

**THE
ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

**MINUTES OF THE
FIFTEENTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

**MEETING AT
WILDWOOD, NEW JERSEY**

MAY 13 - 18, 1948



**Published by
THE ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

**REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ELECTED BY THE FOURTEENTH
GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
TO STUDY THE INCOMPREHENSIBILITY OF GOD, ETC.**

Dear Brethren:

The Thirteenth General Assembly adopted the following motion:

"Whereas the purity and the peace of The Orthodox Presbyterian Church are of the deepest concern to the General Assembly, and

"Whereas 'to the General Assembly . . . belongs the power of deciding in all controversies regarding doctrine . . . ' (Form of Government, XI, 5), and

"Whereas there has appeared to be a difference in our Church concerning the Scriptural teaching pertaining to the doctrines of the incomprehensibility of God, the position of the intellect in reference to other faculties, the relation of divine sovereignty and human responsibility, and the free offer of the gospel,

"Be it resolved that Messrs. Murray, Clowney, R. Gray, W. Young and Stonehouse be appointed to study these doctrines in the light of Scripture and the Westminster Standards in relation to all expressions of views on the doctrines that have appeared or may appear in connection with the discussion of the Complaint against the Presbytery of Philadelphia in the matter of the licensure and ordination of Dr. Gordon H. Clark, for the purpose of clarifying these matters, and report to the Fourteenth General Assembly" (Minutes, p. 112).

This committee labored diligently and submitted to the Fourteenth Assembly a report on the doctrine of the incomprehensibility of God. The Fourteenth General Assembly, however, chiefly because of lack of time to hear and discuss the report, did not receive the report. Instead the Fourteenth General Assembly provided by motion: "That the docket be amended to eliminate the Report of the Committee to Study Certain Doctrines . . ." "that a committee of six be elected to continue the study . . ." and "that the committee be requested to report to the Fifteenth General Assembly" (Minutes, p. 44). After the request of Mr. Gray that his name be withdrawn, the committee was reconstituted by ballot with the following members: W. Young, Clowney, Murray, Kuschke, Stonehouse, and Hamilton (pp. 44 and 46).

The reconstituted committee now presents to the Fifteenth General Assembly its reports on the doctrine of the incomprehensibility of God, the doctrine of the effect of regeneration on intellectual activities of the soul, and the doctrine of the free offer of the gospel. In the case of its report on the doctrine of the incomprehensibility of God, the committee has availed itself of materials which were prepared by the committee appointed by the Thirteenth General Assembly, but has made certain alterations in those materials. The committee voted to include as an "Appendix" a study prepared by one member of the committee on "The Incomprehensibility of God according to Certain 19th and 20th Century Theologians."

The committee has not been able to enter upon studies of the primacy of the intellect, or of the relation of God's sovereignty to human responsibility.

The committee voted to submit to the General Assembly as minority reports, the "Minority Report on the Effect of Regeneration on Intellectual Activities of the Soul", signed by Mr. Young; and the "Minority Report on the Effect of Sin and Regeneration on the Intellectual Activities of the Soul" signed by Mr. Hamilton and Mr. Young, and by Mr. Clowney with reservation; and the "Minority Report on the Free Offer of the Gospel", signed by Mr. Young and Mr. Hamilton.

Respectfully submitted,

ARTHUR W. KUSCHKE, Jr.

Chairman of the Committee

THE INCOMPREHENSIBILITY OF GOD

I—The Doctrine of the Incomprehensibility of God in the Reformed Theology of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries

That incomprehensibility was regarded as one of the attributes of God in the Reformed theology of the Reformation period appears in the fact that it is stated to be such in the creeds of the period. It is coordinated with other attributes such as simplicity, spirituality, eternity, immutability, infinity, ineffability (Belgic Confession, Art. I; French Confession, Art. 1; Scots Confession, Art. 1; Westminster Confession, Chapt. II, Sect. I; The Larger Catechism, Q. 7; Bohemian Confession, Arts. II and III).

The question arises as to the precise meaning of the word "incomprehensibility". This question is somewhat perplexed by the consideration that there does not appear to be complete uniformity in the creeds themselves and by the fact that, in contemporary usage, at least two distinct, though closely related, meanings were attached to the word when viewed as designating an attribute of God.

An instance of the lack of uniformity appears in the Larger Catechism when compared with the Westminster Confession. The Westminster Confession distinguishes between "immensity" and "incomprehensibility." The Larger Catechism does not mention immensity. But the proof text given in the Catechism in support of incomprehensibility is one of the two given in the Confession in support of immensity, namely, I Kings 8:27. It is most reasonable, therefore, to conclude that what the Catechism means by "incomprehensible" the Confession denoted by "immense" and that, when the Catechism says God is incomprehensible, it means God is immense.

These two distinct meanings of the word incomprehensible as applied to God appear to spring from two distinct meanings of the Latin word *comprehendo*. This word in Latin has of course various shades of meaning. But the two meanings that give rise to these two distinct meanings of the word "incomprehensible" are (1) "to contain" (2) "to understand." Immensity is related to the former; incomprehensibility, in the sense of incomprehensibility to the created understanding, to the latter.

It is difficult to ascertain the precise sense in which the word "incomprehensible" is used in the Belgic and French Confessions. In the Scots Confession, however, "incomprehensible" is distinguished from "unmeasurable," which in the Latin is rendered by *immensus*. The Scots Confession may, therefore, be taken to use the word "incomprehensible" in the second sense and as relating, therefore, to the created understanding. The same is also undoubtedly true in the case of the Westminster Confession, both because of the distinction drawn and because of the proof texts used. The Bohemian Confession also in both Art. II and Art. III distinguishes between *immensus* and *incomprehensibilis*.

In any case, the term "incomprehensibility," viewed as an attribute of God, is embedded in the Reformed Confessions and in some, particularly in the Westminster Confession, it is used with reference to that perfection of God by which He is incomprehensible to the created understanding.

In John Calvin there appears to be a double use of the word "incomprehensible" (*incomprehensibilis*); sometimes it is apparently used in the sense of immense, at other times in the sense of incomprehensible to created understanding. In Inst. I, xiii, 1 the former seems to be the meaning. Two considerations in support of this conclusion may be mentioned: (1) In this paragraph Calvin is dealing with the immensity (*immensitas*) and spirituality (*spiritualis natura*) of God as the two attributes that should restrain our carnal speculation and keep us within the bounds of sobriety. It is in this context that he uses the word "incomprehensible" (*incomprehensibilis*). (2) In one sentence he appears

to define incomprehensibility in terms of God's filling the earth. At least the latter is a consequence of the former. And he proceeds forthwith to accuse the Manicheans of disrupting the unity and restraining the immensity of God.

In obvious contrast, however, with this use of the word "incomprehensible" is Calvin's use of the word elsewhere in the *Institutes* and in other works. Notable in this regard are his comments on Romans 11:33, 34. He is dealing with the relation of the unrevealed will of God to the human understanding and it is in that context he uses the word "incomprehensible" (*incomprehensibilis*). The notion of immensity (*immensitas*) found in *Institutes* I, xiii, 1 cannot be applied to the use of the word "incomprehensible" here.

The question arises, however, as to the sense in which Calvin is using the word "incomprehensible" when it has reference to the human understanding. There are two alternatives, namely, "incapable of being fully understood" or "inapprehensible." The Latin word *comprehendo* has again two distinct meanings—to *comprehend* in the sense of exhaustive and complete understanding and to *apprehend* in the sense of intelligent cognition and apprehension. If Calvin is using the word "incomprehensible" in terms of the former we might render it by "incomprehensible," if in terms of the latter it would mean "inapprehensible."

The question here is not whether Calvin taught that all of God's revelation is incomprehensible to man in the sense that it transcends full comprehension. In his comments on Romans 11:34 he indicates that all of God's mysteries far exceed the comprehension of our mind. The question at this point is simply the meaning he attaches to the word "incomprehensible."

A careful examination will show, we believe, that he is using the word, not in the sense of that which transcends comprehensive understanding on the part of man but rather in the sense that the object is shut off from our understanding because God has not revealed it to us. Dealing, as he is, with the secret counsel of God he means that we have now no access to it and it is therefore shut off not simply from comprehensive understanding, but also from human apprehension.

This use of the word "incomprehensible" is illustrated in his treatise, *The Eternal Predestination of God*, particularly at the end. And the same concept of the incomprehensible and the same use of the word "incomprehensible" appears also in the *Institutes* (cf., especially, I, xvi, 9 and I, xvii, 2).

Not only does this meaning of the word appear in connection with his exposition respecting the secret counsel of God but also when he deals with the incomprehensibility of the divine essence (see *Institutes* I, v, 1; I, v, 9; I, x, 2; I, xi, 3). It can hardly be claimed that in these sections he is using the word "incomprehensible" merely in the sense of "transcending comprehensive understanding." It is rather used in the sense of "beyond human apprehension." For his insistence is that the nature of the divine essence is in a different category from the mysteries revealed in the Word. We do not know God as He is in Himself (*quis sit apud se*). It is in this sense and for that reason that the divine essence is "incomprehensible"—it is shut off from our apprehension and is, therefore, in our language, inapprehensible.

In the light of Calvin's use of the word "incomprehensible" it is not defensible to appeal to these passages that deal with the incomprehensibility of the divine essence and of God's secret counsel to show that Calvin taught the doctrine of the incomprehensibility of God in the sense in which God is said to be incomprehensible in the Westminster Confession. For, if Calvin's use of the word "incomprehensible" were applied thus, it would mean that God is inapprehensible, a doctrine which Calvin did not teach. Greater care must be exercised, therefore, in citing and quoting these passages from Calvin in which he says God's essence and secret counsel are incomprehensible.

There are, however, two reservations that require to be made in connection with this use of the word "incomprehensible" in Calvin's works. (1) It does

not follow that, in Calvin's esteem, the reason for the inapprehensibility of the divine essence is the same as the reason for the inapprehensibility of the secret counsel. We must remember that for Calvin the divine essence respects the immanent being of God: the secret counsel respects His works and the government of the world. The former is essentially intrinsic, the latter is extrinsic to Himself. (2) When Calvin affirms that the divine essence is inapprehensible, he does not mean that we can make no predications concerning it. He does not mean that God has given us no revelation whatsoever respecting His essence. He says that God speaks but rarely of His essence (I, xiii, 1). But this implies that God has given us some revelation respecting His essence. Spirituality and immensity he speaks of as attributes which remove gross imaginations and suppress the audacity of the human mind (*idem*). And he also says that the divine essence is simple and indivisible (I, xiii, 2 and 22). There are therefore certain attributes of the essence which we may and must affirm. And there are, also, certain predications which must be made respecting the secret counsel. For these reasons we must conclude that the "inapprehensibility" affirmed of both the divine essence and the secret counsel does not mean complete absence of predication. The inapprehensibility affirmed is rather that of drawing a sharp line of distinction between the divine essence and the secret counsel, on the one hand, and the mysteries which God has so clearly revealed to us in His Word, on the other. Even though the latter far transcend human comprehension and in that sense are incomprehensible, yet it is in connection with the former that the limitations placed upon the human understanding are particularly conspicuous.

It must be admitted, however, that considerable difficulty attaches to Calvin's use of the word "incomprehensible" as applied to the divine essence and to the secret counsel, particularly to the former. On the one hand, the meaning he attaches to the word in these connections is to be carefully distinguished from the meaning we attach to the word, namely, "incapable of being fully understood." On the other hand, his use of the word, particularly as applied to the divine essence, does not mean the complete absence of predication. Consequently, though our word "inapprehensible" is the closest synonym, we must not associate with this word in these connections total inapprehensibility or even total inapprehension.

Some very important observations must be made at this point. When Calvin uses the word "incomprehensible" in the sense defined above, namely "inapprehensible," he does not say God is incomprehensible. He speaks rather of the divine essence or secret counsel as incomprehensible. In this same sense it would be quite non-Calvinian to speak of God (without qualification) as incomprehensible. Hence, when in the Reformed Confessions, God is said to be "incomprehensible," when incomprehensibility is predicated of God as an attribute, this cannot be in the sense in which Calvin uses the word, namely, "inapprehensible," but rather in the sense of "beyond comprehensive understanding." To aver, therefore, that God is incomprehensible except as He reveals Himself to us is neither in accord with Calvin's usage nor is it in accord with the usage of the Reformed confessions. When incomprehensibility is viewed as an attribute of God, the evidence dealt with above shows that one of two things can be meant, either the immensity of God (as in Larger Catechism, Q. 7) or the incomprehensibility of God in the sense that He is not capable of being comprehensively understood or known by the human understanding.

In other Reformed theologians we do find that incomprehensibility is conceived of in terms of immensity as in Calvin's Institutes I, xiii, 1 and in the Larger Catechism. But this usage is relatively infrequent. This notion probably appears in Amesius: *Medulla Theologica*, Cap. IV, "Concerning God and His Essence," Section 46, and is probably implied in Gomarus: *Concerning the True God*, Section XXXVII. The most frequent and rather uniform meaning ascribed to incomprehensibility is the relation of God's being and glory to the human under-

standing. The immensity of God is frequently appealed to as a reason or even the reason for God's incomprehensibility, but the latter is not defined in terms of immensity.

Of the two meanings that could attach to this notion of incomprehensibility, namely, "beyond comprehensive understanding" and "inapprehensible" it is the former that rules rather than the latter.

One of the clearest statements appears in Leydecker: *Medulla Theologica*, "De Deo," Cap. III, Sections XXIX, XXX. Here he treats of incomprehensibility under the attribute of infinity as the fourth respect under which the infinity of God may be viewed. He proceeds: "Fourthly, the infinity of God may also be considered in respect of the created intellect and so it is said, God is incomprehensible. Psal. 145:3; Job 11:9; Rom. 11:33,34; I Tim. 6:16 . . . wherefore to no creature in whatsoever state does a comprehensive and adequate knowledge of God belong; but only apprehensive and inadequate: from the infinity of the object and the disproportion between it and the finite subject.

"It does not follow from this, however, that our knowledge concerning God is erroneous, as if we knew otherwise than the truth itself is in God; for we know in God those perfections, which truly and formally are in Him; and at the same time we know that these perfections are in God by a more perfect mode than we are able to comprehend" (cf. also Leydecker's *Synopsis Theologiae Christianae*, Cap. VI, Sections XXXV, XXXVI, where, instead of subsuming incomprehensibility under the infinity of God, he rather coordinates incomprehensibility with the attributes of spirituality, immutability, and adorability).

Another equally clear and even fuller statement of what is meant by the incomprehensibility of God appears in John Owen: *A Declaration of the Mystery of the Person of Christ*, Chapt. V, Sections 1, 2 and 3 (Works, London, 1826, Vol. XII, pp. 85ff.).

"God in his own essence, being, and existence, is absolutely incomprehensible. His nature being immense, and all his holy properties essentially infinite, no creature can directly or perfectly comprehend them, or any of them. He must be infinite that can perfectly comprehend that which is infinite; wherefore God is perfectly known unto himself only; but as for us how little a portion is heard of him! Hence he is called the 'invisible God,' and said to dwell in light inaccessible. . . . Therefore we can have no direct intuitive notions or apprehensions of the divine essence, or its properties. Such knowledge is too wonderful for us. Whatever is pleaded for an intellectual vision of the essence of God in the light of glory, yet none pretend unto a possibility of an immediate full comprehension of it. . . . All the rational conceptions of the minds of men are swallowed up, and lost, when they would exercise themselves directly on that which is absolutely immense, eternal, infinite. . . . We have no means, no corporeal, no intellectual instrument or power for the comprehension of him. . . . That God is in himself absolutely incomprehensible unto us, is a necessary effect of our infinite distance from him. . . . But as to the being of God, and his subsistence in the Trinity of persons, we have no direct intuition unto them, much less comprehension of them. . . . Yet must it be granted that no mere creature, not the angels above, not the heaven of heavens, are meet or able to receive upon them such character of the divine excellencies as to be a complete satisfactory representation of the being and properties of God, unto us. They are all finite and limited and so cannot properly represent that which is infinite and immense. . . . Yet there are such effects of God's glory in them, such impressions of divine excellencies upon them, as we cannot comprehend nor search out unto perfection. How little do we conceive of the nature, glory, and power of angels? So remote are we from an immediate comprehension of the uncreated glory of God, as that we cannot fully apprehend, nor conceive aright, the reflection of it on creatures in themselves finite and limited."

The following observations regarding Owen's statement may be made:

(a) Owen gives great prominence if not the primary place to the immensity of God as the reason for His incomprehensibility. But he does not equate the two. The latter is rather the relation of God's infinity and immensity to our apprehension or understanding.

(b) It is not simply the divine essence that is incomprehensible but also the sum-total of God's glory.

(c) Even the representations of the divine glory in and upon finite things are incomprehensible.

See also the following in elucidation and confirmation of this concept of incomprehensibility:

Stephen Charnock: *A Discourse upon God's Omnipresence*, IV, 1, (5) (*Complete Works*, Edinburgh, 1864, Vol. I, pp. 447ff.).

Henry Bullinger: *Decades*, English Translation, Vol. IV, pp. 123ff.

Francis Turretine: *Institutio*: Loc. I, Quaest. IX, Sections 8 and 9.

Richard Baxter: *Of the Knowledge of God*, Chap. IV, Sections 2 and 3; Chap. V, Section 1.

Thomas Watson: *A Body of Practical Divinity*, "God Is Infinite," Glasgow, 1844, p. 40.

B. DeMoor: *Commentarius*, Cap. IV, Sections XI, XVIII.

J. Maccovius: *Loci Communes Theologici*, Cap. XVI.

Ulrich Zwingli: *Works*, English Translation, Vol. III, pp. 67f.

Thomas Ridgeley: *A Body of Divinity*, New York, 1855, Vol. I, pp. 90f.

Summary. The following summation of conclusions respecting the Reformed theology of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries may be presented.

(1) There is not complete uniformity in the use of the word "incomprehensible." Sometimes it means "immense" and at other times "incomprehensible to the created understanding."

(2) These two uses of the word are closely related. The latter springs from the former.

(3) The latter sense is, however, the more prevalent and uniform use. In this sense incomprehensibility has relevance and meaning only in reference to the finite intelligence.

(4) In this second sense there are also two distinct meanings, one of which may be rendered by our word "inapprehensible," the other by "incomprehensible." In the sense of "inapprehensible" the word is not applied to God without qualification. In Calvin's works this meaning occurs, and it is applied by him to the secret counsel of God and to the divine essence. The meaning "incomprehensible," as distinguished from "inapprehensible," is predicated of God without any qualification.

(5) This meaning "incomprehensible," as applied to God without qualification, is the prevailing usage. Its import is that we cannot have a complete or "adequate" or exhaustive knowledge of God.

(6) This incapacity resides in our finitude and creaturehood.

(7) It is not simply the divine essence that is "incomprehensible" but also the glory of God as revealed. The mysteries revealed in the Word far transcend the comprehension of our minds.

(8) When incomprehensibility is predicated of God as an attribute one of two things is intended, either "immensity" or "incomprehensibility" (as distinguished from "inapprehensibility"). In either of these senses God is absolutely incomprehensible.

(9) The Larger Catechism predicates incomprehensibility of God apparently in the former sense, the Westminster Confession in the latter. In both there is no qualification, and this attribute is coordinated with other attributes such as omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence.

II—Scriptural Doctrine

1. Broad Foundation

The doctrine of the incomprehensibility of God is taught in Scripture both by implication and by direct statement. Were there no express formulations of this truth, the revelation of the lofty transcendence and metaphysical holiness of the God of Scripture would require us to understand this aspect of the glory of the Creator in relation to His creatures. But in addition to being everywhere presupposed and implied, this truth does find explicit expression in both the Old and New Testaments.

No adequate analysis of the revelation of the nature of God, which demands this doctrine, can be attempted in this report, but all the aspects of the divine transcendence have bearing on the incomprehensibility of God. God as God, in all His attributes, surpasses the comprehension of created intellects. The doctrine of incomprehensibility describes the relation of God's being and attributes to the grasp of created knowledge. It is not an essential attribute of God in itself, for apart from created intelligence it would have no application, but it indicates an essential condition of the knowledge of the creature necessarily flowing from the absolute glory of God.

The transcendence of God as the absolute Creator is the theme of the first verse of Scripture, and the development of the proposition of Gen. 1:1 in the first two chapters of the Bible lays the foundation upon which all of revelation stands (cf. Isa. 29:14-16). As revelation unfolds, the exaltation of God above nature, man, and the false idols of man's manufacture is presented in gathering power and distinctness.

That God's dwelling is exalted above the created universe is a presupposition of the earliest revelation, and His power over nature, manifested in the catastrophe of the flood, is implied in the very names **God**, and **Lord (Adonai)** by which He is designated. In the patriarchal period the name **El Elyon** (Gen. 14:18) indicates His transcendence above creation, and He reveals Himself as **El Shaddai** (Gen. 17:1; 35:11) the God who overcomes nature to bring about His purposes of grace, the God of the miracle. This absolute sovereignty over nature remains throughout Scripture as characteristic of the true God, the God of marvelous works and wonders, Whose path is in the storm, Who laid the foundations of the earth, stretched out the heavens, marked the boundaries of the seas and weighed the mountains in His balance. At His rebuke the earth dissolves and the heavens are rolled up as a scroll, but He remains, eternal, for Him, and through Him, and unto Him are all things. Christ manifests this Sovereignty over creation in His miracles, and His deity is affirmed in terms of His Creatorhood as the One Who made all things, and in Whom all things consist.

The glorious Being of God is also exalted above the imaginations of the idol-worshippers. He is the only God, and the living God (Dt. 4:39; 32:39; Josh. 1:11; 3:11; I Sam. 2:2; II Sam. 7:22,26; I Kings 8:23-27). This strand of revelation reaches sublime heights in the major prophets where the materiality, limitation, and powerlessness of the idols become a foil for the triumphant proclamation of the transcendent spirituality, infinitude, and omnipotence of the Sovereign God (Cf. espec. Isaiah, chapters 40-46).

Of closer pertinence to our subject is the transcendence of God over men. This appears most characteristically in the presentation of the holiness and glory of God. These closely connected (1) attributes of God are both characterized by an intensity of meaning which far more than saturates the human understanding, and their significance is conveyed by figure and symbol rather

- (1) Glory may be conceived as the out-going, the operation, of holiness, whether in the intra-Trinitarian sphere or in relation to the creatures.

than by direct statement. Fallen man's consciousness of sin cannot but emphasize, when quickened by grace, that aspect of holiness which contrasts most sharply with the guilt and pollution of his condition. It is both fitting and necessary that the Scriptural representation of the holiness of God lays primary emphasis on God's moral holiness as the Righteous One. This limited significance is derived, however, from a wider meaning of holiness which comprehends not only the moral excellence of God, but the transcendence of all His Being. Isaiah beholds a vision of the Lord high and lifted up, and is immediately overcome with the consciousness of the pollution of his sin before the holy God, but the seraphim, who have no need for the cleansing coal from the altar, also cover their faces with their wings and cry, Holy, Holy, Holy!

The awe invariably produced by the manifestations of the holiness of the glory of God in the history of redemption cannot be isolated from a perception of the metaphysical holiness of God which appears even in those revelations which primarily confronted man as a sinner with the Righteous One, such as those connected with the giving and administration of the ceremonial law (see Ex. 3:11-15; 15:11; 40:34-38; Dt. 4:24; I Sam. 2:2; 6:19; Lev. 10:3, etc.).

The physical manifestations of the presence and glory of God, in whatever form, have the effect of stunning the human senses. The fierce glory of Sinai reflected from the face of Moses is more than the people can bear; the prophets Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel are smitten down in their visions; Paul falls down blinded on the road to Damascus; and John falls at the feet of the glorified Christ as one dead. It is significant, in this connection, that God's presence at Sinai is in the thick darkness (Ex. 20:21, cf. 24:2; 24:16; I Kings 8:12), and that in the appearance to Elijah God is not in the rock-rending wind, the earthquake, or in the fire, but in the "sound of gentle stillness." The ineffability of God in sensible representations is of course directly taught in these manifestations, and that lesson is applied in the matter of graven images: Israel saw no form at Sinai, and is therefore to make no image (Dt. 4:12,15). But the symbolism of such manifestations is also important. When Moses, after requesting to be shown God's glory, is granted a vision of God's back, after His glory has passed by, and told that no man can see His face and live, the symbolism of the act clearly declares that Moses cannot possibly bear to receive a revelation of the full essential glory of God. Cf. also Dt. 5:25; I Sam. 6:19; Judges 6:11-24; 13:22-23; I John 4:12; John 1:18. This lesson again appears in symbolic language in I Tim. 6:15: "dwelling in light unapproachable, whom no man hath seen, nor can see."

The manifestation of the fearful glory and holiness of God so characterizes the revelation of the Old Testament that the "fear of Jehovah" becomes the typical phrase to express piety (e.g. I Kings 18:3). This fear is not paralyzed terror, however, but a religious perception of the nature of Jehovah, leading to a life of obedience to His commands, and worship of His glory.

The transcendence of God over man appears not only when man is confronted with the holiness and glory of God, but is affirmed in many contrasts between the attributes of God and the characteristics of men. "God is not a man" that he should repent (Num. 23:19; I Sam. 15:29; Ezek. 24:14), "I am God, and not man" (Hos. 11:9), the perfection (Ex. 15:11), self-existence (Ps. 33:11; 115:3, Is. 40:1-31; Dan. 4:35; John 5:26; Acts 17:25; Rev. 4:11), immutability (Num. 23:19; Ps. 102:27; Mal. 3:6; Heb. 6:17; Jas. 1:17), eternity (Dt. 33:27; Ps. 90:2; 102:27; Ex. 3:14; John 8:58; Rev. 1:4) and immensity (I Kings 8:27; Ps. 139:7-10; Isa. 66:1; Jer. 23:23; Acts 17:27,28) of God all reveal Him as transcendent. He is sovereign, omnipotent, omniscient, holy, true, and merciful in absolute and original fashion far surpassing any approach to any of these qualities as they are found among men.

When the fullness of Being of such a God is compared with the span of finite intelligence, the disproportion between so transcendent an Object and so

limited an instrument demands the doctrine of incomprehensibility. The history of redemption bears out this doctrine wherever the finite creature is confronted by his Creator and the course of revelation brings this doctrine to express formulation.

2. Grouping of Various Elements

The following passages are the chief explicit formulations of Scripture of the doctrine of Incomprehensibility Gen. 32:29; Judges 13:2-23; Neh. 9:5; Job 5:9; 9:10; 11:7-12; 26:14; 37:23; cf. 42:3; Psalms 36:6; 40:5; 92:5; 139:6; 145:3; 147:5; cf. 131:1; Is. 9:6; 40:12-28; 55:8-11; Rom. 11:33; I Cor. 2:16. Cf. also Rom. 9:19; John 6:44; Matt. 11:25-27.

For convenience in studying these passages we group them according to leading words and ideas:

1. God's knowledge and being is wonderful, incomprehensible. Ps. 139:6; Judges 13:18; cf. Gen. 32:29; Is. 9:6.

These passages are grouped about the word "wonderful," the Hebrew root *pl'*. The adjective, *pl'* occurs only twice in the Old Testament, in the two first references given above. The noun, *pele'* is used in Is. 9:6. The verb, *pala'* occurs frequently, and lexicographers think it probable that it is derived from a root meaning to separate, with the sense of separating from the ordinary. The verb has, in its various voices, the following meanings: Niphal: be surpassing, extraordinary; Hiphil: do a hard thing, do wonderfully, marvelously; Hithpael: show oneself marvelous—i.e. act inexplicably (Job 10:6). The noun means wonder, and is used for God's miracles and marvelous providences. (Cf. Ex. 15:11; Is. 29:14). In Is. 9:6 Christ is promised as a "Wonder of a Counsellor," or a "Wonder, (and) a Counsellor." Brown, Driver, & Briggs, the standard Hebrew-English lexicon, gives the meaning of the adjective used in Ps. 139:6 as wonderful, incomprehensible. Hebrew is not a technical language, but the use of this root and of the adjective appears to warrant this translation. "Such knowledge is too wonderful (incomprehensible), I cannot attain unto it." The Psalmist has been marveling at God's omniscience, and here declares that he can only wonder at it, that it passes his comprehension. However, the adjective cannot very well be pushed to mean inapprehensible, in view of the usage of other forms of the root. Ps. 119:129 declares, "thy testimonies are wonderful, therefore doth my soul keep them. The opening of thy words giveth light: it giveth understanding to the simple." The noun is used here, and translated by the English adjective "wonderful." "Inapprehensible" would here be out of the question: obviously the Psalmist cannot be saying, "Thy testimonies are completely un-understandable; therefore doth my soul keep them," etc. And the broader term "wonderful" does fit the thought better than the word "incomprehensible" here. A similar situation is found in verse 18 of Psalm 119: "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law."

In Judges 13:18 the Angel of Jehovah replies to Manoah, "Wherefore askest thou after my name, seeing it is wonderful?" The RV margin translates the adjective here "secret." Manoah asks the question under the mistaken impression that the Angel is only a man of God, a prophet, and the reply of the angel points him to His supernatural character. The answer may also imply that Manoah could not receive the revelation of the Name of God, which in Scripture represents the very nature of God, either because of his personal lack of discernment, or because of the essential glory of that Name. If the latter is the sense, this passage would still agree in teaching with the account of the theophany before Moses in Ex. 34, where, although God does proclaim His Name, rather than withhold it as here, yet the symbolism indicates that Moses could not bear a full revelation of the glory of God's nature and Name.

Just as the works of God in the world of nature surpass human comprehension and are wonderful—His mighty deliverances, His miraculous working—

so the attributes of God, of which the miraculous works are but earthly sensible manifestations are wonderful, and excite marvelling worship in the redeemed.

2. God's greatness and understanding, judgments and ways, are unsearchable. Ps. 145:3; Isaiah 40:12-28; Job 5:9; 9:10; 11:7-12. Cf. Rom. 11:33.

Psalm 145:3—"His greatness is unsearchable." Lit. "To his greatness there is nothing of searching." The noun used here for searching **hequer** is from the same root as the verb **haquar** to search. The verb is used in a literal sense of searching through the land for the scattered bones of the dead, of the exploring search of a city, of mining; and in a figurative sense of searching a subject, or a man's heart. Ps. 139:1 uses it of the Lord's all-penetrating search of the human heart; Lam. 3:40 of the searching of self-examination. The noun has a similar use: in Judges 5:16 it refers to the great searchings of heart of Reuben at the watercourses. In Job 38:16: "Hast thou entered into the springs of the Sea? Or hast thou walked in the recesses of the deep?"—the same noun is translated by "recesses." Here the **searchings**, i.e., the thing to be searched, implies not only the ranges of the deep, but the inmost, most profound parts in particular, being parallel in idea to the "springs of the sea." The searching here indicated by the noun is of the most intensive and exhaustive kind, "deep-searching," an all-penetrating examination. The noun is also used in Proverbs 25:3, in the same phrase as occurs in Ps. 145:3. In the Proverbs passage, the heart of kings is said to be unsearchable. This could not very well mean that it is impossible to gain any knowledge whatsoever about the heart of kings, but must mean that the range of the heart of kings, "as the heavens for height, and the earth for depth" cannot be searched out. It is the exhaustive searching which is impossible. Ps. 145:3, like Ps. 139:6 teaches the incomprehensibility, but not the inapprehensibility of God. The same force of "searching" appears in Job 11:7, where Zophar declares, "Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? (Lit. "unto the end of Shaddai wilt thou reach?" i.e. so as to know him fully. The root meaning of the noun for **end**, **completeness** here comes from the idea of enclosure). The parallelism of this verse again indicates that the searching spoken of is a deep-searching of an exhaustive character. The RV margin gives as an alternate translation of this first clause "Canst thou find out the deep things of God?"

The verb to **find out**, which appears here is used also in Job 37:23, "Touching the Almighty, we cannot find him out." Brown, Driver & Briggs give the meaning as used in these passages as **find out thoroughly, explore**. In Ecclesiastes 3:11; 8:17 (cf. 7:24) this word is used of finding out all the works of God under the sun, in the sense of attaining to a comprehensive, adequate understanding of them. **Matza'** is a very common verb in Scripture and may be used of **finding, finding out or attaining to** in a wide range of meanings.

This truth of the unsearchability of the Almighty is taught in the other Job passages, and in Isaiah 40:28. It is also emphatically asserted by Paul in Romans 11:33. "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past tracing out!" Paul looks with awe upon the inexhaustible abundance—the depth of the riches of the knowledge of God. (Cf. I Cor. 2:10). The judgments of God are unsearchable—**anekserunetos**. His ways past tracing out—**aneksixniastoi**. Paul has just been revealing, according to the wisdom given him of God, many things hard to be understood, as Peter says. The judgments of God with respect to Israel have been the particular subject of this revelation. He surely does not mean that we can have no knowledge of the judgments he has just been discussing. On the other hand it is plain throughout these chapters, how much there is that surpasses our understanding, and Paul here is emphatically asserting that the full depth and significance of these judgments of God must forever escape us. The parallel term—"past tracing out"—is used in the Septuagint in

Job 5:9; 9:10 and 34:24. Paul's worshiping statement here is drawn from the heart of the O. T. revelation of the incomprehensibility of God. It is an absolute incomprehensibility. The formulations of unsearchability do not allow us to suppose that God's greatness is merely temporarily beyond our grasp, or that our sin has clouded what would otherwise be an adequate knowledge of His nature. It is the greatness, the sovereignty, the deity of God which is unsearchable, and that unsearchability must remain for all creatures so long as He is the Great Jehovah, the Sovereign El Shaddai, the Lord God.

Psalms 36:6, "Thy judgments are a great deep," and Psalm 92:5, "Thy thoughts are very deep," are two additional passages which teach the doctrine of unsearchability, by implication, if not by direct statement.

3. God's understanding is infinite. Ps. 147:5; cf. Ps. 40:5; 139:17; Job 11:6.

4. God's name is exalted above all blessing and praise. Neh. 9:5.

This statement occurs in one of the most eloquent passages of the Bible, where the history of the Old Testament is summed up, and God's glory and praise is seen manifested in it, despite the repeated sin and failure of His people. His name is glorified and praised in the passage, but no blessing or praise can adequately extol His High and Holy Name.

5. God's thoughts and ways are exalted above man's. Is. 55:8,9.

The wicked and the unrighteous is invited to forsake his ways and thoughts and return unto the Lord, who will have mercy and abundantly pardon. The first contrast is that of the righteousness of the thoughts and ways of Jehovah as over against the people's sin. A second exaltation of the thoughts and ways of the Lord lies in their unimagined mercy and grace. Still a third contrast may be implied by the succeeding verses in that the thoughts and ways of Jehovah have a sovereign efficacy unknown to man: the Word of the Lord is unfailingly productive of God's good pleasure. Here again the extreme of exaltation, the heights of heaven) is ascribed to the thoughts and ways of the Lord.

From the evidence of Scripture the absolute character of God's incomprehensibility emerges clearly. Transcendent above the universe He framed; transcendent above man whom He formed in His image; transcendent in living reality and truth above the loftiest imaginations of men and the mightiest angelic beings of His creation, God in all His attributes surpasses infinitely the comprehension of finite intelligence. No fullness of revelation given to man can possibly diminish the reality of this truth. God is not more or less incomprehensible as He is more or less known, for no matter how much a creature may know of Him, it is still absolutely true that he cannot comprehend Him. This remains the essential limitation of human thought, not in an arbitrary or mechanical sense, that man's knowledge is brought to a certain line beyond which an advance is not permitted (although God's sovereignty may impose such a barrier in His own good pleasure), but in the sense of the essential disproportion between the infinite fullness, the depth and height and breadth of the riches of the being and knowledge of God and the capacity of the intelligence of a finite and temporal creature.

The doctrine of incomprehensibility is never expressed in Scripture in such a way as to deny the knowability of God. It never becomes a doctrine of inapprehensibility. There is no support in Scripture for a dialectical position that would polarize a *Deus Absconditus* (Hidden God) and a *Deus Revelatus* (Revealed God). This doctrine does not negate or cancel in advance the revelation of positive knowledge concerning God found in the Bible. The atmosphere of Scripture is not the atmosphere of negative theology, and the doctrine of incomprehensibility found in Scripture is not expressed in the reckless, meaningless and self-contradictory language of those who pervert transcendence into an abstract, boundless, Otherness. (2)

On the other hand, Scripture plainly indicates that human knowledge of God from the very outset is a knowledge bounded by incomprehensibility and that the more we know of Him, the more we are confronted with the measureless vastness of His glory, the infinite perfection of His being, and the transcendence of His counsels (cf. Job 26:14).

3. Specific Treatment of Certain New Testament Passages

The revelation of the New Testament presupposes fully the revelation of the Old Testament, and thus also the doctrine of God set forth in the Old Testament. Neither in the teaching of Jesus nor in that of the apostles is there a new doctrine of God. The God whom Jesus proclaims is the Lord of heaven and earth (Mt. 11:25) and the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Mt. 22:32). The distinctiveness of the New Testament revelation is, therefore, only relative; it is the distinctiveness which is involved in the recognition that the God of creation and of the covenant revealed himself afresh in word and deed in the establishment of the new covenant. This revelation of the new covenant, as the fulfillment of the prophetic revelation of the old covenant, possesses an eschatological character. It heralds the arrival and expounds the significance of the coming of a new order through the manifestation of the power of God. Thus that new revelation may be subsumed under the doctrine of the coming of the kingdom of God. It is a revelation through signs and wonders which, in association with the revelation through words spoken with divine authority, bespeak the presence of God and his action in the accomplishment of his redemptive purposes. Though the revelation of the new covenant may be characterized in terms of the message of the kingdom and the miracles which disclosed the presence of the kingdom, it may more pointedly still be described as the revelation "in a Son" (Heb. 1:2). The revelation of the old covenant was concerning the son of God, Jesus Christ, but that of the new was a revelation which possessed finality and absoluteness because of the very presence of the Son of God. The incarnation of Jesus Christ is then the great fact and act of revelation with which the New Testament has to do.

That the manifestation of the Son of God among men constituted a glorious fact of divine revelation does not require special emphasis here. "The people that sat in darkness saw a great light" (Mt. 4:16). "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. . . . Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son (or, God only begotten), who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him" (Jn. 1:14-18). See also Mt. 11:25-27; 13:13-17; 16:17. These passages show that Jesus Christ, his words and works, constituted an objective revelation of God. But they also teach that there was an adequate apprehension of the revelation on the part of some only, namely on the part of the babes who were given eyes to see according to the good-pleasure of God.

Matthew 11:25-27

This passage, and the parallel passage in Luke 10:21,22, bears significantly upon the doctrine of the incomprehensibility of God. It emphatically teaches indeed the possibility and the reality of true knowledge of God and of His Son Jesus Christ, a knowledge based upon revelation, an apprehension granted by the Father and the Son in their good-pleasure. The things hid from the wise and understanding are revealed unto babes. The Son knows the Father but also men may know Him.

In spite of the accent which is placed upon the fact of revelation and the possibility and reality of human knowledge of God, however, there is another

- (2) It need hardly be said that the God of Scripture is not incomprehensible to Himself: the knowledge which man can never attain to, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have eternally. Cf. Mt. 11:25-27; 1 Cor. 2:9-16.

aspect of the passage that gives it pertinence to the present subject. For it clearly is concerned with the transcendence of the Son of God in the sphere of knowledge. What the passage states concerning the Son, in connection with what it states about the Father, constitutes it a completely unambiguous evidence of the ontological sonship, or deity, of Christ. It has been thus acknowledged because of the exact correspondence and reciprocity of the Father and the Son which is set forth.

This correspondence finds partial expression in what is said concerning the revelational activity of the Father and the Son. The Son reveals as well as the Father. And both do so in the exercise of their sovereignty. "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou . . . didst reveal them unto babes: yea, Father for so it was well-pleasing in thy sight" (Mt. 11:25). "Neither doth any know the Father save the Son and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal him" (11:27). The Son as well as the Father is described as sovereign revealer, and this description is a significant evidence of the deity of Christ.

What is said concerning the sovereignty of the Son's action, and what is affirmed concerning the Son's revealing activity, however, are far from exhausting the significance of the passage in this connection. The very heart and center of the passage is reached only when one considers what is said concerning the Son's knowledge in relation to the Father's knowledge. The revealing activity in the case of the Son, and evidently also in the case of the Father, is based upon the knowledge which is predicated. The terms in which the Son's knowledge of the Father and the Father's knowledge of the Son are described correspond so exactly, and are so extraordinary, that subordination of the Son to the Father is ruled out. "No one knoweth the Son save the Father; neither doth any know the Father save the Son" (v. 27). With an eye upon the whole of the Biblical revelation it is perhaps not extraordinary that the Father should be said to possess an absolutely exclusive knowledge of the Son. It has depths and heights which place it beyond human reach. Since it is divine knowledge there is no knowledge that is comparable with it. Surely all this is involved in the statement that "No one knoweth the Son save the Father."

In the context of the history of revelation, the more extraordinary feature of this passage is that Jesus immediately adds the stupendous claim that "neither doth any know the Father save the Son." The very terms that are used to set forth the absolutely exclusive knowledge of the Father concerning the Son are now employed to describe the Son's knowledge of the Father. The Son's exclusive knowledge of the Father, then, like the Father's exclusive knowledge of the Son, is a divine knowledge to which no human knowledge of God can be compared.

When now, on the background and alongside of such affirmations of exclusive knowledge, the passage speaks of human knowledge of the Father, it is clear that a most significant distinction is in view. It is crucial to gauge this distinction accurately. (1) The difference does not concern the object of knowledge. The Father is known by the Son and He may be known by men. Since the distinction does not concern the object known, it must relate to the difference in the apprehension of the object. (2) It is clear that the difference in apprehension goes beyond the fact that human apprehension is based upon revelation. The Son indeed is the revealer and men know only as the Son willeth to reveal. But the apprehension of the Son is described as an exclusive knowledge, and hence the difference in relation to revelation does not describe it fully. The knowledge of the Son is itself an incomparable knowledge which he possesses as Son just as the knowledge of the Father is an incomparable knowledge which he possesses as Father. This goes far beyond saying that the knowledge of the Son and of the Father is not an acquired knowledge. (3) The distinction between the Son's knowledge and human knowledge which is drawn

here is not viewed in terms of the extent of knowledge. The Son's knowledge is not described as complete in contrast to the partial knowledge which men possess. It does not take the form that the Son knows all about the Father whereas men may know only certain propositions about the Father. (4) The Son's apprehension as an absolutely exclusive apprehension is a divine knowledge; the apprehension on the part of men necessarily does not possess that exclusive, divine character which has been shown to be the mark of the Son's knowledge. The contrast in view involves the contrast between the divine subject (the Son) and human subjects, for the exclusiveness of the knowledge of the Son is bound up with his being the Son, that is, a divine person. The very evidence, therefore, which establishes the ontological sonship, or absolute deity, of Jesus demands the conclusion that a distinction in ontology between God and men is basic to the affirmations concerning the Son's knowledge of the Father and human knowledge of the Father. The Son knows the Father on the divine level of understanding: men may know the Father from the human level, the level of their creaturehood.

The teaching of Mt. 11:25-27 finds significant parallels in the Gospel according to John. There, too, the fact of the revelation of God through Jesus Christ is a conspicuous theme. The possibility and actuality of knowledge of God on the part of men is also emphatically set forth. "The Word became flesh . . . and we beheld his glory . . . he hath declared him" (John 1:14-18). "If ye had known me, ye would have known my Father also; from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him. . . . He that hath seen me hath seen the Father also" (14:7,9). "And this is life eternal, that they should know thee, the only true God, and him whom thou didst send, even Jesus Christ" (17:3; cf. 17:25f; 1:10; 16:3).

But a further significant point of contact between the Matthean passage and the teaching in John is found in the place given to the affirmation of the deity of Christ in connection with the subject of the knowledge of God. Jesus identifies knowledge of himself with knowledge of the Father: "if ye knew me, ye would know my Father also" (8:19; cf. 10:15; 14:7,9). With the same intent, Jesus uses the verb "see" when he says, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (14:9). Thus he makes himself one with the Father.

Jesus teaches, moreover, that the Son has an exclusive knowledge of the Father: "Not that any man hath seen the Father, save he that is from God; he hath seen the Father" (6:46). "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son (or, "God only begotten"), who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him" (1:18). In denying, then, that God hath been seen, the concern is not with the spirituality and invisibility of God. If the passages just quoted had to do with the invisibility of God, they would not state that the Son had seen God (cf. 14:7,9). These passages teach, accordingly, that the Son has an exclusive knowledge of God. The Son as the Son, as God only begotten, being in the bosom of the Father, being from the Father—in short, because of his absolutely unique relation to God as the eternal Son—alone hath seen and known God. It is on the background of this teaching concerning the deity of Christ, expressed in terms of the Son's original, essential and exclusive knowledge of God, that the Gospel sets forth the fact of revelation.

Alongside these truths the Gospel nevertheless teaches that men may see God (14:9; 11:40). The problem presented by the juxtaposition of the exclusiveness of the Son's knowledge of God and the affirmation of knowledge on the part of men is identical with that presented in connection with Mt. 11:25-27. And the answer must be found in the same terms. The ontological Son knows God as the Son, and therefore his knowledge is exclusive. As the knowledge of a divine person the knowledge itself is divine. When men nevertheless are said to know God, the distinctiveness of their apprehension can be explained only in terms of the distinctiveness of their nature as human beings.

Romans 11:33f.

Paul's ascription of praise to God in Romans 11:33f. is a crucial passage. In the translation of the ARV it reads: "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past tracing out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? . . ."

The passage has as its immediate background a consideration of certain judgments and ways of God which centers attention upon the marvelous disclosures of the mercy of God already realized and yet to be manifested. Although the ascription of praise is not isolated from the consideration of the divine revelation, it should be recognized that it does not consist of praise or thanksgiving for revelation. Basically the passage is an acknowledgment of the transcendence of God, and has largely to do with the transcendence of God in the sphere of knowledge. Turning from the consideration of specific manifestations of the justice and mercy of God, the apostle ascends here to a general contemplation of the transcendent knowledge and judgments of God. In spite of his own lack of comprehension, the devout child of God may rest in confidence in God whose knowledge is unfathomable and whose judgments are unsearchable.

In our judgment the apostle is not concerned here with the distinction between the secret counsel of God and his revealed will in the Scriptures. He is not affirming that, because God has not chosen to reveal it, the secret counsel is unsearchable. The contrast between the secret and revealed will is not drawn here. But certain affirmations are made concerning the wisdom, knowledge, judgments and ways of God in **absolute terms**. The wisdom and knowledge of God, without reservation or qualification, are said to possess inexhaustible wealth, or, in other words, to be unfathomable. His judgments are said to be such that they cannot be searched out; they are unfathomable. His ways cannot be traced out; they are **inexplorable**. As Hodge comments in this connection, "It is because God is infinite in his being, and incomprehensible in his judgments and in his ways, that he is an exhaustible source of knowledge and blessedness."

It is further to be observed that the transcendence of the divine knowledge in view in this passage is not that of the divine omniscience as contrasted with the partial character of human knowledge. The judgments and ways of God, even when the subject of revelation, and even when considered individually, are regarded as unfathomable and inexplorable. There inheres in them a quality of divinity, as judgments and ways of the infinite and transcendent God, which makes human comprehension impossible.

This interpretation of Rom. 11:33 receives support from the opening words of v. 34, which depends on Isaiah 40:13. The rhetorical question, "Who hath known the mind of the Lord?", emphatically implies that no one hath known the mind of the Lord. This is said without qualification; it is not qualified, for example, by making knowledge depend on revelation. The connotation of the verb "known" is therefore, a crucial matter. If it means "apprehended," the question would amount to a declaration of the inapprehensibility or unknowability of God. Since, however, such a view would contradict the entire thrust of the Scriptures, it must be understood in the sense of "comprehended." The question is equivalent, then, to a declaration that the mind of God is incomprehensible. When the language of v. 34 is applied to v. 33, it carries the implication that no one hath known (i.e., comprehended) the wisdom, knowledge, judgments and ways of God.

I Corinthians 2:6-16

I Cor. 2:6-16 may appropriately be considered in this connection, especially since a point of contact is found in the fact that v. 16 also employs the language of Isa. 40:13. It must be acknowledged that the main emphasis of the Corinthian passage differs sharply from that of Romans 11:33f. For I Cor. 2 is largely occupied with the glorious wisdom and knowledge communicated to the children of God rather than with the transcendence of the divine knowledge and

with incomprehensibility. The wisdom that hath been hidden, which none of the rulers of the world hath known, the things which entered not into the heart of man, that which the natural man doth not receive and cannot know—these God hath revealed through the Spirit. And those who are spiritual, possessing the mind of Christ, know the things freely given of God.

But even in this context, however much the wisdom and knowledge possessed by the regenerate may be emphasized, the wisdom and knowledge in view stand in an entirely different relation to men than to God. To receive the Spirit is not to qualify men to know as the Spirit knows; to have the mind of Christ is not to know in the exclusive and exhaustive way in which Christ knows. The Spirit, who reveals the things of God to men, has an exclusive knowledge of the things of God in virtue of His being the Spirit (v. 11). The Spirit alone enjoys the intimacy of communion with God which makes it possible for Him "to search all things, yea, the deep things of God" (v. 10). Hence, when in v. 16, Paul says, "For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he should instruct him," he is not interpreting the language of Isa. 40:13 differently from the force which it has been observed to have in Romans 11:34. In quoting this passage Paul's point is not, in effect, that the natural man does not know the mind of the Lord. Nor is he saying that men who have not come into contact with the divine revelation do not know the mind of the Lord. But he must be understood as setting forth the astounding truth that God is so transcendent in knowledge that he is incomprehensible. Nevertheless, he adds, they have the mind of Christ. The children of God, being in union with Christ and having received the Spirit, have a true apprehension of God. It is this apprehension of the incomprehensible God which gives the spiritual man the advantage over the unregenerate (v. 15).

I Corinthians 13:12

In another passage in I Corinthians, Paul apparently goes even beyond the teaching of I Cor. 2 in emphasizing the privileges of the children of God in the sphere of knowledge. When in I Cor. 13:12, he says, "For now we see in a mirror, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know fully even as also I was fully known," he might appear to teach that in heaven the knowledge of men will be indistinguishable from the divine knowledge. If taken literally, the passage would teach that man's knowledge will be as complete and exhaustive as God's. But such an interpretation would bring the verse into sharp conflict with Scripture as a whole. Paul is indeed stressing the glorious privileges of the people of God in the age to come. Their knowledge will correspond to the time "when that which is perfect is come" (v. 10). But, on the analogy of Scripture, a distinction must be drawn between the perfection of God and the perfection of man in heaven, and this distinction must be regarded as implicitly qualifying the assertion in v. 12. As Charles Hodge says, "As we are required to be perfect (Mt. 5:48) as our Father in heaven is perfect, we may be said to know even as we are known. We may be perfect in our narrow sphere as God is perfect in his and yet the distance between him and us remains infinite." Hodge, accordingly, interprets this passage in the context of the Biblical doctrines of God and man. As there are two levels of being, there are two levels of perfection. Even in heaven man remains a creature. His understanding will always remain that of a creature. In the perfection of his creaturely knowledge in heaven, he will realize as never before the transcendence of God.

III—Formulation of the Doctrine of God's Incomprehensibility

I. Incomprehensibility is not an attribute essential to the being and knowledge of God; His being and perfection are not incomprehensible to Himself. This at-

tribute has respect only to the relation of God's being and perfection to created reality. In this sense it is a relative attribute.

II. Incomprehensibility expresses the relation of the being and perfection of God to created rational intelligence and has relevance or meaning only as we contemplate the finite understanding.

III. Though incomprehensibility is, in the sense defined, a relative attribute and though it is only within the sphere of finite intelligence that it has meaning, nevertheless incomprehensibility springs from and rests upon the transcendent uniqueness and distinctness that belong to God in virtue of His own essential being and perfection.

IV. Incomprehensibility does not mean that God is inapprehensible or unknowable. It presupposes, rather, knowledge of God on the part of rational creatures. And this knowledge presupposes creation in the divine image and divine revelation. It is, therefore, only within the sphere of rational intelligence confronted with divine revelation that the incomprehensibility of God has relevance or meaning.

V. Incomprehensibility means that within that sphere of revelation and of rational intelligence finite creatures cannot have a complete, or exhaustive, or comprehensive or "adequate" knowledge of God. We cannot search or find out God to perfection. All-penetrating examination or understanding always completely escapes human capacity.

VI. In this sense God is absolutely incomprehensible. He is not more or less incomprehensible as He is more or less known. There is always an essential disproportion between the infinite transcendence of the being and perfection of God on the one hand, and the capacity of finite intelligence, on the other. And this transcendence is not simply temporarily beyond the finite grasp; God's greatness is essentially and eternally unsearchable.

VII. God is incomprehensible not only in His essential being and intradivine relations; He is also incomprehensible in all His perfections, counsels, judgments, ways and works. God is incomprehensible even in His self-revelation. Yet no created thing is incomprehensible. All creaturely knowledge, whether of the creature or of the Creator, is limited. But it is a specific limitation of creaturely knowledge of God which is referred to by the term "incomprehensible."

VIII. Like all His other perfections, God's knowledge and understanding are incomprehensible. He knows Himself and all things in a way that is unique and exclusive and with all-penetrating fullness and exhaustiveness that are never predicable of finite knowledge or understanding. The qualities of divinity inhere in His knowledge and understanding so that His knowledge is too high for us and we cannot attain unto it. By revelation and illumination we may truly know God and have communion with Him. Yet our knowledge is always from the human level, the level of creaturehood. God's knowledge is always on the divine level and possesses the divine qualities that can never attach to ours. God is perfect in knowledge and this perfection that covers the whole of His knowledge must be applied to His knowledge of every point, however infinitesimally small may be the point which we consider.

IX. The infinite transcendence of God and His consequent incomprehensibility should always constrain in us the profound sense of mystery, awe and reverence. It is at the highest reaches of our apprehension, understanding and contemplation that we are most deeply, gratefully and adoringly aware of the transcendent and incomprehensible glory of God. It is then that we are most truly conscious that God dwells in light unapproachable and full of glory, and we are constrained to exclaim: "Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised: and his greatness is unsearchable" (Ps. 145:3); "Great is our Lord, and of great power: his understanding is infinite" (Ps. 147:5).

IV—Evaluation of Documents

In the perspective of these findings certain documents which bear most closely upon the discussion of this question in The Orthodox Presbyterian Church may be evaluated, particularly the documents known as **The Text of a Complaint and The Answer**.

The **Complaint** does appear to have conceived of the doctrine of the incomprehensibility of God in accordance with Reformed tradition when at the outset it intimates that the question is concerned with our knowledge of God. For although there is not complete uniformity in the Reformed theology in the use of the words "incomprehensible" and "incomprehensibility" as predicated of God, yet the most characteristic and pervasive meaning is that which applies to the relation of the being, perfections, glory and works of God to our created understanding. The predicate or attribute of incomprehensibility has meaning only in reference to the finite intelligence and arises from God's very nature as **infinite and absolute** (cf. p. 2, col. 3; p. 3, col. 1). In accordance with the most representative Reformed usage, the **Complaint** also appears to have conceived of the inability implied in the word, "incomprehensible" as our inability to know God **comprehensively** and exhaustively rather than as our inability to know God or as our inability to know God apart from revelation. The quotation given from Charles Hodge to the effect that "to comprehend is to have a complete and exhaustive knowledge of an object" (p. 3, col. 3) is a good indication of the sense of the words, "comprehend" and "incomprehensible" in the language of the **Complaint**. Numerous other passages demonstrate this to be the meaning. It should have been clear from the preponderant usage of the **Complaint** that it was not using the word in the sense of "unknowable" or "inapprehensible" but rather in the sense of "incapable of being comprehensively known."

Again the **Complaint** is correct in conceiving of incomprehensibility as something inherent in the nature of God as infinitely transcendent in relation to the limitations inherent in our creaturehood and finitude, and rightly distinguishes between the doctrine that God can be known "only if he makes himself known and insofar as he makes himself known" (p. 2, col. 3), on the one hand, and the doctrine of the incomprehensibility of God, on the other.

In this context, however, the **Complaint** appears to lapse into an unfortunate and unwarranted delimitation of that which is being contemplated as incomprehensible in God. The **Complaint** says, "Because of his very nature as **infinite and absolute** the knowledge which God possesses of himself and of all things must remain a mystery which the mind of man cannot penetrate. The divine knowledge as **divine** transcends human knowledge as **human**, even when that human knowledge is a knowledge communicated by God" (p. 3, col. 1). It is perfectly true that the knowledge of God is incomprehensible along with all his other perfections. And it is, no doubt, true that it is on this particular phase of God's incomprehensibility that the **Complaint** feels called upon to focus the burden of its attention. But since the **Complaint** does not intimate such delimitation of the question being discussed and does not advise the reader of express transition to a more restricted phase of the doctrine of God's incomprehensibility, faulty orientation is given to the formulation at this point and some confusion is thereby created. The doctrine involved would have been set in clearer focus if the doctrine of the incomprehensibility of God had been formulated in those broader terms necessary to the conception and then intimation given that attention was to be concentrated on the particular question of the incomprehensibility of the divine knowledge.

Apparently the **Complaint** in thus delimiting the question made one further step in this direction without giving any clear indication that this was being done. It not only focused attention upon the incomprehensibility of the divine knowledge but, in doing so, restricted the word, "knowledge" to what it calls

the "contents of the divine knowledge" in distinction from the **mode** of the divine knowledge. This appears to be the only reasonable explanation of the statement, "the doctrine of the mode of the divine knowledge is not a part of the doctrine of the incomprehensibility of his knowledge. The latter is concerned only with the contents of the divine knowledge" (p. 6, col. 2). It would have been proper for the **Complaint** to define the question in debate as concerned simply with the knowledge of God and then to limit the question still further to "the contents" of the divine knowledge. But it was faulty formulation to state the doctrine of God's incomprehensibility in terms simply of the incomprehensibility of his knowledge and then again to limit that phase of God's incomprehensibility to "the contents" of his knowledge without conscious and express intimation that the question in debate was being circumscribed in this way. Even here the debate is being focused not solely on the incomprehensibility of the "contents" of the divine knowledge, but on the correlative question, namely, the qualitative distinction between the "contents" of the divine and human knowledge.

In dealing with Calvin's teaching respecting the incomprehensibility of the divine essence the **Complaint** appears to take it for granted that Calvin, in the places cited (p. 3, col. 1), is using the word "incomprehensible" in the same sense as it is used elsewhere in the **Complaint**. This has been shown not to be the case. Calvin indeed says that it would be "presumptuous curiosity to attempt to examine" into the divine essence. But this cannot properly be said with reference to those respects in which God is incomprehensible in the meaning attached to the word in the usage of the **Complaint**. Whatever may be the relation of Calvin's teaching to the doctrine formulated in the **Complaint**, Calvin's teaching in the places cited must be distinguished from the doctrine of the incomprehensibility of God as formulated, for example, in the Westminster Confession.

When the **Complaint** claims for the word "incomprehensible" "uniform significance in the history of Christian thought which constitutes the background of the formulation" of the Westminster Standards (p. 4, col. 2), it does not take sufficient cognizance of the lack of uniformity in Reformed usage. Its analysis of the meaning of the word as used in the Westminster Confession, however, is undoubtedly correct.

It is now necessary to turn attention to the **Answer** and to relate further discussion of the **Complaint** to the treatment accorded to this question of the incomprehensibility of God in the **Answer**. On page 9 the **Answer** states four points which it claims are included in "the doctrine of the incomprehensibility of God as set forth in Scripture and in the Confession of Faith." The first proposition in this statement is that "the essence of God's being is incomprehensible to man except as God reveals truths concerning his own nature." Since this claims to be a statement of what is included in the doctrine of the incomprehensibility of God as set forth in the Confession of Faith, we should expect that the word, "incomprehensibility" is used in the same sense as in the Confession. It is hard to believe, however, that this is the case. For, if so, the statement does not make good sense. How could it be said that God's essence is incapable of being comprehensively known except as God reveals truths respecting his own nature? The revelation of truths does not provide us with comprehensive understanding of God's essence. Hence we conclude that the word "incomprehensible" is being used, in the statement quoted, in the sense of "inapprehensible" or "unknowable," a sense which the **Answer** apparently considered to be attached to the word in the **Complaint**. When understood thus the statement as a whole becomes intelligible, as also true. The divine essence is inapprehensible except as God reveals truths respecting his own nature.

But if this is the meaning, the divine essence does not occupy any distinctiveness in this regard; it is not only the divine essence that is inapprehensible except as God gives revelation concerning it but also all of God's perfections,

counsel and will, and the same proposition may be affirmed of everything that concerns God and his will.

Furthermore, it hardly seems feasible for the Answer to use the word, "incomprehensible" here in the sense of "inapprehensible" without any intimation that this meaning was intended. In the introductory sentence the Answer speaks of "the doctrine of the incomprehensibility of God as set forth in Scripture and in the Confession of Faith." The word "incomprehensibility" is surely not being used here in the sense of "inapprehensibility." That is certainly not the meaning in the Confession of Faith. Reformed theology asserts the incomprehensibility of God without qualification. So does the Confession. But we may not speak of the inapprehensibility of God without qualification. It appears to us therefore, that basic confusion in the use of the term, "incomprehensible" characterizes the Answer at this point.

That the Answer uses the word "incomprehensible" in the sense of "inapprehensible" appears from other instances of the use of the word. "Until it is revealed, man cannot discover it; it is indeed incomprehensible because it is unrevealed" (p. 11). "What God does not reveal remains incomprehensible" (p. 12). "The manner of God's knowing would of course be different, and would eternally remain incomprehensible to man" (pp. 12f.) "That is not to claim that man can sometime in eternity become omniscient by the comprehension of one truth after another as God reveals them to him" (p. 13). Yet at the end of this part of the Answer a quotation from Charles Hodge is given with apparent approval: "'To comprehend . . . is to have a complete and exhaustive knowledge of an object'" (p. 24). It cannot be said, however, that this meaning of the word "comprehend" or of its derivative "incomprehensible" rules in the cases quoted above. It appears therefore that there is no uniform meaning attached to the use of the word in the Answer. This is distinctly unfortunate and leads to no little confusion.

The second and third propositions in the statement of points included in the doctrine of the incomprehensibility of God do not call for comment at this point. But the fourth proposition introduces a question that is of paramount importance in the discussion and may be dealt with now. It runs: "4. But, Dr. Clark maintains, the doctrine of the incomprehensibility of God does not mean that a proposition, e.g., two times two are four, has one meaning for man and a qualitatively different meaning for God" (p. 9). It is with this question that a very large part of the Answer is concerned. The Answer is most insistent that a true proposition has the same meaning for God and for man.

It is understood that the word "meaning" in this statement and in the subsequent argument of the Answer bears the sense of objective "import" or "significance." In this sense of the word "meaning" we contend that it is undoubtedly correct to maintain that a proposition has the same meaning for God and for man, when man truly apprehends it.

The lengthy argument of the Answer to establish and defend this point was evidently provoked by certain statements that appear in the Complaint. Some of these, at least, call for comment and are herewith quoted.

- (1) "If knowledge is a matter of propositions divorced from the knowing subject . . . a proposition would have to have the same meaning for God as for man" (p. 5, col. 2).
- (2) "We dare not maintain that his (God's) knowledge and our knowledge coincide at any single point" (p. 5, col. 3).
- (3) "And since Dr. Clark maintains that no limitation may be placed upon God's power to reveal propositions one at a time to men, there is no single item of knowledge in God's mind which may not be shared by the human mind" (p. 5, col. 2).

- (4) "As true knowledge, that knowledge (man's) must be analogical to the knowledge which God possesses, but it can never be identified with the knowledge which the infinite and absolute Creator possesses of the same proposition" (p. 5, col. 3).
- (5) "The knowledge which God possesses of himself and of all things must remain a mystery which the finite mind of man cannot penetrate" (p. 3, col. 1).
- (6) Again the position of Dr. Clark, quoted from the stenographic record, to the effect: "If we don't know the object that God knows, then we are in absolute ignorance" (p. 5, col. 3) is offered in support of the contention that Dr. Clark is in error and the assumption is that this position of Dr. Clark is being controverted and opposed.

We consider that the first of these statements is regrettably infelicitous and misleading. We hold that the sense of the word "meaning" that is liable to be conveyed by a statement of this kind and in a discussion of this sort is that of "import" or "signification." The denial, therefore, that a proposition has in any respect the same meaning for God as for man would be incorrect and would be fraught with skeptical implications.

The second statement is also misleading, particularly because of the words, "single point." The whole clause, taken by itself, is liable to create the impression that our knowledge does not come into contact with the objects of the divine knowledge at any point. This would, of course, be incorrect and would also be skeptical in character.

The third statement might create the impression that there are items of knowledge, in the sense of objects of knowledge, in the divine mind that cannot come within the compass of human knowledge or apprehension. To take such a position would be indefensible and presumptuous.

The sixth statement is particularly misleading because it distinctly creates the impression that the position is being maintained that we never know the object that God knows.

While making full allowance for the infelicity and misleading character of these statements—(1), (2), (3) and (6)—, we cannot, however, be persuaded that the intent of the **Complaint** was skeptical, as the **Answer** interpreted the intent of these statements to be. The **Answer** was quite justifiably aroused to refute with vigor what was interpreted to be the intent, and language used by the **Complaint** gave some plausible ground—in some cases more than in others—for the interpretation placed upon such language. But, when the main thrust of the **Complaint** is taken into account, it does not appear that the intent was as interpreted.

The second statement, we are convinced, was pressed by the **Answer** to bear a meaning that careful consideration of the immediate context should have prevented. It should have appeared that the **Complaint** in the use of the word "knowledge" in every case in the whole of the sentence concerned was employing the word not in the objective but in the subjective sense. The first reference to knowledge in the sentence is in the words, "the divine knowledge of his thoughts." Obviously "knowledge" here refers to the divine understanding or comprehension and not to the objects with which his comprehension or understanding is engaged. And this meaning of the word knowledge must be carried through to the end of the sentence. The immediately succeeding sentence confirms this use of the word knowledge, for it proceeds to speak of "our knowledge of any proposition." Obviously "knowledge" in this construction cannot refer to the object of knowledge but rather to our apprehension or understanding or cognition. And this same meaning of the word knowledge carries through to the end of the paragraph concerned.

We consider, therefore, that fair examination should have shown that what was being affirmed was that our subjective knowledge of any truth must never be identified with God's knowledge of that same truth and that the distinctiveness of the divine understanding or cognition or knowledge obtains at every point, however infinitesimally small may be the point which we consider.

With respect to the third statement quoted above, it is fully admitted that the phrase "item of knowledge" should be regarded as referring to object of knowledge. But the **Complaint** does not here deny that within the compass of revelation the object of divine knowledge is identical with the object of human knowledge. Its observation appears to be that on the assumption which it attributes to Dr. Clark, that the knowledge situation should be analyzed as a mere aggregation of propositions, it would be erroneous to conclude that "there is no single item of knowledge in God's mind which may not be shared by the human mind."

The first statement quoted above has been responsible for creating a great deal of misunderstanding. The paragraph in which the statement occurs appears to us distinctly obscure because of the way in which the word, "knowledge" is used. In the preceding sentence the word rather obviously has the sense of understanding or cognition but in the sentence that follows "knowledge" seems rather to refer to the objects of knowledge and in the sentence concerned, also, "knowledge" may have this latter sense. It cannot be claimed that the meaning would have been perfectly clear to readers.

There are, however, two considerations that lead us to the conclusion that the statement in question was not intended in the sense understood by the **Answer**.

1. In the immediately preceding sentences the **Complaint** speaks of "man's knowledge of any proposition" and "God's knowledge of the same proposition." "Knowledge" in both cases clearly refers to the understanding and not to the object of knowledge. This should be taken as intimating the sense attached to the word and should, at least, have suggested that the word "meaning" was being applied to the "understanding" on the part of God and man respectively and not to the truth itself.

2. In this section of the **Complaint** the great burden of emphasis rests upon the contention that the "content" of the divine knowledge differs from the "content" of human knowledge at every point. It is not with the objects of knowledge the **Complaint** is concerned but with the difference between the character of God's understanding and man's understanding even when the same object is contemplated. In terms of the discussion, the **Complaint** is not concerned so much with the **proposition** as with the **knowledge** of the proposition. It is the qualitative distinction between the divine and human **knowledge** that is being stressed and the implied denial that a proposition has the "same meaning for God as for man" should be understood as denying the identity of the **knowledge** in its subjective aspect rather than the identity of the truth involved.

However much misunderstanding of the intent of the **Complaint** might understandably have been created by the language used, it does not appear to us that the contention of the **Answer** respecting the skepticism inherent in the **Complaint** can be established.

The **Answer** alleges that "according to the **Complaint** man can never know even one item of truth God knows; man can only know an 'analogical' truth, and this analogical truth is not the same truth that God knows, for the truth that God knows is 'qualitatively' different, and God cannot reveal it to man because man is a creature. To repeat: the truth that God knows and the truth that man knows are never the same truth, for they do not 'coincide at any single point'" (p. 10). The **Answer** alleges that the **Complaint** advances a theory of a "two-fold truth" (*idem*), that propositions do not have the same meaning for God and for man and that the truths known by God are different

from those known by man (cf. pp. 9,10,13,14,16,22). This charge is repeatedly made and is stated in various ways. If this were the position of the **Complaint**, such a position would have to be condemned as without warrant from the Word of God and our subordinate Standards.

It is true that the **Complaint** uses the word "analogical." It says, "Our knowledge of any proposition must remain the knowledge of the creature. As true knowledge, that knowledge must be analogical to the knowledge which God possesses, but it can never be identified with the knowledge which the infinite and absolute Creator possesses of the same proposition" (p. 5, col. 3). Apart from instances of the word in quotations from Reformed writers this is the only occurrence of the word "analogical" in the section of the **Complaint** that deals with the matter of God's incomprehensibility. Several things should be noted respecting this quotation from the **Complaint**.

1. It speaks of the knowledge of God and of man as concerned with the same proposition. This should intimate that it is not correct to aver that the **Complaint** holds that man cannot know "even one item of truth God knows" (**Answer**, p. 10).

2. The **Complaint** does not say that it is the truth that is analogical but rather the **knowledge** which man possesses of the truth. It appears that the identity denied by the **Complaint** was not the identity of the truth expressed in the proposition but the identity of the **knowledge** on the part of God and man respectively.

3. In developing the allegation that according to the **Complaint** man knows only an analogy of the truth the **Answer** continues to appeal to the statement in the **Complaint** that God's knowledge and ours do not "coincide at any single point." But unfortunate as this expression is, the more discriminating interpretation presented above should have precluded such an application of the statement and, in any case, it is too slim a basis upon which to base such a far-reaching allegation as that man, according to the **Complaint**, knows only an analogy of the truth.

4. In the other instances in which the word, "analogy" or "analogical" appears in the **Complaint** in quotations from Reformed writers, it would appear that what is referred to as an analogy or as analogical is our **knowledge** and not the truth concerned. This is likely even in the quotation from J. H. Thornwell. "Again the difference betwixt Divine and human **knowledge** is not simply of degree. It is a difference in kind. God's **knowledge** is not like ours, and therefore we are utterly unable to **think** it as it is in Him. We can only think it under the analogy of ours in the sense of a similarity of relations" (p. 3, col. 2, italics ours). In the other two instances in quotations from Shedd and Bavinck (p. 3, col. 3; p. 4, col. 1) it is apparent that what is qualified by the word "analogical" is our knowledge of the truth and not the truth itself. The element of the unknowability of God's essence in Bavinck's view of analogy (**Complaint**, 4:2) however, is not an element which all Reformed theologians have employed in their formulation of the doctrine of God's incomprehensibility. It would have been well if the **Complaint** had taken this fact into consideration.

It might indeed appear that this element in Bavinck's conception of analogy is incorporated in the **Complaint**, but this is not necessarily the case, and more careful examination of the **Complaint** will evince that the concept of analogy used in the **Complaint** was not applied to the truth known but to our knowledge of the truth and that the sustained allegation of the **Answer** that, according to the **Complaint**, man knows only an analogy of the truth is mistaken.

In this connection it is necessary to point out another misinterpretation on the part of the **Answer**. The latter insinuates that the **Complaint** maintains "the strange doctrine that there are mysterious areas of knowledge which God has, incapable of being revealed by God to man or of being understood by man

even if God revealed them" (p. 14). First of all, there does not appear to be the least basis for the allegation that there are certain revelations God might give that man could not understand. Secondly, it is difficult to understand what the Answer means by "mysterious areas of knowledge." It is not clear in what sense "knowledge" is being used, whether in the sense of "understanding" or in the sense of "the objects known." The presumption is that the latter is intended and might, therefore, be rendered, "mysterious areas of truth." Thirdly, we do not find in the Complaint evidence to support the notion that it conceives of any area of truth and reality with respect to which God cannot give us any revelation. The Complaint does contend that God cannot give us an exhaustive or comprehensive knowledge respecting any area or any item and, also, that there are "mysteries set forth in the divine revelation that are quite beyond the powers of the finite mind to comprehend" (p. 4, col. 2). But this is an entirely different matter. The word "comprehend" was used in the Complaint in one uniform and consistent sense, namely, that of "comprehensive knowledge."

A great deal of misunderstanding has been created by the use of the word "contents" in the Complaint in its discussion of divine and human knowledge. The word appears repeatedly (p. 5, col. 1; p. 6, col. 1; p. 6, col. 2(2)). And the contention of the Complaint is that the content or contents of the divine knowledge differs qualitatively from the content or contents of human knowledge. Apparently the Answer understood this designation to refer to the objects of knowledge rather than to the understanding or apprehension with reference to these objects. Consequently the argument of the Complaint to the effect that there is a qualitative distinction between the contents of the divine knowledge and the contents of human knowledge was interpreted to mean that the objects of knowledge were qualitatively different in the respective cases (cf. Answer, pp. 21f.). This interpretation lent additional support to the view that, according to the Complaint, man could only know an analogy of the truth and is entirely in line with such a conception. If this were the meaning and intent of the Complaint the rejection of such a position would be demanded.

It is to be admitted that the words, "content" and, particularly, "contents" are not free from ambiguity and it is easy to see how these words could be misunderstood in the discussion of a subject that requires careful use of terms. Furthermore, it is regrettable that the Complaint did not more carefully distinguish between what it meant by content as distinguished from object, especially since the word "object" had been used by Dr. Clark in the course of his examination. Again, since the Complaint does not use the word, "object" in reference to the question debated it is still more easily understood how the Answer could have interpreted the Complaint in this way and have regarded the word "contents" as referring to that which Dr. Clark denoted by the word "objects," especially since at one point in the Complaint Dr. Clark's insistence that the object of knowledge is the same for God and man is, by implication, being controverted (p. 5, col. 3).

We are convinced, however, that the word, "contents" was not intended to be understood in the same sense as the word, "objects." It is most probable, however, that in the judgment of the Complaint Dr. Clark failed to distinguish between content and object and that the identicalness he claimed for the object applied also to what the Complaint denoted by the word, "contents." Otherwise the contention of the Complaint that Dr. Clark did not maintain the qualitative distinction between the contents of the divine knowledge and of human knowledge could not have been so insistently maintained. The stenographic record of the examination of Dr. Clark on July 7, 1944 makes abundantly plain that he contended for the identity of the object (see for further expansion of this subject the Minority Report submitted to the Thirteenth General Assembly, Minutes pp. 72ff.). And it would appear that this is one of the reasons, if not the main reason, why the Complaint concluded that Dr. Clark denied the qualitative distinction between the contents of divine and human knowledge. That the Com-

plaint was justified in identifying its own use of the word "contents" with Dr. Clark's use of the word "object" is another question. But whatever may be true respecting this question it is clear that very considerable confusion had been injected into the debate by failure to understand or define the use of these terms.

We conclude, however, that the word "contents" was not intended by the **Complaint** to denote what in the present phase of the discussion, at least, may be designated as the object of knowledge. It may be difficult to demonstrate this from the immediate contexts where the word "contents" occurs. But a careful examination of this part of the **Complaint** will demonstrate, we believe, that when the **Complaint** contends for the qualitative distinction between the divine knowledge and human knowledge the word "knowledge" is not being used in the sense of "the objects of knowledge," but rather in the sense of the "understanding," "cognition," "grasp," "condition or state of cognitive consciousness" with reference to these objects. This appears, as has been shown above, in the very paragraphs where the phrases, "coincide at any single point" and "same meaning for God as for man" occur—expressions so frequently alluded to by the **Answer** in support of its allegations respecting the skepticism inherent in the **Complaint**. While it may not be contended that the **Complaint** never uses the word "knowledge" in the objective sense, yet if the **Complaint** is read carefully it will appear that in its fundamental contention and argument the sense attached to the word "knowledge" is the subjective. When the subjective sense of the word "knowledge" is applied, the usage of the **Complaint** is found to be in harmony with its positive development of the doctrine in the earlier part of the discussion, and so it is reasonable to conclude that the word "knowledge" was used, in the fundamental contention of the **Complaint**, to designate the "understanding" of the truth known, apprehension in the case of man and comprehension in the case of God. Consequently it is the distinctiveness of the divine "understanding," "grasp," or "knowing" that is being insisted upon and not at all the difference of the truth known. It would be far too tedious and repetitious an undertaking to adduce the evidence in support of this conclusion.

Since it is the distinctiveness of the divine knowledge in this sense of the word "knowledge" that is the great burden of the argument in this part of the **Complaint**, it is necessary to conclude that when the word, "contents" or "content" appears on four occasions and the same distinctiveness is claimed for the contents of the divine knowledge as is claimed elsewhere so pervasively for the divine knowledge, the same meaning is intended when at a few points the qualitative distinction is affirmed of the "contents" and at many other points the same distinction is affirmed of the knowledge.

While the **Complaint**, then, was at fault in not making clear by more defined statement its use of the word "contents," yet fair and careful examination should have shown that the **Complaint** was not contending for any qualitative distinction between the "objects" of knowledge known to God and man, nor that a true proposition in its "narrowest and minimal significance, is qualitatively different for God" (**Answer**, p. 21), nor that a true proposition has one import or signification for God and another for man, nor that man can have no cognitive contact with the objects of divine knowledge, but rather was contending for a qualitative distinction in some other respect, namely, what the **Complaint** denotes as "content," distinguished from "mode," on the one hand, and from the "truth known" on the other. Hence we conclude that, though the **Complaint** failed in the matter of clear definition and lucidity, it is not defensible to charge it with error in the direction of skepticism.

In the same connection it is necessary to examine the allegation of the **Answer** to the effect that the **Complaint** is "advancing a theory of a two-fold truth" (p. 10). What the **Answer** adduces in support of this interpretation is the contention of the **Complaint** that God's knowledge is qualitatively different

from that of man and that God's knowledge and man's do not "coincide at any single point." These contentions of the **Complaint** have been examined already and it has been shown, we believe, that what the **Complaint** had in mind was the qualitative difference in respect of **knowledge** and not of the truth known. The **Complaint** does insist upon two levels but it is made plain that the two levels are not two levels of truth but two levels of **knowledge**, indicated by the distinction between "apprehension" on our part and "comprehension" on the part of God. The **Complaint** says: "Only the Son has a knowledge of the Father that is on a level with the Father's knowledge of the Son; only the Son's knowledge of the Father is accordingly exhaustive knowledge; the knowledge which men may come to possess of the Father and of the Son is knowledge on a lower level, apprehension but not comprehension, for otherwise mere men would have to be accorded a place alongside of Christ who alone 'knows the Father' (Mt. 11:27; Lk. 10:22. Cf. also Romans 11:33; Deut. 29:29)" (p. 4, col. 3). It should be obvious that it is the Father and the Son who are contemplated as the "objects" of human knowledge in this case and that the lower level applicable to man is not a lower level of truth but a lower level of **knowledge**. Consequently any such notion as a two-level theory of truth finds no support whatsoever in this passage. We believe that a two-level view of **knowledge** must be maintained and cannot therefore endorse the statement of the **Answer** in its discussion of Isaiah 55:8,9, namely, "There are two levels, to be sure, but not two levels of knowledge" (p. 12). There is doubt, however, as to the sense in which the word "knowledge" is used in this connection.

Conclusions

We conclude that the doctrine of God's incomprehensibility set forth in the **Complaint** is basically and substantially the doctrine set forth in the Word of God and in the Reformed theology. While there is in the **Complaint** a narrowing down of the question in debate to the incomprehensibility of the **knowledge** of God as the aspect of God's incomprehensibility on which attention is being focused, and while this delimitation has caused some confusion and misunderstanding, yet the quotations given from Reformed writers, as well as the underlying conception of incomprehensibility that is being applied in the sphere of God's **knowledge**, evince that the doctrine had been conceived correctly in terms of the transcendent mystery of God's being, perfections, counsel and will. The word, "incomprehensible" was used in the **Complaint**, in accordance with the most characteristic usage of Reformed theology, not in the sense of "unknowable" or "inapprehensible" but in the sense of "not able to be comprehensively understood." This epithet is conceived of as applied to God without any qualification. It is not simply God's essence that is incomprehensible in this sense but also all of his attributes. And this incomprehensibility inheres in the very nature of God as infinite, eternal, and unchangeable.

We are not assured that the doctrine of the incomprehensibility of God set forth in the **Answer** can be evaluated as basically and substantially that of the Word of God and of Reformed theology. The discussion of the question in the **Answer** is to a large extent vitiated by the use of the word "incomprehensible" in the sense of "inapprehensible" and by lack of uniformity in the use of the word "comprehend" and, by implication, of its derivative, "incomprehensible." The statement of points included in the doctrine on page 9 does not enunciate, as it appears to us, with any clear-cut decisiveness the doctrine as set forth "in Scripture and in the Confession of Faith."

The first point has been dealt with above. It has been shown that if the word "incomprehensible" is used in one sense the statement does not make sense; if used in another sense it states a truth which is not only true of God's essence but of all that concerns God and does not really express the doctrine of God's incomprehensibility.

The second point, namely, that "the manner of God's knowing, an eternal intuition, is impossible for man" is quite true, but it is not clearly stated in what sense "the manner of God's knowing" is incomprehensible, even though it is insisted upon that the manner of God's knowledge "would eternally remain incomprehensible to man" (p. 13; cf. p. 24).

The third point: "Man can never know exhaustively and completely God's knowledge of any truth in all its relationships and implications; because every truth has an infinite number of relationships and implications and since each of these implications in turn has other infinite implications, these must ever, even in heaven, remain inexhaustible for man." This statement is the closest approximation to the phase of God's incomprehensibility on which the **Complaint** lays its main emphasis. That the statement expresses an incontrovertible truth goes without saying. But we are not satisfied that this statement adequately safeguards the contention of the **Complaint**, for it is upon the inexhaustibility of the relationships and implications that the stress falls. Unless the phrase, "knowledge of any truth in all its relationships and implications" is taken to mean not merely "a knowledge of a truth and its relationships and implications" but a "knowledge of a truth embracing relationships and implications in what is nevertheless, properly speaking, knowledge of one truth," it would still be possible to maintain that man's knowledge of a particular truth is identical with God's knowledge of that same truth, even though, admittedly, a vast difference would obtain in the knowledge of the relationships and implications. But on either construction of this point in the **Answer**, the crucial statement as to the essential qualitative difference between the subjective aspect of human knowledge and the divine knowledge with respect to any truth would not find expression. This difference, if expressed in the **Answer**, must be included under its category of **mode**.

The fourth point, namely, that "the doctrine of the incomprehensibility of God does not mean that a proposition . . . has one meaning for man and a qualitatively different meaning for God" we recognize as quite correct, understanding the word, "meaning" in the sense of "import" or "signification." In dealing with the question of the incomprehensibility of God's knowledge, we also regard this insistence as necessary in order to guard against skepticism. While it is a necessary emphasis, it does not, however, provide any positive addition in the exposition of what is involved in the incomprehensibility of God.

On these grounds we conclude that in these four points there is not an adequate formulation of that in which the doctrine of God's incomprehensibility consists and that the subsequent discussion in the **Answer** has not rectified that deficiency.

Respecting the central argument of the **Complaint**, namely, that there is a qualitative distinction between the knowledge of God and the knowledge possible for man, we find ourselves in agreement with the contention of the **Complaint**. The **Complaint** does not consider that the question at issue is the qualitative distinction between the mode of divine knowledge and the mode of human knowledge. It recognizes that Dr. Clark fully maintains that distinction and does not argue the question. Neither does the **Complaint** maintain a qualitative distinction between the truth known by God and that known by man through revelation. This has been argued sufficiently above and need not be repeated. The distinctiveness which the **Complaint** regards as the question at issue is the distinctiveness of what it occasionally calls the "contents" or "content" of the divine knowledge but which it usually designates simply as the knowledge of God. However infelicitous may be the word, "contents" or "content," it is quite clear that what is meant is the "understanding," the "cognition," perhaps the "knowing," as distinguished from mode. Apparently the **Complaint** is using the word "mode" in a restricted sense to denote the way by which man comes to know as distinguished from the way by which God knows.

We recognize that when the word "mode" is understood in this restricted

sense, it is necessary to regard another element as comprised within our knowledge as well as within the knowledge of God. This other element the **Complaint** generally designated by **knowledge** and occasionally by **contents**. But whatever the word may be, used to designate it, the element exists and the distinction between divine and human knowledge must be preserved in connection with this element as well as in connection with **mode**.

It is here that difficulty arises in evaluating the **Answer**. The latter vigorously protests that "Dr. Clark does not deny the qualitative distinction between God's knowledge and man's knowledge" (p. 14). And later on, after quoting from the stenographic record of Dr. Clark's examination, it continues: "Dr. Clark in the transcript says God's knowledge of a given object is not the same as man's knowledge of the same object. And the complainants after reading these passages say that 'Dr. Clark holds that man's knowledge of a proposition . . . is identical with God's knowledge of the same proposition.' The **Complaint** therefore has attempted to put into Dr. Clark's mouth the very position he explicitly denied" (p. 20). These are emphatic statements and would leave no room for doubt if the question were not perplexed in differing terminology. This difference of terminology concerns particularly the scope of the word "mode" in this discussion.

It is clear that the **Answer** does not go beyond the stenographic record in regarding the elements in knowledge as consisting simply of **mode** and **object**. As was shown in both reports submitted to the Thirteenth General Assembly this is a defensible schematism and no issue is involved in a twofold or threefold division as such. The question reduces itself simply to this: what is the scope of the word "mode" as used by Dr. Clark and by the **Answer**? If it is broad enough to include what the **Complaint** means by **contents** or by the simple use of the word "knowledge" as generally used by the **Complaint**, or, in other words, if the word "knowledge" as used by the **Answer** in the two quotations given above is conceived of as including what the **Complaint** means by **knowledge**, then the distinctiveness of the divine knowledge for which the **Complaint** contends is emphatically asserted by the **Answer** and the issue disappears. Both **Complaint** and **Answer** would agree on the central question debated in the **Complaint**.

In our esteem it would not, however, be doing full justice to the **Answer** or to the **Complaint** or to the truth to aver that the question may be thus concluded. While both the Majority and Minority Reports to the 13th General Assembly held that there was some doubt as to the scope of the word "mode" as used by Dr. Clark in his examination, and allowed for the possibility that it might be used broadly enough to include what the **Complaint** means by "content," it must be acknowledged that the **Answer** does not give assurance that the term "mode" is being used in the more inclusive sense. When the **Answer** on p. 20 denies that Dr. Clark holds that "man's knowledge of a proposition . . . is identical with God's knowledge of the same proposition," it appeals to passages in the **Transcript** where Dr. Clark stated that "the method of knowing" is entirely different and where, evidently in explanation of what is meant by "method of knowing," the distinction between intuitive and discursive knowing is in view.

It is to be regretted that a paper circulated by Dr. Clark in the fall of 1946 does not yet clear up the question whether "mode" is understood broadly enough to include what the **Complaint** had in view in speaking of "content" as distinguished from "object." For example, on p. 8, Dr. Clark states: "God's mode of knowing is intuitive while man's is always temporal and discursive. This distinction, the **Complaint** claims, is insufficient; a further distinction is needed. It is obvious therefore that the complainants hold to a two-fold theory of something in addition to a two-fold theory of the act of knowing." Dr. Clark may have intended by these words to indicate the inclusiveness of his conception of

mode. However in our estimation further clarification along this line is necessary.

We are jealous for the maintenance of the distinctiveness of the divine knowledge for which the Complaint contends. We believe that this is a necessary element in the doctrine of the transcendence of the divine knowledge. The terms that may be used to designate this aspect of the divine knowledge is a matter of relative indifference. But if the word, "mode" is used in the restricted sense in which the Complaint uses it, the distinctiveness of the divine knowledge for which the Complaint contends must be found to apply to another aspect of the divine knowledge as well as to the mode of knowledge. The cause of truth and peace in The Orthodox Presbyterian Church is bound up with this question. In our judgment this issue has not been settled and it is highly necessary that those who have signed the Answer assure the Church that the qualitative distinction between God's knowledge and man's applies to the "understanding," "grasp," "cognition," "knowing" at every point where God's knowledge and man's respect the same truth.

Furthermore, since certain expressions used in the Complaint have been understood as skeptical in character and since the Complaint cannot disavow all responsibility for creating such misunderstanding of its intent, in our judgment, it is incumbent upon those who have signed the Complaint to express regret for such expressions. They should express regret that the Complaint appeared to deny that there is any sense in which a proposition may be said to have the same meaning for God as for man. They should also affirm that, when the objects of knowledge are contemplated, human knowledge does have contact with the objects of divine knowledge within the compass of the divine revelation and that within the sphere of revelation the objects of knowledge are the same for God and for man.

Unequivocal declarations along these lines by those who have signed the Answer and the Complaint respectively will, we are persuaded, go a long way to the vindication of the truth, the removal of misunderstanding, and the healing of breaches that have tended to disrupt the unity and disturb the peace of our denomination.

We are keenly aware of the difficulties inherent in the subject being discussed in this study. We are not satisfied that we have been able to reach any fixed formulation on several of the details dealt with. And we are far from supposing that the schematism in some instances would not require modification and revision on more thorough and mature reflection. For example, in the use of such words as "meaning," "import," "object," "content" and "mode," especially as applied to the divine knowledge, there is great need for a more thorough analysis on the basis of Scripture teaching. We fear that in the discussion of this subject in recent years there has sometimes been manifest an over-simplification of the problems involved, with the consequence that the transcendence of the divine knowledge has not been sufficiently appreciated and guarded.

Nevertheless we are convinced that an element of the transcendence of God's knowledge of most fundamental importance to the Biblical doctrine of God and His incomprehensibility is involved in the question debated. We are convinced that it was this element that the Complaint brought to the forefront and made central in its contention. This element has been stated repeatedly as consisting in the qualitative distinction between God's knowledge and man's knowledge even in respect of those very truths known to man. Whatever revision might have to be made in the formulation of this great truth or in the schematism in terms of which it would be set forth, yet we are deeply persuaded that no such modification will alter in the least the necessity for maintaining this qualitative distinction. We are persuaded that any proper subsequent development will only lead to a clearer exposition of this distinction and a more deeply-grounded vindication of its validity and paramount importance.

Respectfully submitted,

THE COMMITTEE

Appendix

The Incomprehensibility of God

According to Certain 19th and 20th Century Theologians

Observations concerning the position of Charles Hodge

1. Under the incomprehensibility of God, Hodge is considering the infinity of God in relation to the created intellect, and not the doctrine of the immensity of God (cf. *Systematic Theology*, I, pp. 337f.; pp. 383f.).

2. Comprehension denied to man is defined as "a complete and exhaustive knowledge of an object" and thus is distinguished from the knowledge or understanding possible to man (337).

3. It is man's **creaturehood** or **finiteness** which is viewed as the ground of his incapacity to comprehend God. "Such knowledge is clearly impossible in a creature, whether of itself or of anything out of itself" (p. 337). Accordingly, this incapacity for comprehensive knowledge, inhering in man as a creature, was present before the fall; it will also be present in the state of glory. It is not subject to modification by anything outside of the creature, such as the fact of revelation. None but the Infinite can comprehend the Infinite (cf. pp. 345f.).

4. Human knowledge as finite knowledge is **partial** (337, 338). "There is infinitely more in God than we have any idea of" (337). We cannot know all about God.

5. But human knowledge as finite knowledge is also **imperfect**. "What we do know we know imperfectly" (337, 338). We not only cannot know all about God, but whatever knowledge we possess, being creaturely, finite knowledge, is imperfect.

6. Nevertheless, knowledge is possible and actual for man. "Our knowledge as far as it goes, is true knowledge" (338). The possibility of knowledge is grounded in the fact of creation in the divine image (339).

7. In discussing knowledge as an attribute of God, Hodge states that "this knowledge of God is not only all-comprehending, but it is intuitive and immutable" (397).

Observations concerning the position of A. A. Hodge

Dr. A. A. Hodge's position is most fully set forth in his *Outlines of Theology*, 2nd Edition, London, 1879. Discussing the subject of the Attributes of God, he asks: "How far can we have assurance that the objective reality corresponds with our subjective conceptions of the divine nature?" His answer is as follows:

"There are upon this subject two opposite extreme positions which it is necessary to avoid. 1st. The extreme of supposing that our conceptions of God either in kind or degree are adequate to represent the objective reality of his perfections. God is incomprehensible to us in the sense (a) that there remains an immeasurably greater part of his being and excellence of which we have and can have no knowledge, and (b) in the sense that even what we know of him we know imperfectly, and at best conceive of very inadequately. . . . 2d. The second extreme to be avoided is that of supposing that our knowledge of God is purely illusory, that our conception of the divine perfections cannot correspond in any degree to the objective reality. . . ." (pp. 129f.).

A. A. Hodge, like Charles Hodge, grounds the reality of human knowledge in the fact of creation in the divine image. "The fundamental fact upon which

all science, all theology, and all religion rests is that God made man a living soul in his own image. Otherwise man could have no understanding of God's works any more than of his nature, and all relations of thought or feeling between them would be impossible" (132; cf. p. 129; pp. 130f.).

Of further interest is the manner in which this author associates incomprehensibility with the divine revelation, when he says: "Concerning the nature and operation of God, we can know only what he has vouchsafed to reveal to us, and with every conception, either of his being or his acts, there must always attend an element of incomprehensibility, which is inseparable from infinitude. His knowledge and power are as truly beyond all understanding as his eternity or immensity.—Job xi. 7-9; xxvi. 14; Ps. cxxxix. 5, 6; Isa. xl. 28" (135f.).

The application of this approach to the subject of eternity is also significant. In answer to the question, What is eternity?, he says: "Eternity is infinite duration; duration discharged from all limits, without beginning, without succession, and without end. . . . We, however, can positively conceive of eternity only as duration indefinitely extended from the present moment in two directions, as to the past and as to the future. . . . The eternity of God, however, is one and indivisible" (P. 142). And in reply to the question, "What relation does time bear to eternity?", he says, "Eternity, the unchanging present, without beginning or end, comprehends all time, and co-exists, as an undivided moment with all the successions of time as they appear and pass in their order. Thought is possible to us, however, only under the limitations of time and space. We can conceive of God only under the finite fashion of first purposing and then acting, of first promising or threatening and then fulfilling his word, etc. He that inhabiteth eternity infinitely transcends our understanding. Isa. lviii. 15" (p. 142).

His discussion of "The Infinite Intelligence of God" is also pertinent. In reply to the question, "How does God's mode of knowing differ from ours?", he says, "God's knowledge is, 1st, his essence knowing; 2d, it is one eternal, all-comprehensive indivisible act. (1) It is not **discursive**, i.e. proceeding logically from the known to the unknown; but **intuitive**, i.e., discerning all things directly in its own light. (2) It is **independent**, i.e., it does in no way depend upon his creatures. . . . (3) It is **total** and **simultaneous**, not successive. It is one single, indivisible act of intuition, beholding all things in themselves, their relations and successions as ever present. (4) It is **perfect** and **essential**, not **relative**, i.e., he knows all things directly in their hidden essences, while we know them only by their properties, as they stand related to our senses. (5) We know the present imperfectly, the past we remember dimly, the future we know not at all. But God knows all things, past, present, and future, by one total unsuccessive all-comprehensive vision" (pp. 144f.). Cf. also **Commentary on the Confession of Faith**, 1869, p. 75. Certain formulations in the **Popular Lectures on Theological Themes**, Philadelphia 1887, are rather distinctive. He speaks of God as "unknowable, the infinite Abyss of darkness" (pp. 18f.) "In all our knowledge, God is always beyond us, hid in the light which is impenetrable" (p. 32). "We have been convinced that the finite can never measure the Infinite" (p. 42).

It is not necessary to show in detail the evidence that the position set forth in these passages agrees with that of Charles Hodge. A few observations concerning certain of the formulations may be useful.

1. The manner in which he associates incomprehensibility with the divine revelation is noteworthy. The revelation of God as a revelation of the infinite One must necessarily be attended by an element of incomprehensibility. The revelation of God is necessarily a revelation of the infinite or it would not be a revelation of God. And since it is a revelation of the infinite, the revelation given cannot be comprehended by finite man. Hence revelation, though given to be apprehended and though actually apprehended, is not comprehended. Man

may apprehend the eternity of God but he can conceive of it only in finite fashion.

2. It is clear that in discussing the "mode" of the divine knowing, A. A. Hodge embraces under this term more than the fact that God knows by an eternal intuition whereas man knows discursively. In particular, the characterization of the divine knowledge as perfect and essential goes beyond the above.

3. In saying that God is the unknowable, the infinite Abyss of darkness, Hodge adopts, as a partial statement of the truth, language which is not well guarded. Evidently it is understood much like statements to the effect that the essence of God is unknowable. Though such formulations are not completely felicitous it should be recognized that they are based upon a concern to acknowledge the transcendence of God, his infinite separateness from our finiteness. They go far beyond expressing the idea that God has secrets which he has not chosen to reveal.

J. H. Thornwell, (Collected Writings, I, Richmond, 1871).

PP. 123f.: "The result of this inquiry into the nature and extent of our knowledge of God may be summed up in the following propositions. As we know only in and through our own faculties, our knowledge must be determined by the nature of our faculties. The conditions of consciousness are such that we can never directly apprehend aught but the phenomenal and relative; and yet in the apprehension of that we are constrained to admit a real and an absolute as the necessary explanation of appearances. The infinite is never apprehended in itself; it is only known in the manifestations of it contained in the finite. As existing, it is known—it is a positive affirmation of intelligence; but it cannot be translated into the forms of understanding—it cannot be conceived, except as the annihilation of those limitations and conditions which are essential to the possibility of human thought. We know *that* it is, but we know not *what* it is. In our actual concept of God, while we are constrained to recognize him as an infinite and absolutely perfect being, yet we are unable to realize absolute and infinite perfection in thought. We only know that it must be; but our utmost efforts to grasp it amount to nothing more than the transmutation of a series of negations into delusive affirmations. The matter of our thought, in representing the Divine perfections, is taken from the phenomena of human consciousness. The perfections which we experience in ourselves are reduced to their utmost abstraction and purity, and then applied to God in the way of analogy. We do not know His perfections, consequently, as they are in themselves or in Him, but as they appear to us under finite forms and symbols. This analogical conception, however, is accompanied with the belief that the relative necessarily implies the absolute; and therefore in the very act of imperfect thought our nature protests against the imperfect as an adequate or complete representation. We feel that we see through a glass darkly—that is only a glimpse of truth that we obtain; but the little, though partial and defective—a mere point compared to the immense reality—is inexpressibly precious, for its object is God. If it is only the hem of His garment that we are permitted to behold, it impresses us with a sense of His glory."

"This relative, partial, analogical knowledge of God is the Catholic doctrine of theologians. . . . 'His essence,' says Calvin, 'is incomprehensible, utterly transcending all human thought; but on each of His works His glory is engraven in characters so bright . . . that none . . . can plead ignorance as their excuse' (Instit. I.V.1; cf. V. 9)." He also appeals to Cocceius, Charnock, Macrobius, and Augustine (124f.).

He next considers the objection that, if our knowledge of God is only relative and analogical, it cannot be accepted as any just or true representation

of the Divine Being, but of something essentially different. He says that "if nothing more were meant than that we do not know God as He is in Himself, and as, consequently, He knows Himself, the objection would certainly have to be admitted. No such knowledge is competent to the creature. The finite can never hope to comprehend the Infinite as the Infinite comprehends itself. But if it is meant . . . that our knowledge of God does not apprehend the appearances which such a being must make to minds constituted like ours, that the things which we think are not real manifestations of the Infinite, adapted to our faculties of intelligence, the objection is assuredly without reason. Either our whole nature is a lie, or the Being whom we thus know under finite symbols is the supreme and everlasting Jehovah" (125f). "We are obliged to trust in the veracity of consciousness. We know because we believe" (127). ". . . our relative analogical knowledge of God is not only true and trustworthy, but amply adequate for all the purposes of religion" (129). "Those finite symbols under which God is represented to us, and thought by us, furnish just the intimations of His character which are suited to be the basis of reverence and love" ". . . to complete the notion of religious worship we must introduce the other element of our knowledge, in which God is negatively presented as transcending the capacity of thought. . . . The very darkness which shrouds this infinitude reacts upon our worship, and expands our emotions into rapture and adoration" (135).

H. Bavinck: *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, (Kampen, 1918) Chapter IV Concerning God, Par. 23, The Incomprehensibility of God. (Vol. II, pp. 1ff.).

"Mystery is the element in which dogmatic theology lives . . . the knowledge which God has revealed concerning himself in nature and Scripture far transcends the conception and understanding of man. To this extent dogmatic theology is wholly concerned with mystery. It is constantly concerned, not with finite creatures, but from the beginning to the end . . . with the Eternal and Infinite. At the very beginning of its labor it stands before the Incomprehensible. . . . But also in the other loci, as it descends to the creatures, it does not view them otherwise than in their relation to God. . . . So all doctrines are but explications of the one dogma of the *cognitio Dei*. . . ."

But how can we speak concerning God? "We are men and he is the Lord our God. There does not appear to be any affinity or community between Him and us that we should be able to denominate Him in truth. There is a distance between Him and us as between the infinite and the finite, between eternity and time. . . . He is a being infinitely exalted above all creation. . . . Yet Scripture also teaches emphatically the knowability of God. Scripture never attempts to prove the existence of God; it rather presupposes it; and it always presupposes that man has an ineradicable consciousness of that existence and a certain knowledge of the being of God. Man does not owe this to his own investigation . . . but to the fact that God has revealed himself . . . to man." (2f.).

In undertaking an historical survey of the subject, Bavinck speaks of the doctrine of "the incomprehensibility of God and of the unknowability of his essence" as the point of departure and foundational thought of Christian theology. "God is not exhausted in his revelation, whether in creation or in recreation. He cannot fully communicate himself to his creatures, because they themselves would then have to be God. Therefore there is no 'adequate' knowledge of God" (p. 10). Coming specifically to the view of the Reformed theologians, he says that their strong repudiation of the all-creature deification made them distinguish sharply between what was of God and what was of the creature; they took more seriously than any other theology the proposition that *finitum non est capax infiniti* (p. 15). After speaking of Zwingli and Calvin, he says that later theologians even more strongly asserted that the essence of God is unknowable. Because the finite cannot comprehend the infinite, the

names of God do not serve to give knowledge of his essence but to intimate, to a degree according to our understanding, what of God we need to know. The propositions: *Deus definiri nequit, Deo nomen non est, finitum non est capax infiniti* return in all the theologians. They all teach that God is infinitely exalted above our understanding, our conception, our language. (p. 15).

Bavinck states that this doctrine was lost sight of largely as the result of the development of rationalism, but came to the fore again through Kantian influences. Like Hodge he finds a point of contact between the position of Hamilton and Mansel and that of orthodoxy: Scripture and the church affirm with emphasis the unsearchable majesty and the sovereign transcendence of God. There is no knowledge of God as he is in himself. . . . He can be apprehended, not comprehended. There is a *gnosis*, but not a *katalepsis* of God. . . . And when a superficial rationalism considered an *adequate* knowledge of God possible, Christian theology has always fought it most strenuously (p. 23). Although Scripture and the church as it were have accepted the premises of agnosticism and have been more deeply impressed than Kant and Spencer with the limitation of man and the incomparable greatness of God, nevertheless they draw an entirely different conclusion therefrom, the conclusion expressed by Hilary: *perfecta scientia est, sic Deum scire, ut licet non ignorabilem, tamen inenarrabilem scias*. The knowledge which we have of God is quite distinctive. It may be called a positive knowledge insofar as through it we know (*erkennen*) a being who is infinitely distinguished from all finite creatures. It is on the other hand negative because we cannot ascribe a single predicate to God as we conceive of such a predicate in creatures. And it is therefore analogical because it is the knowledge of a being who is in himself unknowable and nevertheless can make something of himself known in creatures.

While agnosticism finds herein an irreconcilable contradiction, Christian theology beholds an adorable mystery. It is wholly incomprehensible for us that and how God can reveal himself and to an extent make himself known in the creature, the eternal in time, the immeasurable in space, infinity in the finite, immutability in change, being in becoming. . . . That God is the Infinite and nevertheless can and has revealed himself in finite creatures is truly the recognition of an incomprehensible mystery, indeed of the wonder of creation, but in no sense the admission of a tangible absurdity. Finite being cannot detract from the infinitude of God, if only it has its existence in the absolute being of God. And so also our knowledge is not a limitation of God, because it finds its ground in God himself, exists alone through him, and has precisely as its object and content God as the Infinite. (25).

Abraham Kuyper (Dictaten Dogmatiek, 1910, Vol. I)

De Cognitione Dei Summary: "according to the rule *finitum non posse capere infinitum* a creature cannot have an adequate knowledge of God. Equally unthinkable is a knowledge of God whereby he would be known passively, against his will and apart from his action. Therefore all possibility of knowing God rests upon the self-revelation of the Eternal Being. And finally, the Eternal Being is knowable alone by such a creature as receives aptitude for such knowledge through the creation ordinance, and then alone in the particular form which harmonizes with that aptitude. For man therefore there is no other knowledge than that which is *forma humana et pro mensura humana*, revealed by God himself from his archetypal self-consciousness ectypally to man. . . ." (p. 11).

Exposition: He is dealing in this chapter with the question concerning the possibility of acquiring a knowledge of the eternal One. The problem is that God is knowable and yet incomprehensible (cf. John 17:3 and Job 36:26). This has led in two directions, the mystical and the intellectual. The problem is to set both elements in organic harmony (15).

We have to do then with two elements: (1) a transcendence in the being of God which does not permit knowledge of him, and (2) a revelation of God, which actually gives knowledge of him. Agnosticism has one-sidedly taken hold of the former; rationalism similarly of the latter. These are to be repudiated. And as well mysticism which finds rapport with God in *via mystica*. The elements are not put in organic relation by rationalists and mystics because of a faulty psychology, which makes either the intellect or the feeling the one and all (25ff.).

If then knowledge of God is possible for man, the question arises as to the limitations to which that knowledge is subject. There is a threefold limitation: The *cognitio Dei* A. is and always remains *finita*; B. is *data, non sumpta*; C. is *forma et pro mensura humana*.

A. *Cognitio Dei finita est*. With God we have to do with an *ens infinitum*. Therefore our knowledge of him is limited; it cannot be adequate. *Finitum non capit infinitum*. . . . The concepts Creator and creature stand squarely over against each other . . . man is *finitum quid*. . . . We must always keep in view the difference between the knowledge which God has of himself and which is infinite and the knowledge which we have of him which is a finite knowledge . . . *Apprehendimus Deum, non comprehendimus* (Alexander of Hales). Knowledge of a finite being is *finita*; how much more so in the case of *cognitio Dei* whose being is quite separate from the creaturely. In so far as knowledge of God is possible, it is always bound by the limitations of our finiteness and is never *cognitio adaequata*.

B. *Cognitio Dei data, non sumpta est*. Here Kuyper discusses the limitation imposed by our dependence upon divine revelation.

C. *Cognitio Dei est forma et pro mensura humana*. (36ff.).

1. *Forma*. All knowledge depends on the subject and the object. When an object is revealed in the same way, results differ according to the receptivity of the subject. So we may distinguish between angelic and human knowledge, and these in turn from divine knowledge (*forma divina*). Cf. Christ's knowledge as *via unionis*.

Here we are confronted with a deep question in philosophy: the connection between the noumenon and the phenomenon. If our knowledge of God is *forma humana*, it is still real knowledge. We do not possess *cognitio Dei adaequata*, archetypal knowledge, the noumenon; this is in God himself. We have alone the phenomenon, the *cognitio Dei forma humana*. We would have to say that there is not reality in human knowledge except for the fact that man is created according to the divine image. Therein, and therein alone, lies the guarantee of the reality of the phenomenal, *forma humana*, knowledge of God communicated to us. (37).

2. *Mensura*. Man knows according to *mensura humana*. Cf. I Cor. 13:11. There are variations of measure according to personality, age, opportunity, etc. Revelation takes account of *mensura humana*.

L. Berkhof (Systematic Theology, 1946)

"The Christian Church confesses on the one hand that God is the Incomprehensible One, but also on the other hand, that He can be known and that knowledge of Him is an absolute requisite unto salvation. . . ." (29) "Reformed theology holds that God can be known, but that it is impossible for man to have a knowledge of Him that is exhaustive and perfect in every way. To have such a knowledge of God would be equivalent to comprehending Him; and this is entirely out of the question. . . ." (p. 30) "God has made Himself known. Alongside of the archetypal knowledge of God, found in God Himself, there is also an ectypal knowledge of Him, given to man by revelation. The latter is related to the former as a copy is to the original, and therefore does not possess the same measure of clearness and perfection. All our knowledge of

God is derived from His self-revelation in nature and Scripture. Consequently, our knowledge of God is on the one hand ectypal and analogical, but on the other hand also true and accurate, since it is a copy of the archetypal knowledge which God has of Himself" (35).

"But in so far as God reveals Himself in His attributes, we also have some knowledge of His Divine Being, though even so our knowledge is subject to human limitations" (43). "We cannot comprehend God, cannot have an absolute and exhaustive knowledge of Him, but we can undoubtedly have a relative or partial knowledge of the Divine being. . . . It will not do at all to say that man knows only the relations in which God stands to His creatures. It would not even be possible to have a proper conception of these relations without knowing something of both God and man. To say that we can know nothing of the Being of God, but can know only relations, is equivalent to saying that we cannot know Him at all and cannot make Him the object of our religion" (44). "Naturally, we should guard against separating the divine essence and the divine attributes or perfections, and also against a false conception of the relation in which they stand to each other. The attributes are real determinations of the Divine Being, or, in other words, qualities that inhere in the Being of God. . . . And because of the close relation in which the two stand to each other, it can be said that knowledge of the attributes carries with it knowledge of the Divine Essence. . . . These qualities cannot be altered without altering the essential Being of God. And since they are essential qualities, each one of them reveals to us some aspect of the Being of God" (45f.).

"The names of God constitute a difficulty for human thought. God is the **Incomprehensible One**, infinitely exalted above all that is temporal; but in His names He descends to all that is finite and becomes like unto man. . . . On what grounds are these names applied to the infinite and incomprehensible God? It should be borne in mind that they are not of man's invention, and do not testify to his insight into the very Being of God. They are given by God Himself with the assurance that they contain in a measure a revelation of the Divine Being. This was made possible by the fact that the world and all its relations is and was meant to be a revelation of God. Because the Incomprehensible One revealed Himself in His creatures, it is possible for man to name Him after the fashion of a creature. In order to make Himself known to man, God had to condescend to the level of man, to accommodate Himself to the limited and finite human consciousness, and to speak the human language" (47f.).

See also pp. 59ff. on The Infinity of God, and pp. 66ff. on The Knowledge of God.

THE EFFECT OF REGENERATION ON INTELLECTIVE ACTIVITIES OF THE SOUL

It is necessary, in order to provide a Scriptural resolution of the debate in our Church concerning the effect of regeneration on the intellect, to come first of all to an agreement as to the actual state of the question. From one point of view in the debate it has been held that regeneration necessarily effects a change in the understanding, or apprehension, of a proposition such as "Christ died for sinners," so that a regenerate man will have an understanding of such a proposition differing from that of an unregenerate man; and that the very point at issue is whether regeneration does so change the understanding of such a gospel proposition that a regenerate man and an unregenerate man will differ with respect to their understanding of this same proposition. From the other point of view in the debate it has been held that while regeneration effects certain changes in the knowledge situation yet it does not necessarily effect a change in the understanding of gospel propositions, and that to say that it does

is to prejudice the unity and immutability of truth itself; and that the real point at issue is whether the objective meaning of a true proposition is changed for a man so that what he understands is different as a consequence of his regeneration. It will be observed that there is concern, at least to a certain extent, over different questions. From the one viewpoint there is concern for the idea that regeneration necessarily changes a man's subjective understanding of the gospel. From the other, there is concern for the idea that objective truth is unalterable as it is apprehended.

On first glance it may seem that the whole question may be resolved by definition of terms. Let all agree, it may be said, that there is a distinction between a truth and the subjective understanding of a truth; then it can justly be asserted that while the particular truth itself is unaltered, yet regeneration does effect a change in the subjective understanding of that truth. But the matter is not so simple. For while some think this distinction valid, others avoid it, fearing that it will set up a false epistemological system whereby the mind, when said to know a truth, in reality knows not the truth but rather the "understanding", as though the mind were to know something other than the truth itself. Thus there has been confusion concerning the word "understanding" and also the word "knowledge" because of differing attitudes toward an epistemological problem.

It is not the work of this committee to attempt to deal fully with the problem of knowledge. The problem needs consideration only insofar as it is directly involved in the precise theological question at issue. To reach the theological question, however, some further analysis of the knowledge situation is necessary.

[*The following materials are included here for information as formulations that have proved helpful to several members of the committee:

Thinking and knowing are two forms of intellectual activity, although neither is possible in isolation from the other. Thinking is an activity of the self in which the self conceives an idea, asserts a proposition or infers a conclusion. Knowing is that act of the self in which the self asserts a truth, the assertion being grounded upon nothing less than valid proximate evidence.

There can be no question that the unregenerate man thinks. Likewise there can be no question that he can know in the sense of thinking true propositions and asserting them to be true, basing his certainty upon valid proximate grounds. (Such grounds of knowledge as the unregenerate man possesses by reason of the general testimony of the Holy Spirit we call valid proximate grounds. Such grounds of knowledge as the regenerate man possesses by reason of the special testimony of the Holy Spirit we call valid ultimate grounds.) Nevertheless, the unregenerate man lacks the recognition of the ultimate valid ground for asserting the truth of the proposition he knows, in the sense that he fails to see that truth in its proper relationship to God who is Truth itself and in whose Light we see light. In the same sense he is unable to justify the validity of the proximate grounds.

Man as the image-bearer of God is subject to divinely-ordained laws and norms in all spheres of his activity. In the intellectual, aesthetic and ethical spheres, he is subject to the norms of truth, harmony and morality respectively. Sin has not affected or altered the laws or norms which govern or hold for the various spheres. Likewise, the laws or norms are not changed by regeneration. Yet sin and regeneration affect the beings that are subject to norms. Sin has disrupted the relation of the human subject to the norm in every sphere, and what has been disrupted by sin has been restored in principle by regeneration. The moral law in the realm of ethics

is the norm of all states and activities when viewed as states and activities. Thus knowing when viewed as an activity is subject to the moral law. Intellectual activity, when viewed not as an activity but as intellectual, is subject to the norm of truth, just as aesthetic activity, when viewed not as activity but as aesthetic, is subject to the norm of harmony.]

Total depravity affects every kind of intellectual activity of the soul. The unregenerate knowing subject is out of fellowship with God and oriented away from him and his will. The unregenerate knowing subject as consciously knowing is out of fellowship with God. The unregenerate knowing subject is oriented away from God in his subconscious or conscious states of knowledge. However, knowledge, when viewed as truths known or knowable by the unregenerate rather than as a modification of the knowing subject, is not altered by sin.

Regeneration effects a change in every kind of intellectual activity with reference to the truth. It results in renewed heart-understanding, i.e., "Spiritual" understanding, Spiritual in the sense that it is due to the operation and indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The truths previously known are unaltered by regeneration but are now oriented in a theocentric system of truth. The regenerate knowing subject as consciously knowing is now restored to fellowship with God. The regenerate knowing subject as being in a conscious or subconscious state of knowledge is restored to fellowship with God. Knowledge when viewed as truths known or knowable rather than as a modification of the human subject, is unaltered by regeneration.

It has been asserted above that knowledge, viewed as truths known or knowable, is not altered by sin or by regeneration. The assertion is made, without appeal to the Scriptural reasons in support of it, because no party in the debate appears to have any interest in denying this datum. To be sure some have held that certain statements made in the course of the debate (with reference to a change in understanding due to regeneration) have endangered this datum. But the need then is not to undertake to prove the datum positively, but rather to come to a formulation concerning the effect of regeneration upon the intellect which will not prejudice this datum.

When knowledge is viewed as a modification of the knowing subject, on the other hand, it may be clearly distinguished from knowledge viewed as truths known or knowable. For in its former aspect knowledge is mutable, whereas in its latter aspect it is not mutable. Thus in the "knowledge" of the knowing subject there is an objective aspect which is unaltered by sin and by regeneration, and a subjective aspect which is mutable. These two aspects of "knowledge" may properly be distinguished the one from the other, and the distinction applied to the question at hand. Knowledge in its former aspect may be designated as "truth known." Knowledge in its latter aspect may be designated as "the subjective state of cognitive consciousness" (1). Such a state may be subconscious or unconscious, as well as conscious.

What then is the state of the question? The question is whether there is such a subjective change necessarily wrought by sin, and such a subjective change necessarily wrought by regeneration, that the respective states of knowledge of an unregenerate and a regenerate man, with reference to the same truth, **must differ.**

The virtue of this analysis of the state of the question appears to be that by it the confusion in the use of the word "knowledge" has been eliminated. Moreover much of the epistemological problem about the proper use of such words as "knowledge" and "understanding" can be avoided, and attention can be devoted to the Scriptural evidence bearing upon the question.

(1) Hereinafter, the subjective state of cognitive consciousness will be referred to as the "state of knowledge."

Before proceeding to the Scriptural teaching, however, it remains to be demonstrated by reference to the history of the debate that the question as stated has actually been the point at issue. The full history of the discussion, with all the various arguments employed and authorities appealed to, need not be traced through the dozen or more relevant documents. To delineate the question will be sufficient.

The **Complaint** described Dr. Clark's view, to which it objected, as making "no qualitative distinction between the knowledge of the unregenerate man and the knowledge of the regenerate man", so that "with the same ease, the same 'common sense', the unregenerate and the regenerate man can understand propositions revealed to man" (10:2). To this the **Answer** replied: "Both the regenerate and the unregenerate can with the same ease understand the proposition, Christ died for sinners. Regeneration, in spite of the theory of the **Complaint**, is not a change in the understanding of these words. The difference between the regenerate and the unregenerate lies in the fact that the former believes the proposition and the latter does not. The regenerate acknowledges Christ as Lord; the other does not. The one is a willing subject; the other is a rebel. Regeneration is not necessarily a change in understanding propositions. An unregenerate man may understand the proposition 'Christ died for sinners', but far from knowing it to be true, he thinks it to be false. Strictly speaking he knows only that 'the Scriptures teach Christ died for sinners.' When he is regenerated, his understanding of the proposition may undergo no change at all; what happens is that he now accepts as true what previously he merely understood. He no longer knows merely 'the Scriptures teach Christ died for sinners'; he now knows 'Christ died for sinners'" (pp. 32f.).

It is to be observed with regard to these quotations that in the first place the use by the **Complaint** of the words "knowledge" and "can understand" is ambiguous. The adverbial expression "with the same ease", as qualifying the words "can understand", indicates that the latter words apply to the knowing subject's subjective state of knowledge concerning the truth. The reference to an "absolute qualitative distinction between the knowledge" of the unregenerate and the regenerate man would also indicate that the knowledge spoken of is subjective, for regeneration changes not the truth but the knowing subject. This appears to have been the intention of the **Complaint**. Yet the description is so brief that it might be taken to teach that Dr. Clark's view was objectionable for the very reason that it allowed unregenerate men to have knowing contact with divinely revealed propositions. And this was in fact the interpretation put upon the **Complaint's** words by the **Answer**. The **Answer** desired to uphold the Biblical teaching that God's revealed truth is the same for all men. But the **Answer** went farther than this. It also assumed that back of the **Complaint's** supposed opposition to the identity of the truth for all men was a notion that regeneration actually changed the truth known. To such a notion the **Answer** reacted vigorously, in the quotation given above: "Regeneration, in spite of the theory of the **Complaint**, is not a change in the understanding of these words." And by "understanding of these words" the **Answer** seems to have meant "the truth known." But the **Answer** then failed to distinguish between understanding in the sense of "truth known" and understanding in the sense of "subjective state of knowledge." For it goes on to refer to the difference between the regenerate and the unregenerate in the words "the one acknowledges Christ as Lord; the other does not. The one is a willing subject; the other is a rebel." Regeneration then brings belief and willing subjection; but these are changes in the knowing subject. Immediately the **Answer** adds, "Regeneration is not a change in understanding propositions." So the question arises, is the **Answer** still speaking of the

knowing subject? Is the Answer rejecting the idea of an intellectual, noetic change in the knowing subject due to regeneration? Perhaps not. Perhaps it merely has failed to distinguish between the truth known and the subjective state of knowledge, and while still bearing the former in mind has used words which seem to refer to the latter. However a later sentence reads, "When he is regenerated, his understanding of the proposition may undergo no change at all; what happens is that he now accepts as true what previously he merely understood." Here the Answer does not seem to have intended to say that the truth of the words "Christ died for sinners" is not changed by regeneration, or else it would not have used the significant word "may." The Answer would not want to allow for the possibility that the truth known might be changed. Therefore it appears to be using the words "his understanding of the proposition" not in the sense of "the truth known by him" but rather in the sense of "his subjective state of knowledge concerning the proposition." Then to say that "when he is regenerated, his understanding of the proposition may undergo no change at all" seems to allow for the possibility that there may be in an unregenerate man such a high subjective state of knowledge respecting this truth that regeneration itself may effect no change at all in his subjective state of knowledge respecting it.

Accordingly the complainants, in a paper circulated on their behalf in response to the Answer, continued the debate in the belief that the question at issue was whether regeneration necessarily changes the subjective state of knowledge with regard to the truth. This paper spoke of the insufficiency of common grace to give the same understanding to the unregenerate that special grace gives to the regenerate, and by "the same understanding" it meant "the same subjective state of knowledge": "It goes without saying that common grace saves no one. It does bestow a certain understanding of the gospel upon those who have not been born again; but this understanding is never the same as that understanding received through special grace. If it were the same, there would be for the human intellect no distinction between the benefits of common grace and those of special grace. It should be obvious that the best that common grace can do leaves a natural understanding; special grace brings a spiritual understanding. The difference for the intellect is in effect the difference between being old, and new; being blind, and seeing." The adjectives "natural" and "spiritual" must refer to an understanding which is not "the truth known" but rather "the subjective state of knowledge", for special grace alters not the truth but the knowing subject.

To this quotation, however, Mr. Hamilton then replied as follows: "The complainants cannot escape from the common sense idea that anyone can understand the meaning of the proposition, 'Christ died for sinners,' so they make an artificial distinction between 'natural understanding' and 'spiritual understanding' and in so doing they are obviously trying to capitalize on the Scriptural distinction between the natural man and the spiritual man. That Scriptural distinction is of course just the distinction between the regenerated and the unregenerated man. Now since the complainants clearly reject our doctrine that an unregenerated man can (though not necessarily) understand the gospel (p. 10) they cannot mean that the 'natural understanding' can understand the gospel. Just what can it do then? If a 'natural understanding' is not an intellectual understanding of the meaning (of) the words 'Christ died for sinners,' just what is it? We insist that an unregenerated man may put exactly the same meaning on the words, 'Christ died for sinners' as the regenerated man. The difference is that the unregenerated man does not love the truth which he understands, and does not apply that blessed truth to his own soul for salvation. He does not 'spiritually apprehend' what he intellectually understands" (Studies of the Doc-

trines of the Complaint, No. 1, p. 5). Throughout this passage the reference is to those changes which are wrought by regeneration (loving, and applying the truth, and spiritually apprehending it) and to that which is said to be unaffected by regeneration (intellectual understanding). But inasmuch as only the knowing subject can be affected by regeneration the reference seems to be to that in the knowing subject which is or which is not altered by regeneration. At the same time that which is said to be unaltered is designated by the term "meaning," a term which is ordinarily used with reference to the truth known, and this suggests the possibility that the words 'intellectual understanding' may also be intended in the same sense. On the other hand it is said on the following page of the paper that the word *ginosko*, in most cases, "means not merely 'intellectual understanding' but understanding plus belief, apprehension and experiential knowledge of that which is intellectually understood" (p. 5). Here the various elements found in *ginosko*, including "intellectual understanding", would all seem to belong to the subject rather than to the truth known.

A Reply to this paper by Mr. Hamilton was then issued by Messrs. Bradford and Kuschke. The Reply attempted to avoid confusion by a distinction between the "object" and the "content" of knowledge. It explained the "object of knowledge" as truth, which is given through revelation, and which is one for all knowing minds. It explained the "content" of knowledge as the representation, in a mind, of the object of knowledge, and as the mind's possession of, or grasp of, that truth. It then went on to refer the word "meaning" to the object, or to truth, and the word "understanding" to the content of knowledge; and then on the basis of these distinctions held that it is the "content" or "understanding" which is changed by regeneration. However, these distinctions by no means cleared up the issue but rather gave rise to further problems of terminology, and were strongly criticized. The word "representation" was noted as an indication of a false epistemology and the word "content" was held to be a word that properly meant the truth itself.

The distinctions advanced in the Reply, therefore, cannot be said to have opened the way to an agreement on the question at issue. But it should be noted, in the attempt to delineate the question by reference to the history of the debate, in what way the Reply did define the issue. It was opposed to the view that "an unregenerate man may have exactly the same understanding of the words 'Christ died for sinners' as a regenerate man, and that regeneration does not necessarily change at all the understanding of spiritual truth." It held, on the contrary, "that although an unregenerate man may have an understanding of the truth, this understanding is never the same as that possessed by the regenerate man; and that regeneration always so enlightens the darkened mind that the understanding of the things of God is changed" (p. 1).

Mr. Hamilton then replied in a Second Paper, "We submit that if a man has an understanding of a truth, he knows the meaning or he has no understanding of it. If he understands something different, he does not understand the meaning at all" (p. 1). "The point at issue is whether an unregenerated man can ever grasp the true meaning. Mr. Kuschke and Mr. Bradford say that he can 'have an understanding' . . . but that it is not an 'adequate understanding'. But is the understanding which he has true or not? If true, then how does the truth change with regeneration?" (p. 4). The evident meaning for "understanding" here is "the truth known", as opposed to the usage of the Reply which is evidently "the subjective state of knowledge." Yet Mr. Hamilton appears to pass into the latter sense of "understanding" when on the same page of the Second Paper, under the heading, "What regeneration adds to intellectual understanding of truth,"

he says, "Now to the intellectual understanding of the truth which may be the same for the regenerated or the unregenerated is added faith in the spiritual truths of the gospel. The regenerated man not only intellectually understands it and intellectually believes it; he appropriates it with his whole soul and knows it experientially in the 'ginosko' sense. Regeneration adds experiential understanding of truth to the intellectual understanding already possessed" (p. 4).

Finally, in a letter addressed to the Committee on Foreign Missions and circulated in the church under date of April 25, 1947, Mr. Hamilton said: "I hold that while the soul is totally depraved before regeneration and unable to have saving faith for that is the gift only of the Holy Spirit, it is nevertheless possible in exceptional cases for a person to have the same intellectual understanding of the meaning of a proposition of the gospel that a regenerated person has, though his attitude toward it will be entirely different" (p. 2). Thus it is held that although regeneration necessarily produces a change in "attitude" it does not necessarily produce a change in "intellectual understanding." "Intellectual understanding" does not seem to mean here "the truth known," or it would not have been stated that it is possible "in exceptional cases for a person to have the same intellectual understanding of the meaning of a proposition of the gospel that a regenerated person has." The mention of "exceptional cases" seems moreover to refer to the high level of knowledge attained by some apparently unregenerate persons as proof that in their cases regeneration will effect no change in their subjective state of knowledge.

This review of the history of the debate appears to justify that formulation of the state of the question which was given earlier, and which may now be repeated: Is there such a subjective change necessarily wrought by sin, and such a subjective change necessarily wrought by regeneration, that the respective states of knowledge of an unregenerate and a regenerate man, with reference to the same truth, **must differ?**

Let it be freely acknowledged that there exists on the part of unregenerate persons what may be called intellectual or notional or historical faith. And where there is historical faith there is also a certain knowledge of that truth which is believed. Understanding and faith of this character can reach very high levels. So high may be the level of attainment along these lines in the culture of man's natural powers and under the non-saving operations of the Holy Spirit that the persons concerned may pass among men as the most exemplary specimens of Christian knowledge, faith and virtue, and no man would be able properly or rightfully to discern that they were not really regenerate. The Scripture itself advises us of this fact when it uses language to describe the experience of persons who have come under the influence of the gospel and of the Holy Spirit, language which we might well think is applicable only to the regenerate but is used, nevertheless, to describe the experience of those who may fall away. (cf. Hebrews 6:4-6; 10:29). Furthermore it is not given to us men so to diagnose the psychology of men that we shall be able to describe the exact difference between the soul exercises of such people who possess this high degree of attainment and grace, short of actual salvation, and the soul exercises of those who may be actually regenerate.

It must also be appreciated that this high degree of attainment and bestowal of non-saving grace covers the whole range of a person's life and activity. It applies to what we may call the intellective, emotive and volitive aspects of man. Indeed oftentimes it is in the sphere of the intellectual that this attainment is most conspicuous.

Furthermore, we must not suppose that attainment in knowledge of Christian truth is restricted to those who have notional and historical faith. A high

level of knowledge may be achieved by those who do not yield any kind of credence to that which is known.

Finally, it must be insisted that prior to regeneration and saving faith, in the case of intelligent adults, there must be some intelligent cognition of the import of the propositions of law and gospel. Faith does not emerge in a vacuum. Faith comes of hearing and hearing by the word of Christ. Information regarding the gospel must be communicated before faith is exercised and that information must be apprehended by the person who is going to believe. It is necessary therefore to maintain that there is a certain knowledge and conviction that must precede faith.

But even when knowledge of this character in the unregenerate reaches its most advanced development a radical difference remains between it and the knowledge of the regenerate when all aspects of the knowledge situation are considered. For even when the knowledge objectively considered is identical with regard to some or many truths of the gospel, subjectively considered, the knowledge is of as distinct a kind as is the spiritual character of the knower. This appears from the Scriptural teaching concerning the pervasiveness of original sin and the pervasiveness of regeneration.

The teaching of Scripture as to the change wrought by sin in the knowing subject.

With reference to the intellective powers in general. Gen. 6:5—"And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the day." "Imagination" is a framing in the mind; "thoughts" means thoughts, devices, inventions. Clearly man's intellective powers are in view. Thus all exercises of those powers are inwardly evil ("every imagination of the thoughts of his heart"); there is no good exercise of those powers ("only evil"); and the exercise of those powers is always evil ("all the day"). God originally "made man upright" (Eccles. 7:29) and in the image of God as to knowledge (Col. 3:10), but the entrance of sin turned his intellective powers inwardly, entirely, and habitually to evil.

In considering the Scriptural teaching as to the manifestation of man's depravity in that aspect of man and his activity which is intellective, cognitive and noetic, it is often difficult to determine precise shades of difference among the terms employed in Scripture to denote that aspect. It should be acknowledged that there is a very close interrelation of the different aspects from which man's soul may be viewed, and it is sometimes very difficult to restrict any of the terms which Scripture uses to designate man on his intellective side to what we might call intellect in a restricted sense. Nevertheless Scripture does view man from the differing aspects of his activity and uses terms which are intended to focus our attention upon these aspects in their differentiation as well as in their interrelation and interdependence. Without giving any support to a crude faculty psychology we can say that Scripture uses language which recognizes that man has an intellective faculty, an emotive faculty, a volitive faculty, a conscience faculty. And this is the same as saying that man is constituted with diverse capacities.

Of the various Scriptural terms to which attention will be called below, it is not affirmed that any is restricted to a purely intellective sense. The soul is a unit, and thinking or knowing does not exist in isolation from the volitive and emotive powers of the soul. But all the words given below embody the intellective element. Thus when it is said that the "mind of the flesh is enmity against God", there is reflection upon the volitive and the emotive while the intellective is yet embodied in the term "mind." Whatever variety of meaning may be set forth in the Scriptural terms below, that variety reveals the variety of the Scriptural reflection upon the depravity of man when viewed from the intellective aspect.

With reference to the mind ("nous"). According to Titus 1:15, nothing is pure to the defiled and unbelieving, but "even their mind and conscience are defiled." In II Tim. 3:8 men who resist the truth are said to be "corrupted in mind"; cf. also I Tim. 6:5. Unbelieving Gentiles walk "in the vanity of their mind" (Eph. 4:17); their mind is characterized by futility. In Scripture that is said to be vain which is futile and to no purpose, and which has no profit. "The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain" (I Cor. 3:20; cf. Titus 3:9, I Cor. 15:17, James 1:26, Rom. 1:21).

With reference to the mind ("noema"). "And if our gospel be hid, it is hid to those who are lost, in whom the god of this world has blinded (*etuphlosen*) the minds of those who believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them" (II Cor. 4:3-4). In the earlier context Paul has spoken of the glory of the ministration of the Spirit, or of the new covenant, as excelling the glory of the ministration of the old covenant. The glory of the old, upon the face of Moses, was veiled from the children of Israel, and even today a veil upon their hearts prevents them from seeing the glory of that covenant. In the new covenant, by the Spirit of the Lord, the glory of the Lord is beheld with open face; and it is in honest manifestation of the truth that ministers of the new covenant commend themselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. Here Paul reverts to the case of the lost or unbelieving, for not all believe the gospel. He uses the same figure that he had used in the case of the unbelieving under the old covenant, that of a veil. The gospel is hid (*kekalummenon*) to them, or veiled from them, and through no lack in the gospel, which is glorious (*doxes*), but rather because the god of this world has blinded (*etuphlosen*) their minds (*noemata*) lest the light of that glorious gospel should shine upon them. Their blindness of mind hides the gospel from them and accordingly they stand in striking contrast with those others mentioned in verse 6, who have that light only because God has shined in their hearts to bestow that light: or, in other words, in contrast with those whom God has regenerated and who believe the gospel. Their blindness of mind, however, by no means excludes them from hearing the gospel in its outward ministration, for when the gospel is preached (cf. verses 1, 2, 5) they show themselves to be unbelieving (*apiston*) toward it. It is rather the light and the glory of the gospel to which they are blind, even as the Jews are blind to the glory of the Old Testament while actually reading it, by reason of the veil upon their hearts (3:7-14). Accordingly their mental blindness of which Paul speaks indicates neither the destruction of their intellectual powers, nor the destruction of the operation or exercise of those powers, but rather an impotency or defect, in their intellectual powers, rendering them noetically blind to the glory of the gospel. Thus the brightest colors appear only as various shades of gray in certain forms of color-blindness.

With reference to the understanding ("dianoia"). Eph. 4:17-18—"This I say therefore and testify in the Lord, that ye no longer walk as the Gentiles also walk, in the vanity of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart." In II Cor. 4:3-4 the minds of unbelievers are said to be blinded lest the light of the gospel should shine unto them. Here unbelievers contemplated as being darkened (*eskotomenoi*) in the mind or understanding (*dianoia*). Darkness is the absence of light; it is opposed to "light in the Lord" (5:8). Associated with this darkness of the understanding is alienation from the life of God, from that Spiritual life which God communicates. These ideas of darkness and death, light and life, are implied again in Eph. 5:14 - "awake thou that sleepest and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." The underlying basis for both darkness of understanding and alienation from life is stated to be, "because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart." The ignorance (*agnoia*) which is in them is that ten

ousan en autois; its seat is in themselves, in their inborn sin. The hardness or obduracy of their heart is likewise the inward original character of their nature. Thus the passage as a whole emphasizes the effects of sin in the unregenerate knowing subject: futility of mind, darkness of understanding, alienation from the life of the Spirit, ignorance whose seat is in themselves, and obduracy of heart. According to the Scriptural doctrine of the unity of the soul, all these effects, even if they do not refer primarily to the intellective powers, nevertheless condition the exercise of these powers.

With reference to the act of knowing (*"ginosko"*). I Cor. 2:14—"The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him; and he cannot know them, because they are spiritually judged." The things of the Spirit of God, which the natural or unregenerate man does not receive, are called "Jesus Christ and him crucified" (verse 2); "the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom, which God hath ordained" (verse 7); "the things which God hath prepared for them that love him" (verse 9); "the things that are freely given to us of God" (verse 12). These are the things "which also we speak" (verse 13). It is the gospel message to which Paul refers, and that message is contemplated as being preached (cf. verses 4,6,7,13). But when it is preached to the natural man he does not receive it, for the reason that it is foolishness to him. It is to be remarked that Paul here is speaking generally of the natural man, and of the fact that the natural man as such does not accept the gospel when it is preached to him. Hence the word "foolishness" cannot mean that the gospel to a natural man is a mere outward form of unintelligible words, for the truth undoubtedly conveys meaning to many unregenerate men. But the wisdom of the world allows for no such philosophy as that God should send his Son to die on a cross for sin (cf. 1:18-23); in the estimation of the natural man such things are folly, so he receives them not. Moreover, "he cannot know them, because they are spiritually judged." He is unable to know them because he as a natural man, to whom the Spirit of God has not savingly come, is not able to judge them in the Spirit; and the gospel, being spiritual, is judged only in the Spirit. Accordingly verse 14 sets the natural man and spiritual things in antithesis.

In the larger context an antithesis obtains between the natural man and the spiritual man; the one cannot know spiritual things, the other can (cf. verse 12, "we have received . . . the Spirit which is of God, that we might know (*oida*) the things which are freely given to us of God"). No natural man can judge spiritual things, for he has not been born of the Spirit, and the inability referred to is an inability which belongs to each unregenerate individual and to all unregenerate individuals. But what precisely is this inability to know and to judge spiritual things? Paul evidently does not mean that the natural man is debarred from all acquaintance with the truth of the gospel. But in virtue of the antithesis between the natural man's inability to know and the spiritual man's ability to know, we may say that the sense is that the natural man, being natural, cannot know the spirituality of the things of God. There is that in them which is foreign to him, and for which he has no capacity. He cannot know spiritual things as the spiritual man knows them. He is subjectively incapable of doing so.

This interpretation receives support from certain passages in which a knowledge of God and of his will is attributed to the ungodly. In Rom. 1:21 knowledge of God (with the use of the verb *ginosko*) and in 1:32 knowledge of the righteous judgment of God (with the use of the verb *epiginosko*) is predicated of unrighteous men. In Rom. 2:18 it is very probable that the "Jew" who knows (*ginosko*) the will of God is also contemplated as an unbeliever, and the verses which follow are in this respect very instructive. Thus the natural man may have a knowledge of God. But the knowledge, subjectively considered, must be characterized by the natural man's subjective condition as natural. His knowledge then is of a distinct kind; it is natural rather than spiritual. As long

as the natural man is natural, his subjective knowledge of the things of the Spirit of God must be natural, and cannot be spiritual. The spiritual man, on the other hand, has a subjective knowledge of God which is of as distinct a kind as is his own condition as spiritual; it is spiritual knowledge.

The natural man's inability to know the things of the Spirit of God is an intellectual or cognitive inability. It is not, to be sure, only intellectual or cognitive. The Greek word **ginosko** is often used in a rich and pregnant sense that embraces far more than the barely intellectual activity of man. It is rather obvious that it designates a deeply practical and experiential knowledge with emotive and volitive aspects as well as intellectual. The knowledge of the Father and of the Son in which eternal life consists is of course not any bare intellectual apprehension but a knowledge that is charged with the notions of love and communion. It is fully admitted that the regenerate man appropriates the truths of the gospel to his own soul and that he comes to have what may be called an "experiential" knowledge of these truths, and that such appropriation with its correlative experience distinguishes the regenerate from the unregenerate man. But the question for the solution of which we refer to I Cor. 2:14 is whether there is a necessary intellectual difference in the subjective knowledge of the natural man and the spiritual man. We would be doing violence to the plain import of I Cor. 2:14 if we should exclude man's very intellectual knowing, or his state of knowledge, from the scope of the antithesis drawn between the natural man's inability to know and the spiritual man's ability to know, in order to put all the emphasis upon the volitive and emotive aspects of knowing. However much we may emphasize the appropriation of the truth by the regenerate, his emotive and volitive engagement with the truth and the radical change of attitude with reference to the truth, and all of this necessarily and rightly so, we must not exclude, from the contrast between the natural man's inability to know and the spiritual man's ability to know, intellectual activity in its most elementary and rudimentary aspect. However much the verb **ginosko** may be interpenetrated with appropriative and experiential notions, yet to suppress the intellectual or cognitive feature of **ginosko**, and particularly to suppose that in the matter of intellectual knowing or in that of the intellectual state of knowledge with respect to the things of the Spirit the antithesis drawn in the text does not obtain, would be wholly unwarranted, would be without any basis in the context and would radically interfere with the leading thought of the passage.

With reference to the act of understanding ("**sunieimi**"). Rom. 3:11—"There is none that understandeth; there is none that seeketh after God". This is a part of the passage from verses 9-19 which shows that all, both Jew and Gentile, are under sin and guilty before God; and which declares all the activities of guilty men, such as those of the tongue, mouth, feet and ways, to be evil and unprofitable. Expressly included in these evil activities is failure to "understand." Since the description applies not only to the Gentile but also to the Jew who knows God's revelation, it cannot be lack of knowledge of truth which is spoken of, but a lack in the knowing subject. The word **sunieimi**, moreover, as clearly as any word in the Greek New Testament, has the force of intellectual understanding. According to Thayer, it "implies native insight, the soul's capacity of itself not only to lay hold upon the phenomena of the outer world through the senses, but by combination (**sun** and **ienai**) to arrive at their underlying laws" (p. 118, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, N. Y., Harper, 1887).

In Matt. 13:18-23 is our Lord's interpretation of the parable of the sower (cf. parallels in Mark 4:14-20 and Luke 8:11-15). It is with the interpretation of the parable that we are concerned and hence some of the difficulties inherent in the parabolic form of our Lord's teaching and the purpose for that form, declared in these contexts, should not be regarded as prejudicing the argument.

What we are dealing with is not so much the interpretation of the parable as the bearing that our Lord's interpretation has upon the question at issue.

We need not argue the point regarding the content of the message contemplated in this case; it is the Word of the kingdom, the gospel. All of the four classes heard the gospel and even in the case of those whose attention to it was most ephemeral we are told that it was sown in their heart. We must conclude, therefore, that there was some kind of lodgement of the Word in the hearts of all these respective classes. We may surely suppose that there was some kind of intellectual understanding or of intelligent cognition on the part of all. It becomes particularly necessary to insist on this in the case of those who are compared to the seed sown on rocky ground. The fact that they received the Word with joy and continued for a season requires the assumption that they had some intelligent understanding of its meaning. There is the strongest presumption that the third class, also, are regarded as yielding some kind of intelligent response to the Word.

It should be noted that the rocky ground hearers are represented as receiving the Word. In this respect also there is a rather close resemblance (for a time) to those who bring forth fruit to perfection (cf. Matt. 13:20; Mark 4:16; Luke 8:13 with Mark 4:20). There is then without doubt in the case of this class a ready reception of the Word, which implies a rather high degree of intelligent understanding.

It is noteworthy, however, that "understanding" of the Word is actually predicated only of the fourth class, the class we would call true and regenerate believers. The distinguishing features of this class are that they understand, they receive the Word into an honest and good heart, they hold it fast, and they bring forth fruit with patience.

It might be argued that the "understanding" predicated of the fruit-bearing, abiding believers is not intended to distinguish them from all the other classes but only from the first. For only in the case of the wayside hearers is it said that they did not understand (Matt. 13:19). And so it might be said that the first class heard but did not understand, the second heard and understood, the third heard and probably understood, but the fourth heard and understood and brought forth fruit, so that the fourth is not distinguished from the second and third in the matter of understanding but only in the matter of continuance and fruit-bearing.

This, however, is not a natural or reasonable interpretation. If this were intended we should expect something more direct and positive in the way of understanding to be attributed to the second and third classes. Such is not the case. And so when we read in Matt. 13:23, "This is he who hears the Word and understands" we should surely expect that the "understanding" is a distinguishing feature of this class and lies at the basis of the difference in the final issue. This is surely the natural and reasonable interpretation. And, if so, it means that the regenerate hearer, if we may use terminology appropriate to our discussion, is distinguished by the fact that he understands the Word. The others do not understand. Consequently the distinction between regenerate and unregenerate applies to the very intellectual activity involved in the understanding (*sunimi*) of the gospel and therefore of the propositions apart from which there is no gospel to be declared or heard.

Moreover in our Lord's introductory statements (Matt. 13:13-14) some very pertinent distinctions bearing upon this very question are drawn. "Seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, neither do they understand. . . . By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive." The thought is that there are those who hear in one sense and not in another, who see in one sense and not in another. On the other hand true believers could be described as those who hear and hear, who see and see. And this distinction characteristic of true believers, of hearing and hearing, of see-

ing and seeing, is also one of understanding and perceiving. Distinction between those who believe and those who do not applies even to hearing and seeing as well as to understanding and knowing.

Accordingly of the four classes of hearers of the Word, it may be said that all hear the same truth, but that a distinction prevails between the subjective understanding of the first three, and the subjective understanding of the last; a distinction so radical that our Lord speaks only of the last, or of the true and abiding believers, as "understanding" the Word.

With reference to the thoughts or purposes ("phronema"). Thayer defines this word as "what one has in mind, the thoughts and purposes." It appears to mean not only exercises of the mind but also frame and disposition of mind. Rom. 8:6-7 - "For the mind of the flesh is death, and the mind of the Spirit is life and peace. Because the mind of the flesh is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, for it is not able." The carnal mind is the unregenerate mind, without the Spirit of God and consequently without the blessings of life and peace, so it is said to be "death" (*thanatos*; cf. Eph. 2:1,5; Col. 2:13). It is a state of spiritual inactivity and spiritual insensibility. It has no inner living impulse toward God, but is rather "enmity" against him. The lack of spiritual impulse toward God and the presence of active enmity against him is patent at the point of God's revelation in his law, where God's glory is most effulgent, and where the demands of his glory come to bear upon us most urgently; here the enmity of the carnal mind becomes most virulent. It cannot be subject to the law of God, Paul adds, in a further reflection upon the state of "death" which he has already ascribed to it.

The teaching of Scripture as to the change wrought by regeneration in the knowing subject.

John 3:3—"Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Except by the radical, pervasive, mysterious, sovereign renewal of regeneration no one can be saved, no one can even see the spiritual kingdom of God. The reality of that which is spiritual is to be perceived only as a result of the new birth.

With reference to the mind ("*nous*"). Rom. 12:2—"Be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind" Eph. 4:23—"Renewed in the spirit of your mind." The renewal begun by regeneration is a renewal extending to the mind, which had been defiled and corrupted by sin (cf. Titus 1:15 and II Tim. 3:8).

With reference to the understanding ("*dianoia*"). I John 5:20—"And we know (*oida*) that the Son of God has come, and has given us an understanding (*dianoia*), that we may know him that is true; and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life." The Son of God has come, and has given us an insight or a power of discernment to the end that we might know him. Candlish says on this text, "The inward working of the Holy Ghost is here assumed, or asserted; that is the 'understanding' or insight that is meant. Jesus Christ coming as the Son of God has given us, not merely new outer light but a new inner eye; otherwise even his coming could not make us know 'the True One.' His coming indeed may be said to be itself the outer light. His coming forth from the True One in whose bosom he dwells reveals the True One to us. But the discovery would be in vain if his coming did not secure to us, as his gift, 'understanding to know' the True One when thus revealed" (*The First Epistle of John*, Edinburgh, A. and C. Black, 1877, p. 554).

With reference to the eyes of the heart. Eph. 1:17-18—"That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge (*epignosis*) of him, the eyes of your heart being enlightened, that ye may know (*oida*) what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints . . ." The work of saving grace brings enlightenment to the eyes of our heart, to the end that we

may know what is the hope of God's calling, an enlightenment which must radically affect the most basic movements of intelligent apprehension with respect to the "hope", "the riches of glory", and "the exceeding greatness of power" which belong to the gospel in its objective accomplishment and effectual application (cf. verses 18-23). It is obvious that without enlightenment the eyes of the heart would be blind (cf. II Cor. 4:4) toward these excellences of the gospel. But now there is new light in the most basic and elemental movements of the intellectual understanding of these truths. The new light must be the light of the Holy Spirit in the soul. Even as natural light is the external medium for the discovery of physical objects, so the light of the Spirit in the soul is the inward medium for the discovery of the beauty and excellence of the gospel. In this connection Acts 26:18 is significant — "To open their eyes, to turn them from darkness unto light and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins". In II Cor. 3:13-18, as well, the minds (*noemata*) of the children of Israel are said to be blinded by a veil upon their heart, blinding them in the reading of the Old Testament; but that veil is taken away in Christ, by the instrumentality of the Spirit of the Lord; and then with open, unveiled face they behold the Lord's glory.

With reference to the act of understanding or perceiving ("*noeo*"). Heb. 11:3 - "By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen did not come of things which appear." Without faith God is not understood to be the Creator; that understanding is attained by faith, a regenerate exercise.

With reference to the act of knowing or understanding ("*oida*"). I Cor. 2:12—"And we have received not the spirit of the world but the Spirit which is of God, that we might know (*oida*) the things which are freely given to us of God." God's special revelation, which has been freely given to us, is not sufficient in itself to provide the whole cure. We need the truth, to be sure; we need the light of the gospel; but we need also the power in ourselves to know it, the power of sight, in order that the light may have its effect in us. That is to say, the truth known is of no saving avail to us unless we have received the Spirit of God, to the end that we might "know" the truth subjectively. This "knowing" of the truth is not achieved in mere contact with the truth, otherwise the reception of the Spirit of God would not be necessary unto it. As already observed in the study of a passage in the same context, I Cor. 2:14, the truth is regarded as "given", as being preached to both the natural and the spiritual man. It is our subjective knowing of the truth, the consequence in us of our reception of the Spirit of God, that is designated by the word "know" in verse 12.

With reference to knowledge ("*epignosis*"). Coloss. 3:10—"And have put on the new man, which is renewed unto knowledge (*eis epignosisin*) after the image of him who created him" (cf. Eph. 1:17-18). Charles Hodge observes that renewal, according to this verse, is "not in knowledge, much less by knowledge, but unto knowledge, so that he knows. Knowledge is the effect of the renovation spoken of" (*Systematic Theology*, II, p. 99). This renewal is of the knowing subject; the knowledge is therefore subjective knowledge. The word "knowledge" means "precise and accurate knowledge" according to Thayer, and Lightfoot, in his comment on Coloss. 1:9 observes that "the compound *epignosis* is an advance upon *gnosis*, denoting a larger and more thorough knowledge".

With reference to knowledge ("*gnosis*"). II Cor. 4:6—"For it is the God who said, Let light shine out of darkness, who has shined in our hearts to give the light (*pros photismon*) of the knowledge (*gnoseos*) of the glory of God in the face of Christ". Here is the counterpart to verses 3 and 4: "And if our gospel be hid, it is hid to those who are lost, in whom the god of this world has blinded the minds of those who believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them." Charles Hodge

observes, "The apostle recognizes a twofold illumination, the one external by the word, to which Satan renders unbelievers blind; and the other internal by the Spirit, whereby we are enabled to see the glory that is objectively revealed" (*An Exposition of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, N. Y., 1876, p. 90). Even the light of all lights, the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, is unknown to the spiritually blind. But God's power is sufficient. He who once said, "Let there be light", and dispelled the darkness, has shined also in our innermost hearts, to abolish the blindness there, to give us the light of the knowledge of himself in the face of his Son.

The Westminster Confession of Faith.

The Confession is in accord with the teaching of the passages of Scripture examined above. Chapter VI, Sections II, III and IV say that our first parents "fell from their original righteousness and communion with God, and so became dead in sin, and wholly defiled in all parts and faculties of soul and body. They being the root of all mankind, the guilt of this sin was imputed; and the same death in sin, and corrupted nature, conveyed to all their posterity descending from them by ordinary generation. From this original corruption, whereby we are utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil, do proceed all actual transgressions."

According to Chapter X, Section I, "All those whom God hath predestinated unto life, and those only, He is pleased, in His appointed and accepted time, effectually to call, by His Word and Spirit, out of that state of sin and death, in which they are by nature, to grace and salvation, by Jesus Christ; enlightening their minds spiritually and savingly to understand the things of God, taking away their heart of stone and giving unto them a heart of flesh; renewing their wills, and, by His almighty power, determining them to that which is good, and effectually drawing them to Jesus Christ: yet so, as they come most freely, being made willing by His grace."

In effectual calling, therefore, the divine activity on behalf of those predestinated unto life terminates upon their minds, their hearts and their wills, which from original corruption had been wholly defiled and utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good. As the divine activity terminates upon their minds, it consists in "enlightening their minds spiritually and savingly to understand the things of God." Clearly, then, without the divine enlightenment they would not understand, and could not understand, the things of God. The subjective state of knowledge of the enlightened toward the things of God therefore differs from the subjective state of knowledge of the unenlightened toward those things.

Conclusions.

1. All unregenerate persons are defiled, corrupt, vain, ignorant, darkened, blinded, and without living impulse toward God, in their intellectual powers and activities. The indictment pronounced by Scripture upon the understanding of the natural man admits of no exceptions within the knowing subject. The natural man's state of knowledge therefore, cannot be regarded as immune from the vanity, ignorance, darkness, even blindness, with which his intellectual powers and activities are characterized. To regard his state of knowledge as thus immune would be a denial of the totality of his depravity.

2. The state of the intellectual powers of unregenerate persons does not prevent them from thinking and knowing, from knowing the truths of special revelation, or from being in a subjective state of knowledge respecting those truths. The objective truths known by them are in no way altered by their sin. Their subjective state of knowledge respecting those truths, however, is

necessarily and radically affected by sin, since it is an exercise of their own corrupt and darkened intellective powers.

3. All unregenerate persons are characterized by an intellective inability to know the light, the glory, the moral beauty and excellence, and the spirituality of the gospel. They are mentally blind to these things, and are prevented from seeing them by a veil upon their heart. Consequently, their state of knowledge respecting the gospel is radically deficient; they know God's special revelation apart from its light, glory, moral beauty and excellence, and spirituality. As "natural", they lack the affinity for such spiritual excellences, and have no noetic capacity for them.

4. Special revelation alone, without the removal of their mental blindness to the glory and spirituality of the gospel, cannot therefore remove the deficiency in their state of knowledge.

5. Regeneration is necessary if a person is to see the kingdom of God. By regeneration the subjective darkness and blindness with reference to the things of the Spirit of God which is characteristic of the natural man is replaced by new subjective light and insight. Regeneration immediately affects and quickens man's intellect and so into his state of knowledge respecting the truths of the gospel there is injected a new capacity of spiritual vision which does not in any way change the truths concerned but does change, in a very radical way that eludes our detection or analysis, the insight which a man has into the most elementary and central truths of the gospel. There is new light in the most basic movements of his intellective activity concerning those truths. To suppose that there is any respect in which his state of knowledge concerning those truths is not changed by regeneration would be to deny the pervasiveness and inclusiveness of the regenerative act.

6. The implantation by the Holy Spirit of a new spiritual light brings the mind into a new spiritual frame and capacity, and into affinity with the truths of the Spirit of God, so that the glory and spirituality of those truths are seen.

7. Due to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit the regenerate man is in a "spiritual" state of knowledge with reference to any truth of the gospel, while the unregenerate man's state of knowledge with reference to that truth is not "spiritual" but natural. The former sees the glory and spirituality of that truth; the latter cannot, and is therefore described in Scripture as being in a state of darkness and blindness. The regenerate and the unregenerate man can never be in the same state of knowledge with reference to that truth; their respective states of knowledge are as distinct as their respective spiritual conditions. Therefore their respective states of knowledge with reference to the same truth must and do differ.

Respectfully submitted,

THE COMMITTEE

THE FREE OFFER OF THE GOSPEL

It would appear that the real point in dispute in connection with the free offer of the gospel is whether it can properly be said that God desires the salvation of all men. The Committee elected by the Twelfth General Assembly in its report to the Thirteenth General Assembly said, "God not only delights in the penitent but is also moved by the riches of His goodness and mercy to desire the repentance and salvation of the impenitent and reprobate" (Minutes, p. 67). It should have been apparent that the aforesaid Committee, in predicating such "desire" of God, was not dealing with the decretive will of God; it was dealing with the free offer of the gospel to all without distinction and that surely respects, not the decretive or secret will of God, but the revealed will. There is no ground for the supposition that the expression was intended to refer to God's decretive will.

It must be admitted that if the expression were intended to apply to the