

THE IMMENSITY OF GOD
The Attributes of God
Banska Bystrica, 28th January 2018

Isa 40:12-17 Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand and marked off the heavens with a span, enclosed the dust of the earth in a measure and weighed the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance? ¹³ Who has measured the Spirit of the LORD, or what man shows him his counsel? ¹⁴ Whom did he consult, and who made him understand? Who taught him the path of justice, and taught him knowledge, and showed him the way of understanding? ¹⁵ Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket, and are accounted as the dust on the scales; behold, he takes up the coastlands like fine dust. ¹⁶ Lebanon would not suffice for fuel, nor are its beasts enough for a burnt offering. ¹⁷ All the nations are as nothing before him, they are accounted by him as less than nothing and emptiness. **18** To whom then will you liken God, or what likeness compare with him?

כי לא מחשבותי מחשבותיכם
ולא דרכיכם דרכי יהוה
כי נבדו שמים מארץ בן נבדו דרכי
מדרכיכם ומחשבותי ממחשבותיכם

Isa 55:8-9 For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. ⁹ For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

לך רמיה תהלה אלהים בציון ולך ושלם נדר

Ps 65:1 There will be silence before Thee, *and* praise in Zion, O God; And to Thee the vow will be performed.

בורא קצות הארץ לא יעף ולא ייגע אין חקר לתבונתו

Isa 40:28-29 Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable.

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0. INTRODUCTION: OUR KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

- another of the *incommunicable* attributes of God...
- Apophatic theology; *via negativa*; Christian mysticism...

[PACKER *Knowing God*] **Two unhappy trends** seem to have produced this state of affairs. ...Trend one (1) is that Christian minds have been conformed to the modern spirit: the spirit, that is, that spawns great thoughts of man and leaves room for only small thoughts of God. The modern way with God is to set him at a distance, if not to deny him altogether ...Trend two (2) is that Christian minds have been confused by the modern scepticism. For more than three centuries the naturalistic leaven in the Renaissance outlook has been working like a cancer in Western thought.

- **conceptual** ([PACKER] ...if we pursue theological knowledge for its own sake, it is bound to go bad on us. It will make us proud and conceited.) → **1Cor 8:1-2** ...“knowledge” puffs up, but love builds up. ² If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know.
 - [Tertullian] **“Quod vero immensum est, soli sibi notum est.”¹**
- **experiential** ([PACKER] ...as we enter more and more deeply into this experience of being humbled and exalted that our knowledge of God increases, and with it our peace, our strength, and our joy. God help us, then, to put our knowledge about God to this use, that we all may in truth ‘know the Lord’.) → **Gal 4:9** But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God ..., (νῦν δὲ γινόντες θεόν, μᾶλλον δὲ γνωσθέντες ὑπὸ θεοῦ)

1. IMMENSITAS

- *Immensus*, immeasurable, im- mense. Fr. metior, mensus.

[BERKHOF] The infinity of God may also be viewed with reference to space, and is then called His **immensity**. It may be defined as that perfection of the Divine Being by which He **transcends all spatial limitations**, and yet is present in every point of space with His whole Being. It has a negative and a positive side, denying all limitations of space to the Divine Being, and asserting that God is above space and fills every part of it with His whole Being. ...In a certain sense the terms **“immensity” and “omnipresence,”** as applied to God, denote the same thing, and can therefore be regarded as **synonymous**. Yet there is a point of difference that should be carefully noted. “Immensity” points to the fact that **God transcends all space** and is not subject to its limitations, while “omnipresence” denotes that He nevertheless fills every part of space with His entire Being. The former emphasizes the transcendence, and the latter, the immanence of God.

1.1. THE UNKNOWABLE GOD

- CALVIN described Scripture as God’s condescending speech to us. From the divine perspective, it is baby talk, i.e., divine speech to creatures is true, if not exhaustive (*Institutes of the Christian Religion* 1.13.1 → “God, to keep us within the bounds of sobriety, speaks but rarely of his essence, yet, by those two attributes, which I have mentioned, he supersedes all gross imaginations, and represses the presumption of the human mind. For, surely, his **immensity** ought to inspire us with **awe**, that we may not attempt to measure him with our senses...”)

[TOZER *Knowledge of the Holy*] Of all that can be thought or said about God, His **Infinitude** is the most difficult to grasp. Even to try to conceive of it would appear to be self-contradictory, for such conceptualization requires us to undertake something which we know at the outset we can never accomplish. Yet we must try, for the Holy Scriptures teach that God is infinite and, if we accept His other attributes, we must of necessity accept this one too

[CYRIL OF JERUSALEM] For we speak, not what we ought concerning God, (for to Him only is this known,) but what man's nature can, and our weakness is equal to. For we explain not what God is ; but we honestly confess that we have no exact knowledge of Him; for on the subject of God, it is great knowledge to confess our want of knowledge“. Magnify, then, the Lord with me, and let and exalt His name together. → (**Ps 34:3** Oh, magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together!) Λέγομεν γὰρ οὐχ ὅσα δεῖ περὶ Θεοῦ [μόνω γὰρ αὐτῷ ταῦτα γνώριμα], ἀλλ' ὅσα κεχώρηκεν ἡ ἀνθρωπίνη φύσις καὶ ὅσα ἡ ἡμετέρα ἀσθένεια βαστάσαι δύναται. Οὐ γὰρ τὸ, τί ἐστὶ Θεός, ἐξηγουόμεθα· ἀλλ' ὅτι τὸ ἀκριβὲς περὶ αὐτοῦ οὐκ οἶδαμεν, μετ' εὐγνωμοσύνης ὁμολογοῦμεν. Ἐν τοῖς γὰρ περὶ Θεοῦ μεγάλῃ γινώσκῃ, τὸ τὴν ἀγνωσίαν ὁμολογεῖν. Μεγαλύνετε τοίνυν τὸν Κύριον σὺν ἐμοὶ καὶ ὑψώσωμεν τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ κοινῇ πάντες· ὁ γὰρ εἷς ἀδυνατεῖ. Μᾶλλον δὲ κἂν πάντες ὁμοῦ συναχθῶμεν, οὐπω τὸ καθ' ὃ δεῖ ποιήσωμεν.

¹ *Liber apologeticus XVII.*

1.2. THE INEFFABILITY OF GOD

- **Jdg 13:18** "Why do you ask my name, seeing it is wonderful?" (שְׁמִי יְהוָה פֶּלִיאִי)
- **2Cor 12:3-4** And I know that this man was caught up into paradise – whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows – ⁴ and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter. (ἤκουσεν ἄρρητα ῥήματα)
- “Via negativa” → God is *not* finite; *not* created; *not* mortal; *not* tempted;...

[Dionysius *Preface to Mystic Theology*] ...“negative” which distinguishes Almighty God from all created things. God is not matter, soul, mind, spirit, any being, nor even being itself, but above and beyond all these. ...Theology prefers the negative because Almighty God is more appropriately presented by distinction than by comparison.

2. HOW WE “MEASURE” GOD

- **1Ki 8:27** "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you; how much less this house that I have built!

2.1. BY OUR IMAGINATIONS

- **2Cor 10:4-6** For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds (πρὸς καθαίρεσιν ὀχυρωμάτων,). We destroy arguments (λογισμοὺς καθαιρούμετες) ⁵ and every lofty opinion (πάν ὑψώμα) raised against the knowledge of God (ἐπαιρόμενον κατὰ τῆς γνώσεως τοῦ θεοῦ), and take every thought captive to obey Christ, ⁶ being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete.

2.2. BY OUR LANGUAGE

- **Jude 1:15** all the harsh things that ungodly sinners have spoken against him. (πάντων τῶν σκληρῶν ὧν ἐλάλησαν κατ’ αὐτοῦ ἁμαρτωλοὶ ἄσεβεῖς.)
- language: based on *comparisons* (**1 Cor 2:13** And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting [συγκρίνοντες] spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.)
- → language of *analogy* (“father”; “king”; “husband”; ...)
- → language and *metaphors* → time, space, experience... ()
- **Isa 40:18** To whom then will you liken God (תְּדַמֶּינָהוּ אֱלֹהִים), or what likeness compare with him (דְּמוּתוֹ)?
- **Isa 40:25** To whom then will you compare me, that I should be like him (וְאֵלֵּי מִי תִדְמֶינִי וְאֵשֶׁתִּי)? says the Holy One.
- **Isa 46:5** "To whom will you liken me and make me equal, and compare me, that we may be alike? (לְמִי תִדְמֶינִי וְתַשְׁווּ וְתִמְשָׁלוּנִי וְנִדְמָה)

2.3. BY OUR EXPERIENCE

[TROELTSCH] (1) Podľa princípu kritičnosti žiadne dokumenty minulosti nie je možné prijímať ako autoritatívne. Všetky nároky minulosti musia byť moderným kritikom zvažované. Prinajlepšom môžeme dospieť k väčšej-menšej pravdepodobnosti vzhľadom na minulosť, nikdy nie k istote. (2) Podľa princípu analógie prítomnosť je kľúčom k minulosti. Minulé udalosti musia byť analogické s tým, čo je možné dnes. (3) Podľa princípu kauzality dejiny sú uzavretým kontinuom udalostí, kde každá udalosť má predchádzajúcu imanentnú príčinu a v dejinách nie je žiadny božský zásah (zázrak). (TROELTSCH, E. Über historische und dogmatische Methode in der Theologie.

2.4. BY OUR SCIENCE

- theories of what is possible → the limits of the created world (predictable;)

2.5. UNBELIEF

- **Ps 78:41** They tested God again and again and provoked the Holy One of Israel. (וַיִּקְדֹּשׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל הַקָּדוֹשׁ וַיִּנְסֶהוּ אֱלֹהִים) → CALVIN *Commentary*:

In the same sense it is added immediately after, (verse 41,) that *they returned* to their former ways, and *tempted God*. The word *return* does not here signify change, but a continued course of sinning. The heinous indignity which is done to God when men tempt him, is expressed by a beautiful metaphor. The Hebrew word **תָּוַח**, *tavah*, signifies *to mark out or describe*. It is intimated, that when the people dared to limit the operations of God, according to their own pleasure, he was, as it were, shut up within bars of wood or iron, and his infinite power circumscribed within the narrow boundaries to which unbelief would confine it. And assuredly, whenever men do not go beyond their own understandings, it is as if they would measure God by their own small capacity, which is nothing else than to pull him down from his throne; for his

3. “DEUS SEMPER MAJOR”

- → Isa 40:18
- **1Pt 5:5** "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." ([ὁ] θεὸς ὑπερηφάνους ἀντιτάσσεται, ταπεινοῖς δὲ δίδωσιν χάριον)
- **Job 22:29 [Eliphaz]** For when they are humbled you say, 'It is because of pride'; but he saves the lowly.
(פִּי־הַשְּׁפִילִי וְתֹאמַר גְּוַה וְשַׁח עֵינַיִם יוֹשֵׁעַ)

3.1. GREATER THAN OUR IMAGINATIONS

- **1Cor 2:9-10** "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him" - ¹⁰ these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God.
- → revelation
- **Isa 55:8-9**

3.2. GREATER THAN OUR LANGUAGE

- → silence
- [sin] **Mt 22:12** 'Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?' And he was speechless
- [worship] **Ps 65:1** There will be silence before Thee (לֵךְ רַמְיָהּ²), and praise in Zion, O God; And to Thee the vow will be performed.
- [meditation?] **Rev 8:1** When the Lamb opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.

3.3. GREATER THAN OUR EXPERIENCE

- **2 Kings 7:2** Then the captain on whose hand the king leaned said to the man of God, "If the LORD himself should make windows in heaven, could this thing be?" But he said, "You shall see it with your own eyes, but you shall not eat of it."

3.4. GREATER THAN OUR SCIENCE

- **Isa 6:9-10** "Go, and say to this people: "' Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive.' ¹⁰ Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed."

4. TO REMEMBER

- If we desire the true knowledge of God, we have to begin with recognizing the absolute difference between us and Divinity.
- To approach the immensity of God in our minds we need to get rid/repent of our puffed up knowledge and harsh language about God.
- To “know” the *immensity* of God is possible only through God’s self-disclosure and our openness to wonder and worship of his infinitude.