry passages and divers manners.

The idea of omnipotence, perfection, and righteousness requires God to know all things always. His knowledge is eternal. Such an immediate and uninterrupted knowledge has frequently been designated as intuitive. God sees all things at a glance, as it were. He does not learn. He was never ignorant, and He can never come to know more because there is nothing for Him to know.

This intuitive knowledge is distinguished from both the reasoning and the empirical learning of man. A high school student learns the axioms of geometry and painfully deduces the hitherto unknown theorem that triangles contain 180 degrees. God does not reason in this fashion. This is not to say that God is ignorant of the logical relation between axioms and theorems. God's mind, that is, God Himself, is perfectly logical.

But He does not reason in the sense of taking time to pass from one idea to another.

That is to say, there is no succession of ideas in God's mind. He does not first know one item and then come to know another of which He was previously ignorant. All ideas, facts, data, and information about all things are always in His mind from eternity past.

But though there is no succession of ideas in God's mind, it does not follow that there is no idea of succession. The logical succession of conclusion upon premise is a part of omniscience. Similarly the idea of succession in time is known to God but God is not time and therefore not in succession.

God knows that one event follows another in time. Christ came after David, and David after Moses. But God's ideas do not follow one another in time, for Christ was slain before the foundation of the world. Therefore God did not learn that Christ was crucified or that David came after Moses by waiting for history to show it to Him. God does not depend upon experience. His knowledge is entirely a priori. Otherwise prophecy would be impossible.

As nothing that He wills is the cause of His will, so nothing that He knows is the cause of His knowledge; He did not make things to know them, but He knows them to make them ... If His knowledge did depend upon the things, then the existence of things did precede God's knowledge of them: to say that they are the cause of God's knowledge is to say that God was not the cause of their being.

Because of God's intuitive omniscience, as well as by reason of His omnipotence and omnipresence, God is incomprehensible. This idea, however, turns the subject from God's knowledge of Himself to man's knowledge of God. Of course God comprehends Himself. In this respect God is not merely comprehensible but is actually known, understood, and comprehended. But God is incomprehensible to man.

The term "incomprehensible" carries undesirable connotations. The word sometimes means irrational, unintelligible, or unknowable. Now, obviously if man could know or understand nothing about God, Christianity would be impossible. It is absolutely essential to maintain that the human mind is capable of grasping truth. Incomprehensible therefore must be taken to mean that man cannot know everything about God.

It is necessary to assert that man can know some truths about God without knowing everything that God knows.

Now, it seems obvious that if a man knows any truth at all, he must know a truth that God knows, for God knows all truths. A sentence must mean to a man who knows its meaning precisely what it means to God; for if the man does not know God's meaning, he does not know the meaning of the sentence.

Hence, if man is to know anything, it cannot be denied that there are points of coincidence between human and divine knowledge. Similarly God cannot be Wholly Other, for this would deny that man was created in the image of God.

Neo-orthodox theologians try to substitute a personal encounter with God for conceptual knowledge of Him. Thought, they say, cannot grasp God, or indeed any persons. Persons are met, not thought. But in human relations wordless encounters do not produce friendship. There must be knowledge of character, and this comes mainly through intelligible conversation. Similarly, if God does not give us information about Himself, information that is rationally understood, a personal encounter would leave our minds a religious blank.

The details of theology and philosophy are very difficult. Whether we learn by logic alone as or whether we learn by experience alone as or whether we can receive truth only by revelation, all these subjects of interesting scholarly discussion.