Chapter Two

G O D

As chapter one explained, it is the Bible, the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments, that provides mankind with the contents of Theology. These books, this Book, the Holy Scripture gives us an enormous amount of information. It is information, no less. Liberals frequently show a dislike for information. They reduce the history of the Old Testament to the levels of Aesop's fables — interesting, even profitable, but not true. Or if some of the historical accounts are true, they are no more than good examples and psychological reactions to religious experiences. This is not the Christian position. The Bible gives information. It contains uninteresting genealogies and hair raising histories, as well as lyric poetry and puzzling prophecies. All of it in one way or another relates to God. Where should one start? Well, since the word theology means the account, the study, the theory of God, it is best to postpone everything else, even the saving activity of the incarnate Christ, and begin with God as he is in himself alone. "In the beginning, God."

Question four in the Westminster Shorter Catechism asks, "What is God?" The catechism then answers, "God is a spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth." The last several words are usually called the attributes of God. They are his characteristics. If we know God's characteristics, we know his character. We know what sort of being God is. Who can say that such knowledge is unimportant? Theology is the most important knowledge there is.

The term attribute, and the question what an attribute is an attribute of, and some similar matters, have given rise to extremely intricate discussions of difficult philosophical problems. They can hardly be called elementary. Hence they seem out of place here. Yet, since every minister of the Gospel ought to know something about them, they cannot be completely omitted. To compromise, they will be reserved for a concluding section of this chapter, and the very young student can skip them, if he wishes.

Now, then, the bible begins with God. It says that God was in the beginning. This may not quite say that God is eternal; at any rate such is not the emphasis. The emphasis is that "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Creation, of course, is a divine action. It is something God did. In this sense it is not directly a statement of what God is in himself alone. Nevertheless the idea of creation presupposes the attribute of omnipotence. It might require considerable power to move a ten ton rock. But how much power is required to produce one tenth of an ounce of rock from absolutely nothing? Creation and omnipotence therefore seem to be the first thing the Bible wants us to learn about God.

1. <u>Omnipotence</u>

In addition to the fact that the Bible begins with the divine omnipotence, there are probably more verses in the rest of the Bible that assert this attribute than there are asserting other attributes, omniscience for example. Following are a few, only a few, that ascribe omnipotence to God.

Gen. 17:1	Jehovah appeared unto Abram and said, I am God Almighty.
Gen. 28:3	God Almighty bless thee.
Gen. 35:11	And God said unto him, I am God Almighty.
Job 24:1	Why are not times stored up by the Almighty?
Job 42:2	I know that thou canst do all things, and that no purpose of thine can be restrained.
Psa. 135:6	Whatever the Lord pleased, he did.
Jer. 32:17	There is nothing to hard for thee.
Dan. 4:35	He doeth according to his will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitant of the earth, And none can stay his hand or say unto him, What does thou?
Matt. 19:36	With God all things are possible.

This brief list, to which scores of more or less explicit verses could be added, is sufficient to show that the Bible represents God as Almighty. Nothing is too hard for him; he can do anything, and he actually does everything he wants to. No power can stop him.

Does not the Bible so teach? Strangely, Geddes MacGregor, professor in Bryn Mawr College, in his <u>Introduction to Religious Philosophy</u> (p. 269) says, "There is no suggestions anywhere in either the OT or the NT of the notion of omnipotence in the sense of 'the ability to do anything whatsoever.' Nor... was it implied in the use of the word <u>pantokrator</u> in the ancient Creeds."

The question here is not whether God is omnipotent. The question is simply, Does the Bible teach that God is omnipotent? Another question answers this last one. Do not the texts just quoted show with sufficient clarity that MacGregor has seriously misunderstood a great deal of the Bible? Let the professor and all other secularists believe in whatever sort of God they wish to, or in no God at all; but let scholarship determine accurately what the Bible says instead of altering the Bible's message to suit the scholar's notion of what the Bible ought to have said, but didn't. As for the main question, Does the Bible teach omnipotence? let one ask, what could possibly be beyond the power of a Being who could create something, even the least thing, from nothing?

Some people who do not think very clearly have objected that omnipotence is a self-contradictory concept. If God can do everything, he ought to be able to create a stone so heavy that he could not lift it. Or, he ought to be able to draw a Euclidean plane square with only three straight lines. However, it is not the concept of omnipotence that is self-contradictory; it is these two examples. A square by definition is a four sided figure. To speak of a square with only three sides is to talk nonsense. The sentence does not mean anything. A three sided square is nothing. Therefore to challenge God to draw a three sided square is not to challenge him at all. Similarly, if a bit less obviously, a stone so heavy that omnipotence could not lift it is not a stone. Stones by definition are things that omnipotence can life. Or, in general, what omnipotence cannot do, when expressed in words, is a sentence that has no meaning. The objection therefore is empty because it proposed nothing that can be understood. It does not present an intelligible problem.

There is another and more pointed form of this objection. Can God sin? One answer is that God can sin, if he wished to, but he will never wish to. This answer, however, is rather poor because it allows the next question, Can God wish to sin? If God can do everything, cannot he wish to sin? The reply must be the same as that given to the more obviously faulty objection about a three sided square; namely, that it disguises a self-contradiction. For one thing, it depends on the definition of sin. Later on sin will be defined as "any want of conformity unto or transgression of the law of God." These laws, however, apply to man, and not to God. God cannot dishonor his father and mother because he has none. He can, of course, kill a man, and he did so in the case of Ananias and Saphira; but he cannot commit the crime of murder because he is the Potter and has every right to do anything with the clay. Man has no rights in his dealings with God. Similarly God cannot steal because he owns everything. Behind these particulars there is a deeper reason. God wills the moral law much as he wills creation. His command, the law he promulgates, is <u>ipso</u> <u>facto</u> the norm of right and wrong. Hence whatever he does is by definition right. To suppose that God can wish to sin because God can do everything is to bog down in self-contradiction. Concerning this point more needs to be said in later connections, for everything in some way fits into everything else. Therefore it is best to continue enumerating the attributes.

2. <u>Omniscience</u>

A second attribute is omniscience. It is related to omnipotence and to the remaining attributes; but the relationships cannot be discussed without first looking at the Biblical data for each one. As for omniscience some passages in the Bible are perfectly general statements that God knows everything. But there is also such a variety of particular items of knowledge mentioned that when compiled they support the widest generalization. The first group is smaller in number.

I Sam. 2: 3	The Lord is a God of knowledge.
II Chron. 16:9	The eyes of the Lord run to and for through the whole earth. cf. Zech. 4:10
Psa. 147:5	His understanding is infinite.
I John 3:20	God … knoweth all things.

The first of these verses, since it does not specify how much God knows, is better adapted to supporting the point that God is spirit, than that he is omniscient. The second is picturesque, and in a way suggests that God knows at least what takes place on earth. The fourth is completely general and conclusive.

The third in the above list may need some exegesis. Is God infinite? Is God's knowledge infinite? What does the term infinite mean? Subject to later qualifications, we may ask, and some theologians have asked, whether there is an infinite number of propositions for God to know? God may be omniscient, i.e. he may know every truth that there is to know, but is all truth a finite or an infinite number of propositions?

If the verses that assert omniscience in all its generality are only a few in number - few but sufficient - the number of verses that specify particular items of God's knowledge are very numerous. The list here is long and yet it is only a sample.

I Cor. 2:10	The Spirit searcheth … the deep things of God … the things of God, none knoweth save the Spirit of God.
Ex. 4:11	Who hath made man’s mouth … is it not I the Lord?
Psa. 90:4,8.	For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past … Thou hast set our iniquities before thee.
Eccl. 3:15	That which is hath been long ago … and God seeketh again that which is passed away.
Isa. 43, 44, 45	I have given Egypt as they ransom. … Yet now hear, O Jacob … whom I have chosen. … I have made the earth … I, even my hands, have stretched the heavens.
Hos 11:1	When Israel was a child, then I loved him.
Job 38: 41	Who provideth for the raven his prey, when his young ones cry unto God.
Psa. 103:14	For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust.
Psa. 139:1-6	O Lord, thou hast searched me and known me … Thou understandeth my thought … thou knoweth it altogether …
Prov. 5:21	The ways of man are before the eyes of the Lord.
Matt. 10:30	The very hairs of your head are all numbered. (cf. Acts 27:34)

Acts 15:18	The Lord, who maketh these things known from of old.
Gen. 3:15	I will put enmity between thee and the woman … he shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.
I Kings 13:2	A son shall be born to the house of David.
Isa. 45:11	Ask me of the things that are to come.
Isa. 46:10	Declaring the end from the beginning.
Dan. 2:47	Of a truth, your God is the God of gods … and a revealer of secrets.
John 6:64	Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who believed not, and who it was that should betray him.
Heb. 4:13	There is no creature that is not manifest in his sight; but all things are naked and laid open before the eyes of him with whom we have to do.

Some of these verses may seem irrelevant, and it is certain that they do not all carry the same weight for the subject at hand. Exodus 4 and Isaiah 43 were not written primarily to teach God's omniscience; but they indicate that God knew, in the time of those prophets, what he had previously created. Similarly Job 38 and Psalm 103 emphasize God's providential care; but to do so he must know the ravens and us. Thus each of these verses, with a hundred others, has its point and contributes to a cumulative description of God as all-knowing.

That God knows himself might seem to go without saying. Its usefulness, however, lies in the fact that, since I Cor. 2 shows that God knows his own mind, and these other particularities also, we are warned against the dialectical or neo-orthodox theologians (Barth, Brunner et al) who claim that God is "Wholly Other". If God were wholly other, then since man is rational, God would be irrational. Since too man knows one or two truths, it follows that a God totally different could not know anything. What is wholly other cannot be an object of knowledge: since man is an object of knowledge to man, himself and others, God could not be an object of knowledge, either to himself or to us. Such is one of the unfortunate results of Neo-orthodoxy.

That God made man's mouth and, so to speak, remembers that he did so; that man's iniquities are before his mind; that he knows he gave Egypt for a ransom, and so on -- that God knows past events also seems hardly worth mentioning. But it serves to distinguish the Christian position from that of Aristotle. This philosopher argued that since God was the best of all being, and to be best included having only the best thoughts, thoughts of the best things, God could not degrade his mind by thinking of men's evils. Nor could God know the events of history, for even if they were not positively evil, yet they were trivial and beneath his notice. For Aristotle therefore God could know only himself. The God of the Bible knows how many hairs we have on our heads. God also knows our secret thoughts. He knew that the men of Keilah wanted to kill David. It is impossible for man to close his mind to God. Some people have an exaggerated notion of the inviolability of personality. In their view God must respect our individuality, our thought, our rights, our so-called freedom. But Jehovah penetrates our minds and understands our thought altogether.

All the predictions in the Bible certify that God knows the future. He prophesied the birth of Josiah some three hundred years ahead of time. He predicted that Cyrus would favor the Jews. It is not as though God said: I shall manage this somehow; if Cyrus does not want to favor the Jews, I can get someone else who will be willing. The future event was the action of Cyrus. There are also predictions of events that are still future to us. Aristotle said that this was impossible. His reason was not only that these events are too trivial for God to bother with; but more particularly that future events cannot be known because the future does not exist. Only what is, can be known. The future not only is not, but it is uncertain. It may turn out one way or the other. Now, Christianity will admit that only the fixed and determined can be known. To say that the future may turn out one way or another surely makes the future unknowable. But Christianity teaches that the future is inevitable. Judas was chosen as a disciple because he was the one to betray Christ. And Christ's betrayal and death were known from eternity. God can declare the end from the beginning, for he made the beginning in order to bring about the end. Thus the list of quotations above refers not only to what is present, but to all things, past, present, and future: all things are naked and laid open before the eyes of God.

3. Eternity.

The next attribute for discussion is God's eternity, for eternity and omniscience are closely related. Maybe they are identical! The first thing to do is to see whether the Bible teaches that God is eternal, and whether the notion of eternity is well defined. The items in the list will require some explanation.

Gen. 21:33	There he called on the name of the Lord, the everlasting God.
Ex. 3:14	I AM THAT I AM.
Psa. 41:13	Blessed by the Lord, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. cf Psa. 90:2
Isa. 9:6	His name shall be called … Everlasting Father.
John 5:26	The Father hath life in himself.
Rom. 1:20	his everlasting power and Godhead.

Rom. 16:26 the eternal God.

With the possible exception of Ex. 3:14 - where the French version translates God's name as L'Eternel - these verse may say merely that God is everlasting, that his years are numberless, but that they are years nonetheless, and that therefore God is not <u>eternal</u>. In philosophy and theology eternity has usually been regarded as something different from endless time. Popularly, however, most people do not make such a distinction. It would appear that J. Oliver Buswell, Jr. in <u>A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion</u> (pp. 40 ff.) holds to the popular view and denies timeless eternity. He writes, "The Bible writers explicitly teach … that the being of God is eternal, both as to the past and as to the future. God has always existed and always will exist… In discussing the cosmological argument for the existence of God, we shall show that all systematic thinkers are obliged to postulate some uncaused eternal being. If anything does now exist, then something must be eternal, unless something can come from nothing. Materialists generally hold that the material cosmic system is itself eternal as a system, and as a chain of causality." Since no materialist ever held that the universe is timeless, this comparison between God and the universe as, in the respective systems, both eternal, shows that Dr. Buswell considers God to exist extended in time. In other words, God is everlasting but not eternal. Below he has a subhead, <u>Eternity is not Timelessness</u>.

Parmenides, an ancient Greek philosopher, argued that origin, absolute origin, is impossible. Since his day probably no one has ever maintained that something comes from nothing. Therefore either there is an eternal, timeless, unchanging reality and nothing else ever comes into being (and this was Parmenides' conclusion), or there is an everlasting series of events (which is the position of so-called materialism); or there is an eternal reality and a temporal series of events. The latter is the standard Christian position, which, if it is to be defended, must be shown to be an implication from the Biblical data.

This implication cannot be based on such phrases as "before the foundation of the world" (John 17:24, Eph. 1:4). Such verses, if there are clear implications of eternity in other places, can be interpreted as human phraseology like "the eyes of the Lord," but they cannot be the primary ground for a belief in God's eternity. There are other verses, however; and they have to do with omniscience, already discussed somewhat, and immutability, yet to be considered.

The question may be put in several ways. One may ask, is eternity qualitatively different from time? Or, is there time in God's own being, or is it a created something? And one should surely ask, what is time? Unless we know what time is, we cannot begin to consider whether or not it was created and has only a finite past. The same is true of space.

If the beginning student of theology had a few courses in Physics before entering Seminary, he may have come across arguments refuting the Newtonian theory of space and time as independent frameworks. Modern physics talks about a four dimensional continuum, called space-time. Prior to the physics of the twentieth century, the philosopher labored with great diligence over the problems of space and time. This material might be included in an Appendix, but let us not clutter up the present paragraph. Yet, one must insist that unless we have some notion of what time is, we cannot decide whether God is temporal or not. It would be like trying to decide whether God is spalificerous or doriconimous.

The great Christian philosopher, Augustine of Hippo, connected time with the succession of ideas in a mind. We know some things today; tomorrow we learn more; the next day we forget some. Even in any five minute or one minute period, ideas come and go. This, says Augustine, is time.

Now, God is omniscient. He does not learn what he did not know, and he never forgets. There can be no succession of ideas in the divine mind. Therefore, God is not a temporal being. Omniscience requires eternity, and eternity is timelessness.

4. <u>Immutability</u>.

Corroborating this argument is the Biblical teaching on immutability. Some verses are:

Num. 23:19	God is not a man that he should lie; neither the son of man that he should repent. cf. I Sam. 15:29

Dan. 6:26	He is the living God and steadfast forever.
Mal. 3:6	I, the Lord, change not.
Matt. 5:48	Your heavenly Father is perfect.
Heb. 1:10-12	the works of thy hands, they shall perish, but thou dost continue… they shall be changed, but thou art the same. c.f. Psa. 102:27.
Heb. 6:17	the immutability of his counsel.
James 1:17	the Father of lights, with whom can be no variation, neither shadow cast by turning.

First, a few comments on these verses. In the section on language in chapter one above, it was pointed out that figurative language does not conflict with inerrancy, for it can always be translated into common prose. One striking verse has been alluded to several times now: the eyes of the Lord run to and from throughout the whole earth. The first verse in the last list says quite literally that God does not repent or change his mind. The words are repeated in I Sam. 15:29. A remarkable contrast occurs in this chapter. Verse II says, It repenteth me that I have set up Saul to be king. Verse 35 says, The Lord repented that he had made Saul over Israel. And between these two verses, I Samuel quotes Numbers and says, "The Strength of Israel will not lie nor repent, for he is not a man that he should repent."

There are two technical terms that name these types of figurative expression. When arms, legs, or eyes are ascribed to the Lord, the figure is called anthropomorphism. It means that bodily parts are figuratively ascribed to God. But when mental passions are ascribed to God, it is called anthropopathism. The Thirty Nine Articles of the Church of England and the Westminster

Confession deny that God has body, parts, or passions. The words are "God … a most pure Spirit … without body, parts, or passions." The proof test in the Westminster Confession is Acts 14:15 where obviously mental or psychological passions are intended. Note that these Confessions do not say that God is without "bodily parts and passions." These words could mean, though they would not have to mean, bodily parts and bodily passions. This ambiguity is avoided. There is no mention of bodily passions. God is without body, parts, and passions.

The verse in Acts 14:15 and its implications deserve some examination. Paul had just healed the lame man at Lystra. The multitudes then jumped to the conclusion that Barnabas was Zeus and that Paul was Hermes. They prepared to sacrifice oxen to them. Then Paul said, "Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you." The main meaning of the word pathos is suffering, and it used with reference to the sufferings of Christ. It is also used to designate lustful sexual passions, anger, emotions, and in general however one is affected by anything. Paul asserts that he experiences these mental changes, and for that reason he is not God because God has no emotions, no sudden mental changes, no gradual changes either, and is completely impassible.

In a very elementary volume such as this it is perhaps wise to acknowledge here, as well as later when the incarnation is discussed, that Christ in his human nature suffered and experienced passions. But as Athanasius says (in his Discourse III of his Select Treatises In Controversy with the Arians, chapter xxvi, paragraph 13) "Let no man stumble at these human affections, but rather let a man know that in nature the Word himself is impassible. … He himself, being impassible in nature, remains as he is, not harmed by these affections."

What is true of the Son in this regard is surely true of the Father. God is impassible. This is not to deny God's wrath and anger against sin. But wrath and anger in God, like repentance, are figures of speech to make vivid to us God's immutable will to punish sin.

To return now to the list: Mal. 3:6 is literal and conclusive. Matt. 5:48 implies immutability because a change would mean that either God had not been perfect before, or is now no longer perfect. James 1:17, in spite of some flowery language, is essentially literal, obvious, and conclusive: there is no variation (parallax) in God, nor any shadow caused by change (as occurs when the heavenly bodies change their positions).

5. Relation Between Omnipotence and Omniscience.

Perhaps enough has now been given to begin considering the relation between omnipotence and omniscience. Augustine in his Confessions (XII, 53) wrote, “We see those things thou hast made because they are; they are, however, because thou seest them.” Aquinas more clearly wrote, “The knowledge of God is the cause [the formal cause] of all things, for the knowledge of God is to all created objects what the knowledge of an artificer is to things made by his art. … Hence the form in the intellect must be the principle of action. … Now it is manifest that God causes things by his intellect, since his being is his act of understanding.” (I, 14, 8).

Charles Hodge takes these two quotations to mean that omnipotence and omniscience are identical. Hodge himself denies this identity. One of his reasons is that when they are identified, “the possibility of knowledge in God is virtually denied.” (I, p. 394) This is hardly a logical inference. To say that two names refer to the same thing, is not to deny the thing. The identification of knowledge and power no more denies knowledge than it does power. And surely those who identify these attributes do not mean that God is neither knowledge nor power. Hodge admits that the Lutheran and Reformed theologians generally assert the identity. Against the Reformation view Hodge objects, “To know a thing is, and to will it, are the same undivided and perpetual act. From this it would seem to follow, that as God knows from eternity, he creates from eternity” (p. 395). And this according to Hodge is pantheism.

Well, of course, it is not pantheism at all. Even if creation were from eternity, the created universe would not be God. Aristotle held that the physical universe never had a beginning; but his God who sits on the circle of the universe, ignorant of what goes on below, is not equated with the universe. Whatever this is, it is not pantheism. Furthermore, it is strange that Hodge, after quoting Aquinas, should here have ignored Aquinas' reply, for Aquinas in the same section from which Hodge quotes answers Hodge's objection: "The knowledge of God is the cause of things according as things are in his knowledge. But that things should be eternal was not in the knowledge of God; hence although the knowledge of God is eternal, it does not follow that created beings are eternal."

Let us observe some caution, however. The subject is complicated. Not to anticipate later considerations, let us note here that the word cause does not mean today what it meant in the fifth, thirteenth, and sixteenth centuries. For Hodge cause probably meant some sort of physical force. Gravity, for example, forces a heavy body to fall. But this idea is repudiated by all physicists. Gravity was intended to be a description of how two bodies move. It was never intended to explain what it was, if anything, that made them move. When Augustine used the word cause, he meant the Christian counterpart of the Platonic Idea. For Aristotle and Aquinas the cause intended here, distinguished from the material cause, was the formal cause. To untangle all of this, the student will need considerable philosophy. Certainly the Bible does not make God the cause of the world in the Kantian sense of a preceding event, which in turn has a cause in a still previous motion.

Hodge's rejection of the identity of omniscience and omnipotence contains another very surprising statement. He quotes a theologian who takes pains to reject pantheism by defining omniscience as "So far as we conceive God as comprehending the world in his consciousness, we call him omniscient." Now, this is a poor definition of omniscience, for God knows much more than the physical universe. Not to mention the angels and the devil, who may perhaps be included in the term world, God knows all theology including himself, and this is hardly the "world" in any ordinary sense. But aside from this objection, which Hodge does not consider, he not only calls the language unintelligible by saying, "Whatever such language may mean to those who use it," but goes on to wax indignant in the phrase, "to the ordinary mind it conveys the revolting idea that all the sins of men enter into the consciousness of God." But this indignation is Aristotelianism, and it is an explicit contradiction of the Biblical assertions, "Thou hast set our iniquities before thee;" "Thou understandeth my thought altogether;" "Your new moons … my soul hateth, … they are a trouble unto me … your hands are full of blood;" and as well every prediction of evil such as the future activities of the anti-christ. Surely the Bible teaches that God knows all.

The problem of this sub-section, the relation of omniscience to omnipotence can well be concluded by a comparison between Charles Hodge and Stephen Charnock.

Stephen Charnock, a great Puritan divine of the seventeenth century, wrote a book well over a thousand pages on The Existence and Attributes of God. Among the other excellent chapters he has one on God's omniscience. Whereas the present elementary volume restricts itself to a few verses and urges the reader to look for more, Charnock provides such a long list of the items of God's knowledge that one is tempted to think it is complete. The student is urged to become acquainted with the Rev. Stephen Charnock.

The comparison of Hodge with Charnock is not meant to imply that Charnock is always right and Hodge always wrong. Neither of them was infallible as the Bible is; but both of them are to be considered as much as any other writer on theology, and more than most. The first quotation from Charnock is not so much on the relation between omniscience and omnipotence; but to provide a foundation it asserts the doctrine of eternity. So then, Charnock wrote, "If eternity were anything distinct from God, and not of the essence of God, then there would be something which was not God, necessary to perfect God. … God is essentially whatever he is, and there is nothing in God but his essence. Duration or continuance in being in creatures differs from their being; … they are not therefore their own duration, no more than they are their own existence. And though some creatures … may be called everlasting … yet they can never be called their own eternity … but as God is his own necessity for existing, so is he his own duration in existing; as he doth necessarily exist by himself, so he will always necessarily exist by himself."[1]

[1] The Existence and Attributes of God, Vol. II, pp. 285-286, misplaced in the edition of 1873 from Vol. I.

6. Are All Attributes One?

There is a second quotation from Charnock. But in the progress the subject matter broadens. It is no longer a question whether omnipotence and omniscience are identical, but whether all attributes are one.

If in the previous quotation Charnock has correctly understood the implication of the Scripture, then all the attributes of God are identical because each one is necessary to the essence of God. Charnock says that God is his own duration (though this word may be unfortunate); God then would be his own power and knowledge. In fact he says (Vol. I, p. 318), "In our notion and conception of the divine perfections, his perfections are different … but immutability is the center in which they all unite. … All that we consider in God is unchangeable; for his essence and his properties are the same, and therefore what is necessarily belonging to the essence of God, belongs also to every perfection of the nature of God."

In conformity with this, he also writes (p. 325), "The will of God is the same with his essence. If God had a will distinct from his essence, he would not be the most simple being. God hath not a faculty of will distinct from himself; as his understanding is nothing else but Deus intelligens, God understanding, so his will is nothing else but Deus volens, God willing, being therefore the essence of God; though it is considered, according to our weakness, as a faculty, it is as his understanding and wisdom, eternal and immutable; and can no more be changed than his essence."[2]

A few pages back comments were made on a list of verses, relating to the eternity of God, with the exception of one. That verse was, "I AM THAT I AM." It is hard to say how much can be drawn from this name, or how much can be read into it. Probably one cannot validly infer from this verse alone that God is pure simple being, and that his essence and attributes are all one reality; but it would be harder to show that this verse ruled out Charnock's position. It rather supports it.

[2] Cf. later, James Daane's attack on this position

7. The Infinite and the Finite.

The Shorter Catechism, quoted earlier, defined God as a spirit, infinite in his being, wisdom, power, etc. Wisdom and power have now been sufficiently discussed. But in addition to God's being infinite in his wisdom and knowledge, the Catechism asserts that God is infinite in his being. This needs further explanation.

A quotation from H.B. Smith makes an appropriate starting point. One of the aims here is to show that even a good theologian sometimes flounders in confusion. To quote:

> "God is unconditioned and unlimited by space and time. This is defining God in contrast with the finite. The infinitude of God has in it two elements… The limitations of the finite, being comprehended in the two particulars of time and space, the infinitude of God may be resolved into two points, which are defined and described as two attributes, eternity and immensity. By the very necessity of our thinking we are obliged to conceive of all that is finite under the limitations of space and time. We cannot define anything except in reference to space and time" (System of Christian Theology, p. 17).

There seem to be some inaccuracies in this statement. For those who believe that time and space are both infinite, it is suspicious that "This is defining God in contrast with the finite". Although some who believe that time is infinite assert an infinite past time, and this volume does not, the observation still applies, for while this volume denies an infinite past, it asserts an infinite future. Since then time is infinite, Smith's "defining God in contrast with the finite" is a phrase he might well have omitted. Furthermore, it is not true that the limitations of the finite, such as a dog, a mountain, or a star, are exhausted in the two particulars of time and space. A dog has a tail, and though comets do too, stars do not. Tails are surely limitations of some sort, but tails are neither time nor space. Nor is it correct to say, “We cannot define anything except in reference to space and time.” The Catechism defined God without mentioning space or time. For that matter the number two is a finite number, but space is not a term in its definition. Then there is zero, not to mention the square root of minus one. Dr. Smith was a good theologian; but when theologians indulge in philosophy or mathematics they sometimes make mistakes.

Thus many of the infelicities in theology books do not arise from a definite rejection of the Biblical data. The trouble is that the author fails to pay attention to the usage of words in secular philosophy and scholarly publications. Another example is the word <u>cause</u>. From the time of Thomas Aquinas on to the eighteenth century, theologians could use the term in the four Aristotelian senses. From the sixteenth or seventeenth century to the very recent past, the idea of mechanical causation grew in popularity and submerged the four Aristotelian causes. About 1752 Hume showed that the idea of cause resulted from a confusion of mind, and that science could neither support nor use such a concept. With the advent of evolution, the ancient cause that was always greater than its effect, and the modern cause that was always equal to its effect, turned into the contemporary cause that is always less than its effect. Therefore when the educated public is asked to read theology, the author is obliged to inform his readers what he means by his terms. <u>Infinite</u> is another one of these terms.

Now, H.B. Smith’s reference to infinite time and space brings Spinoza to mind. He held that God is absolutely infinite: “BY God I mean a being absolutely infinite -- that is, a substance consisting in infinite attributes, of which each expresses eternal and infinite essentiality. Explanation: I say absolutely infinite, not infinite after its kind; for, of a thing infinite only after its kind, infinite attributes may be denied; but that which is absolutely infinite contains in its essence whatever expresses reality and involves no negation.”

In earlier theology, even in the pagan philosophy of Plato and Aristotle, not to mention the Jew Philo, and the Christian Augustine and Aquinas the attributes of time and space were denied to God because somehow these attributes were considered imperfect and unworthy of God. Even when Anselm and Descartes argued: God is the being who has all attributes or perfections, existence is a perfection, therefore God exists; they denied that space was a perfection. But Spinoza attributed space as well as knowledge to God and concluded that God is an extended being, the universe.

Since Spinoza has had considerable influence on the subsequent history of thought, a Christian theologian, if he wishes to be understood, must deny that God is absolutely infinite. God is "infinite" only after his kind, or in certain particulars. The God of the Bible may know an infinite number of propositions; but, with all due respect to the Shorter Catechism, written by men who had never heard of Spinoza, we today dare not say that God is infinite in his being. There are many predicates that must not be attached to God, such as green, feline, and extended in three dimensions.

Turn now to a quotation from Charles Hodge (Vol. I, p 380.):

"He is infinite in his being and perfections … In all ages wrong views of what the infinite is, have led to fatal errors in philosophy and religion. … When it is said that God is infinite as to his being, what is meant is, that no limitation can be assigned to his essence. … The infinite, although illimitable and incapable of increase, is not necessarily all. … The sense in which Spinoza and Mansel make this assertion is the fundamental principle of Pantheism. … A thing may be infinite in its own nature without predicating the possibility of the existence of things of a different nature. … There may even be many infinities of the same kind, as we can imagine any number of infinite lines. ... "

It is obvious that Hodge has tried to distinguish between the absolutely infinite God of Spinoza and the Biblical God who is only infinite after his kind. The last half of the quotation is unexceptionable. But should we say that the infinity of the Biblical God means that "no limitation can be assigned to his essence"? The difficulty lies in the pejorative ambiguity of the word <u>limitation</u>. When we "limit" the concept <u>animal</u> by attaching the predicate <u>canine</u>, we limit it to dogs, wolves, foxes. Limitations of concepts are predicates. All predicates limit or delimit their subjects. Thus we limit God by attaching the predicate <u>spirit</u>. God is <u>spirit</u>. Furthermore; other limiting predicates must be attached to distinguish this God from other alleged Gods. Zeus was not omnipotent. If no predicate can be attached to a subject, that subject is unknowable. But the Biblical Deity can be known. Therefore predicates or limitations must be attached. At the same time there are predicates that must not be attached. God not only is x, but he is also not y.

This highlights the necessity, not only of specifying what in God is infinite, but more importantly of defining infinity, i.e. of limiting infinity! Hodge writes, "Notwithstanding the conflicting statements of philosophers [about space], and the real obscurity of the subject, every man knows clearly and definitely what the word 'space' means. … It is much the same with the idea of infinity. If men would be content to leave the word in its integrity, as simply expressing what does not admit of limitation, there would be no danger in speculating about its nature." (Vol. I, p. 381). But this is pernicious nonsense, and it contradicts what he so well said about Spinoza and the "many infinites of the same kind" in the previous quotation. No one should object to the reference in the present quotation to "the real obscurity of the subject;" but how can he immediately continue by saying, "every man knows clearly and definitely what the word 'space' means"? Consider Plato's receptacle, Aristotle's place, Locke's hesitation between a simple idea and an idea of relation, Kant's a priori intuition, Hegel in the first chapter of his Phenomenology, and Nietzsche's finite space. Would Hodge agree with Einstein that Space is curved? It is foolishness to leave the word in its non-existent "integrity". If as Hodge admits, "wrong views of what the infinite is have led to fatal errors," is it not the part of wisdom to avoid errors by searching for a clear definition? If we fail, at least we shall avoid using a definition we concluded to be bad.

At this point an appeal to Scripture should be made. if we cannot find in Scripture the correct definition of space, at least we can see what it says about the infinite. There are in fact only three verses in the entire Bible (KJ version) where the word <u>infinite</u> is found. The RSV will also be given here.

Job 22:5	Is not thy wickedness great? and thine iniquities infinite.
RSV	There is no end to your iniquities.
Psa 147:5	His understanding is infinite.
RSV	His understanding is beyond measure.
Nahum 3:9	Ethiopia and Egypt were her strength, and it was infinite.
RSV	and that without limit.

These three verses provide very fragile support for a doctrine of the infinitude of God. Two words, not one, are used. Job and Nahum use a root that means to chop off, to cut or destroy, from which come two similar nouns for an extremity, border, and, brink, edge, or frontier. Since it is clear that Egypt's strength was not <u>infinite</u>, the word is better translated <u>extreme</u>, or simply, <u>very</u> <u>great</u>. In any case, the word is not applied to God. The word applied to God in Psa 147 is a different word. The verbal root is to score, to tally, or to enumerate; and the noun means a <u>number</u>, either <u>innumerable</u> or a <u>few</u>. Song of Solomon 6:8 uses the word when it says, "There are three score queens, and four score concubines, and virgins without number." This shows that the Hebrew word does not exactly correspond to the English word <u>infinite</u>. It is better translated "very many." Certainly the virgins were not without number. Two of the very many occurrences of this word are

Joel 1:6	A nation is come up upon my land, strong and without number.
I Chron 22:4	Cedar trees without number.

Obviously there was an exact number of soldiers who came up against Israel and Judah; and obviously the cedars were not infinite in number. The Hebrew words therefore must be regarded as they were in ordinary conversation. They clearly do not bear the meaning of the term <u>infinite</u> in modern English. <u>Infinite</u> is a wrong translation. The Hebrew expression simply means "very many".

To prove that God is "infinite," theologians regularly use verses in which the word itself does not occur. For example,

Job 11:7-10	Canst thou be searching find out God… The measure thereof is longer than the earth.
Psa 145:3	His greatness is unsearchable.
Matt 5:48	… as your Father in heaven is perfect.

These verses are irrelevant. The first two are repudiations of the cosmological argument; but they do not specify how "long" God is, or how great his power. The last verse is ethical and little to do with infinite being. In fact, if pressed, it seems to suggest that man be equal to God in this respect.

Charles Hodge uses Eph 1:23 to prove that God is infinite in his being. The verse is extremely difficult to exegete. Students may consult several commentators: the Puritan Thomas Goodwin, T.K. Abbott in the International Critical Commentary series; Francis Foulkes in the Tyndal Press; and Charles Hodge himself. They differ as to whether <u>pleroma</u> means that which fills or that which is filled; as to whether <u>ta</u> <u>panta</u> means the universe or the Church; and as to whether <u>pleroumenou</u> is active, that which does the filling, or passive, that which is filled, or middle, he who fills something for his own advantage. But regardless of the many complexities it can easily be seen that nothing in the verse asserts that God is infinite in his being.

Another verse Hodge uses is Acts 17:28. If this verse had said that God extends throughout the universe, it would no doubt have suggested a great spatial extent, not necessarily infinite, for it does not say that the universe is infinite in extent. One should not suppose carelessly that the universe is infinite. At least Aristotle and Nietzsche denied that it is. Furthermore, God is not an extended object at all; he is a spirit. In any case, the verse does not say that God extends through the universe: it says that the universe "extends" through God. More accurately, it says that human beings, the pagan poet as well as Paul and Luke, live and move and have their being in God.

Hodge of course recognizes that the term <u>infinite</u> gives us some difficulties. The trouble is that he does not seem to take his own recognition seriously enough. Certainly we must reject his previously quoted sentence, "When it is said that God is infinite as to his being, what is meant is, that no limitation can be assigned to his essence." Now, God's essence is his definition. <u>Esse</u> is the Latin for the Greek <u>einai</u>; and the <u>einai</u> of anything is its definition. The definition is what the object is. The God of the Bible is <u>definite</u>. He is not a subject to which every predicate can be attached. He is not heavy, white, tall, or sweet. The number of appropriate predicates is definitely limited.

Nor is it easy to understand why Hodge said, "The infinite, although illimitable and incapable of increase" etc. The number of series is illimitable precisely because it is always capable of increase. Indeed, whatever is illimitable must be capable of increase. For such reasons we must reaffirm the first sentence quoted, "In all ages wrong views of what the infinite is have led to fatal errors in philosophy and religion." Unless one is ready to define what the term infinite means, it would be better not to use it.

It is possible, however, to defend the proposition that God is infinite even in his being. The wording of the Catechism can be retained, if the word <u>being</u> is taken as a participle instead of as a noun coordinate with the nouns that follow it. The argument would be: God is spirit, mind, truth. God <u>is</u> what he <u>thinks</u>. Since what he thinks is an infinite series of propositions, as the mathematicians grant us, God is infinite in his being these truths. God is truth. Doubtless this would puzzle the Westminster authors of the Catechism. Were is not for the indisputable authority of professional mathematicians, who assert an infinite number of theorems deducible from the mere definition of a plane; were it not for the acuity of Spinoza in providing an infinite number of propositions deducible from each of God's infinite number of attributes; were it not for the unsurpassed Biblical scholarship of our fathers at Westminster, we could think of truth as a closed and complete whole, in which case God would be entirely actual and perfect, without any unrealized potentiality. His knowledge then would not be infinite, but he himself would be, even more clearly omniscient.

8. <u>A Finite God</u>.

If caution about the infinite causes hesitation over this mathematical defense of the Catechism, and if therefore all the previous confusion continues, it is still possible to discuss and reject theories about a finite God because these theories do not concern the concept of an infinite being. Here the term <u>finite</u> refers to just one or two particularities. William James and consistent Arminians limit God by denying his omnipotence and omniscience. They say that there are certain things God cannot do and cannot know.

Though it may be unnecessary to inform anyone that William James was a vigorous antagonist of Christianity, three citations from his <u>Pluralistic</u> <u>Universe</u> follow to document the two points mentioned. Contrasting the nominalist point of view that regards the universe as a collection of discrete "eaches," with the idealistic view that the universe is a whole and that parts must be understood in terms of the whole, James writes, "Whereas absolutism thinks that the said substance becomes fully divine only in the form of totality, and is not real self in any form but the <u>all</u>-form, the pluralistic view which I prefer to adopt is willing to believe that there may ultimately never be an all-form at all, that the substance of reality may never get totally collected, that some of it may remain outside the largest combination of it ever made." (p. 34). James, of course, has Hegelian absolutism chiefly in mind, but since he says that theism is worse, it is clear that this is a denial of omniscience.

Later he writes, "When John Mill said that the notion of God's omnipotence must be given up, if God is to be kept as a religious object, he was surely accurately right … I believe that the only God worthy of the name must be finite …" (pp. 124-125). Here James rejects omnipotence. In the last of these three quotations the language is broad enough to cover both omniscience and omnipotence. "The only way of escape, I say, from all this [Hegel's absolutism] is to be frankly pluralistic and assume that the superhuman consciousness, however vast it may be, has itself an external environment, and consequently is finite … it is not all-embracing … he is finite in power or in knowledge or in both at once" (pp. 310-311).

9. <u>Finitude and Knowledge</u>.

Lutherans are inclined to deny omniscience. Bishop Martensen of Denmark attracted the ire and vituperation of Soren Kierkegaard, but the good bishop was far from being the scoundrel Kierkegaard thought he was. Let us admit that the gentleman was a devoted and sincere Christian; but on the matter of omniscience he was woefully mistaken and virtually contradicted the Christian position. Here is a passage from his <u>Christian</u> <u>Dogmatics</u>, (tr. by Urwick, 1880) pp. 218, 219.

> The contradiction which has been supposed to exist between the idea of the free progress of the world and the omniscience of God, rests upon a one-sided conception of *omniscience*, as a mere knowing *beforehand* and an ignoring of the conditional in the divine decrees. An unconditioned foreknowledge undeniably militates against the freedom of the creature, so far as freedom of choice is concerned; and against the undecided, the contingent, which is an idea inseparable from the development of freedom

in time. The actual alone which is in and for itself rational and necessary, can be the subject of an unconditional foreknowledge; the Actual which is not this, cannot be so; it can only be foreknown as possible, as eventual. but such an unconditional foreknowledge not only militates against the freedom of the creature, it equally is opposed to the idea of a freely working God in history. A God literally foreknowing all things, would be merely the spectator of events decided and predestined from eternity, not the all-directing governor in a drama of freedom which He carries on in reciprocal conflict and work with the freedom of the creature. If we would preserve this reciprocal relation between God and His creatures, we must not make the whole actual course of the world the subject of His foreknowledge, but only its eternal import, the essential truth it involves. The final goal of this world's development, together with the entire series of its essentially necessary stages, must be regarded as fixed in the eternal counsel of God; but the practical carrying out of this eternal counsel, the entire fulness of actual limitations on the part of this world's progress, in so far as these are conditioned by the freedom of the creature, can only be the subject of a conditional foreknowledge ; i.e., they can only be foreknown as possibilities, as *Futurabilia*, but not as realities, because other possibilities may actually take place. In thus asserting that God does not foreknow all that actually occurs, we by no means imply that every event is not the subject of his all-penetrating cognizance. God is not only *before* His creatures - "before the mountains were brought forth, or ever the earth was made," - He is also *in* and *with* His creatures, in every moment of their development. While God neither foreknows, nor will foreknow what He leaves undecided, in order to be decided in time, He is no less *cognizant* of and *privy* to all that occurs. Every movement of His creatures, even their most secret thoughts, is within the range of His all-embracing knowledge. "Thou compassest my path, and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold thou art there " (Psalm cxxxix.). His knowledge penetrates the entanglements of this world's progress at every point; the unerring eye of His wisdom discerns in every moment the relation subsisting between free beings and His eternal

> plan; and His almighty hand, His power, pregnant of great designs, guides and influences the movements of the world as His counsels require

Arminians also limit God's knowledge, if they are consistent. Not all are. Whedon vacillates, but it is clear that he inclines to a denial of omniscience: "Our view of free agency does not so much require in God a foreknowledge of a peculiar kind of event [i.e. a single particular event?] as a knowledge of a peculiar quality existent in the free agent. … If any power be planted in an agent, God, who placed it there, must know it. And if that power be … a power to do otherwise than the agent really does do, God may be conceived to know it and to know it in every specific case" (D.D. Whedon, The Freedom of the Will, pp. 271-272). Now, this quotation certainly means that God does not know what the free agent will do; he only knows that the agent is free to do an one of several possibilities. Whedon continues, "As a corollary resulting from these views, we note that an agent may be supposed to possess a power of acting otherwise than the way that God foreknows he will act." But then he surprises the reader by saying on the next page, "As the impossibility of performing a contradictory act is no limitation of Omnipotence, so the impossibility of a contradictory knowledge is no limitation of Omniscience. … If by the absolute perfectness of God's omniscience that one train of free events, put forth with full power otherwise, be embraced in his foreknowledge, it follows that God foreknows the free act." In this paragraph Whedon attempts to preserve the omniscience he denied on the previous page; but that his attempt fails becomes clear in the difficulty he cannot escape: "the real difficulty which we distinctly profess to leave forever insoluble … is to conceive how God came by that foreknowledge."

A.H. Strong (Systematic Theology, Vol. I, p. 285) quotes an author, Daniel Curry, who said, "The denial of absolute divine foreknowledge is the essential complement of the Methodist theology." Now, Whedon is unable to conceive how God came to know the future because the Methodist theology makes foreknowledge and therefore omniscience impossible. On Arminian principles the problem of retaining omniscience is insoluble. But if one reject the Arminianism, the problem presents little if any difficulty. First of all, God did not "come by" his foreknowledge. Eternal knowledge is an eternal attribute of the eternal God. Perhaps it s not fair to stretch Whedon's unfortunate expression "come by" beyond its disclosure of Whedon's habitual state of mind; but even so it reveals the tendency to explain God's knowledge of the world as empirically based on observation. Since there can be no <u>causes</u> in the present to determine the future action of human <u>free</u> will, there is nothing now for God to look at, if he wishes to know the future; and of course the future event, until it occurs, is an unknowable non-entity.

The Bible, however, says that every event is caused or determined, and that the determiner is God. God therefore knows what is future to us because he determined it to happen. Otherwise prediction would be impossible. Take for example Cyrus' restoration of the Jews to Jerusalem. The event predicted was not an isolated event that could have occurred under nearly any condition. It required the consolidation of the Medes and Persians into one empire; it required the defeat of Croesus, and, obviously the destruction of Babylon. This latter depended on Nabonidus' neglect of his own interests and the irresponsibility of Belshazzar. It also required changes in the policies regarding the treatment of captive peoples. The prediction therefore is not limited to Thursday at 10:33 A.M. when Cyrus stamped his seal on a document. The event depended on multitudinous matters, every one of which God knew because he had planned the whole thing.

Charnock (p. 443, 444) has a humorous description of a similar situation. Gen. 15:16 predicts that "in the fourth generation they [the posterior of Abraham] shall come hither again [into Canaan], for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full." Continues Charnock, "If Abraham had been a Socinian, to deny God's knowledge of the free acts of men, had had not a fine excuse for unbelief? What would his reply have been to God? Alas, Lord, this is not a promise to be relied upon; the Amorites' iniquity depends on the acts of their free will, and such thou canst have no knowledge of; thou canst see no more than a likelihood of their iniquity being full, and therefore there is but a likelihood of thy performing thy promise, and not a certainty."

With respect to God's knowledge, theologians usually try to give an account of the divine psychology. They say that God's knowledge is intuitive, not discursive. The words are not altogether appropriate. Psychology is hardly the term for a study of the immutable divine mind. If intuition means merely that there is no temporal succession in God, the term can be used, but it is useless; if, however, it means the immediate perception of a sensory individual, as in Kant, but not the understanding of a general principle or even a concept, the term is worse than inappropriate. Similarly, if discursion means a temporal sequence, it may be properly denied of God; but if the term is intended to assert God is ignorant of the relationship between premises and conclusions, it cannot be denied to God.

Most simply, God's knowledge is eternal and immutable. God knows the end from the beginning because he created the world and controls it according to the eternal plan.

Psa. 104:24 O Lord, how manifold are thy works; in wisdom hast thou made them all.

How could this be true, if the things known were the cause of his knowledge, and so prior to his knowledge, and therefore antecedent to his action? Does God act in ignorance and then discover what he has made? If the divine perfection in knowledge were gained from things external to God -- and inferior to him, unless there be objects superior to him -- God would not be self-sufficient or independent; whatever perfection of knowledge he had would be derived from these inferior things. Such a conclusion, however, would be both queer and unbiblical. It follows therefore that God is essentially omniscient. There is no truth outside of his mind. And there is so because God himself is truth. Truth is what God thinks or knows.

10. God is Spirit.

For many pages now the discussion has dealt with the attributes of God. There was eternity, omniscience, omnipotence, and infinity. Because they so much overlapped it was necessary to consider their mutual relationships. This went further perhaps than an elementary exposition is supposed to go. But one point, in a sense the most important point, was omitted, even though implicitly it underlay them all. These attributes that were discussed are predicates or characteristics of a subject. Traditionally it is said that the "attributes" attach to a "substance." In simpler terms the question could be, what are the attributes attributes of? Speaking in ordinary language one may say that a man <u>has</u> wisdom or courage. The man <u>is</u> one thing, and wisdom or courage is something else he <u>has</u>. One may also say, the man is wise or courageous; and now the sentence seems to state what the man <u>is</u>, rather than what he <u>has</u>. Since, however, theology for centuries has discussed attributes and substance, the question will be, What is this God who has knowledge, power, goodness, and truth?

The Catechism answers in its first phrase, "God is a spirit." Spirit is not something God has; Spirit is what he is. Had this chapter on God proceed logically, the idea of spirit would have been discussed before the attributes. Should not learn what x is in itself before learning what characteristics it has? Do we not first decided what a dog is, and the add that dogs have tails? If we did not first know dog, what would the tail attach to? But perhaps tails are essential to dogs, and if we cut off Fido's tail, he no longer remains a dog. Can we really know what a thing is without knowing its characteristics? Is it possible to study what God is in himself without explicitly describing his attributes? Maybe it was necessary to begin with the "attributes" and only later arrive at the "substance." However that may be, the Catechism says that God is a spirit. What is spirit? Well, surely, spirit is distinguished from non-spirit by attributes of life, consciousness, and in higher forms, knowledge.

Although the concept of spirit is of such tremendous importance, or, better, because it is of such tremendous importance, it is utterly easy to find Scriptural evidence to justify the statement that God is spirit. Of course, there is Jesus' brief assertion in John 4:24. But the massive evidence permeates the Old Testament. There is no point in listing a number of verses. God spoke to Adam and Eve; he spoke to Noah, Abraham, and Moses; to David, Elijah, and Isaiah. The continuous denunciation of idolatry repeatedly asserts

“They have mouths, but they speak not; they have ears, but they hear not … They hire a goldsmith and he maketh it a god … they bear him upon the shoulder … yea one shall cry unto him, yet can he not answer.”

Our God is a God of truth; he knows; he speaks; he is alive; he is not a body, he is a spirit. Unfortunately not only in Old Testament times did some people turn from the living God to worship dumb idols; even today there are unhappy theologians who teach that God is dead.

11. Philosophical Difficulties.

Although this elementary textbook promises to restrict philosophical diversions to a minimum, there are some that ought not be avoided. Students who are not ready for them may skip this section, but it would not be fair to others slightly more advanced if philosophy were omitted completely. Nor should this material be considered “philosophy” in sharp distinction from “theology.” For years, in fact for centuries, these subjects have filled many pages in theological textbooks. This is then a part of the history of theology.

Some theological textbooks, using as their first principle something other than the Bible, begin by asking, Can God be known? But if there is no God, there can be no point in asking whether he can be known. Should we not therefore begin by proving the existence of God? But if God is not knowable, how could one prove his existence? These two questions are so intertwined that one cannot be answered without the other. We cannot prove the existence of an object without knowing what it is we have proved; and cannot know an object without knowing that there exists such an object. The medieval theologians began with the existence of God, and their example is as good as any to follow here.

Augustine (354-430), if he did not absolutely introduce it into Christian theology, elaborated a type of Platonic philosophy by which he worked out a proof of God’s existence.

Augustine's writings on many subjects are extremely valuable; but Anselm about A.D. 1100 gave a twist to Augustine's proof that was brilliant in the extreme. It is called the Ontological Argument. Strange to say, it possibly is not an argument at all, but rather a postulation of a first principle, an explanation of the ultimate axiom, a setting down of the base on which everything must be built. At any rate, it is so intricate and profound, it has caused so much discussion, and its opponents think it is supreme as an example of plausible confusion, that it must be omitted here. The second attempt to prove God's existence will be difficult enough.

(a) <u>The Cosmological Argument</u>.

Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274) rejected the Platonic cast of Augustine's theology and based his thought on Aristotle. Therefore he had no time for the ontological argument, but reconstructed the cosmological argument. To refer again to the question of knowledge, the difference between these two arguments is basically a difference in epistemology: For Augustine it was not necessary to start with sensory experience, for one could go directly from the soul to God; but Aquinas wrote, "The human intellect … is at first like a clean tablet on which nothing is written" (<u>Summa</u> <u>Theol</u>. I, Q 97, 2). It is sensation that writes on the <u>tabula</u> <u>rasa</u>. The mind has no form of its own. All its contents come from sensation. on this basis Thomas gave five arguments for God's existence; but the first four are almost identical, and the fifth is so little different, that only the first will be reproduced here.

"The first and more manifest way is the argument from motion. It is certain, and evident to our senses, that in the world some things are in motion. Now whatever is in motion is put in motion by another, for nothing can be in motion except it is in potentiality to that towards which it is in motion; whereas a thing moves inasmuch as it is in act. For motion is nothing else than the reduction of something from potentiality to actuality. But nothing can be reduced from potentiality to actuality, except by something in a state of actuality. Thus that which is actually hot, as fire, makes wood, which is potentially hot, to be actually hot, and thereby moves and changes it. Now it is not possible that the same thing should be at once in actuality and potentiality in the same respect, but only in different respects. For what is actually hot cannot simultaneously be potentially hot; but it is simultaneously potentially cold. It is therefore impossible that in the same respect and in the same way a thing should be both mover and moved, i.e. that it should move itself. Therefore, whatever is in motion must be put in motion by another. If that by which it is put in motion be itself put in motion, then this also must needs be put in motion by another, and that by another again. But this cannot go on to infinity, because then there would be no first mover, and, consequently, no other mover; seeing that subsequent movers move only inasmuch as they are put in motion by the first mover; as the staff moves only because it is put in motion by the hand. Therefore it is necessary to arrive at a first mover, put in motion by no other; and this everyone understands to be God."[3]

The first thing to be noticed is that this is a formal argument. Thomas intended it to be a conclusive demonstration that God exists. It is not a collection of evidences that make it plausible to believe in God. It is an analysis of sensory experience with the conclusion that only God can explain it. Far from being a list of evidences, it appeals only to a pebble that rolls down the hillside or a marble that rolls across the floor. It claims to prove conclusively that on this basis God must of necessity exist. It is a matter of logical necessity.

The syllogism is the most common form of necessary inference. There are twenty four valid forms of the syllogism. Any other form, and there are two hundred fifty six in all, is invalid. An example of the valid form is the ancient illustration: All men are mortal; Socrates is a man; therefore Socrates is mortal. But if one say: All dogs are mammals; some mammals are cats; therefore all or even some dogs are cats; the argument is a fallacy. Even if we say: All dogs are mammals; some mammals are fox terriers; therefore some dogs are fox terriers; the argument is invalid. The conclusion happens to be true, but the premises do not prove it. It is fallacy of the undistributed middle. To estimate the value of Thomas' cosmological proof, we must see if the premises necessitate the conclusion.

[3] Summa theologica, Part 1, Qu. 2, Art. 3

(b) Five Objections.

Five objections can be made against this cosmological argument. First, the original premise says, “It is certain and evident to our senses that in the world some things are in motion.” This premise is an acceptance of empirical epistemology. In Thomas, if not elsewhere, it requires the assertion that the mind has no apriori forms, that it is actually nothing before it receives sensory impressions, and that more advanced knowledge is developed through images and abstraction.

Empiricism is perhaps a common sense view. It has also been the view of many philosophers. But it faces insuperable objections. In the first place the senses of men and animals produce conflicting data. Dogs, for example, are supposed to be color blind, but they have sensations of sound when men hear nothing For that matter, men differ among themselves. Esoteric artists see colors in grass that no common man finds there. Which then of these sensation correctly represent the color of the object seen? In some cases the sense contradict each other, as when a stick half submerged looks bent but feels straight. Then there are mirages and other optical illusions. While they last, we cannot tell that they are illusions; and we cannot tell whether our present sensations are illusions. Again, are we dreaming or not? An elementary textbook on psychology will describe many of these phenomena, with the result that it is impossible trust what we call sensory perception. Beyond this, the theory of imagination, by which these sensations are supposed to be preserved and later raised to concepts, collapses on the fact that some people do not have images. Many people lack olfactory or tactual imagery; some also lack visual imagery as well. Empiricism then would have to say that these people can know nothing. But some of them are accomplished scholars.

This first objection, however, does not test the validity of the argument. It disputes the truth of the premise. Yet the skepticism which Hume showed so well follows upon empiricism is fatal to this approach.

The second objection will also be somewhat disappointing as given here because it can only be partially developed. The objection notes that the quoted passage is more a summary than a complete argument. In fact the argument would include a great amount of physics and metaphysics. For example, the second, third, and fourth sentences in the quoted argument need lengthy substantiation. The extent would cover hundreds of pages, as it does both in Aristotle and Aquinas. For the final cosmological argument to be valid, all the subsidiary arguments must be valid. Now, while this is theoretically possible, it is not probable. Surely Aristotle and Aquinas must have made a mistake somewhere. And one mistake breaks the chain of consequences. Of course, someone is sure to complain that this unfair and begs the question. To avoid this accusation, it may be pointed out that the two philosophers use the concept of potentiality. Aristotle needed the concept of potentiality in order to define motion. But in the third book of the Physics, where Aristotle takes up this problem, he not only defines motion by potentiality, but he also explains potentiality by the concept of motion. If the student wants to spend the time, he may study Aristotle's Physics to determine whether the argument is circular and whether there are any other flaws in books four to eight.

The third objection can be seen in the summary itself. Toward the end Aquinas talks about a series of motions and movers, and says that this series cannot go on to infinity. The reason it cannot go on to infinity is that if it did there would be no first mover. But unfortunately the argument as a whole claims to prove that there is a first mover. Therefore Aquinas has used for one of his premises the very proposition that he wants as the conclusion.

The fourth objection is more complicated. Because Aquinas holds that God's existence is identical with his essence, which is not true of any other object of knowledge, he must assert that no predicate can be attributed to God in the same sense that it is said of created beings. When both man and God are said to be good, or rational, or conscious, or anything, the words good and conscious do not mean the same thing in the two cases. If God is a mover and man is a mover, the word mover does not mean the same thing. Not only so, but since God's existence and essence are identical, the verb to be does not have the same meaning in the two cases. If we say

God is good, neither the good nor the is means what it means in the created world. Hence when we say God exists, this existence does not mean existence in the same sense we use it for pebbles or marbles. Now, in a valid argument the only terms that can occur in the conclusion are those that occur in the premises. If some additional element is added in the conclusion, the syllogism is a fallacy. But the cosmological argument begins with the existence of a pebble or some sensory object that moves. It ends, however, with an existence that is different. Therefore the argument is fallacious. The different meaning of the word in the conclusion cannot be derive from the original meaning in the premises.

Now, finally, the fifth objection is directed against the last sentence of the argument, which is, "and this everyone understands to be God." But this is not what everyone understands to be God. Particularly Christians deny that this is God. Aquinas claims to have proved the existence of a first mover, a primum movens, an ens perfectissimum, or even a summum bonum. But these neuters are not satisfactory for a concept of the living, self-revealing God of the Scriptures. It can even be said that if the cosmological argument were valid, Christianity would be false. The God of the Bible is a Trinity of Persons. No forms of the cosmological argument has even claimed to demonstrate the existence of this only true God.

(c) A Reconstructed Argument.

Despite these objections Roman Catholics continue to depend on the cosmological argument. So do most Lutherans, as may be seen from Leander S. Keyser's A System of Natural Theism (1917); and some Calvinists defend it too. J. Oliver Buswell, Jr. was one of these, at least in his earlier writings, though he seems to have agreed later that it is not strictly valid. Cornelius Van Til of Westminster Seminary, Philadelphia, makes very strong statements on the validity of the argument. Buswell had accused Van Til of disparaging the objective evidences for Christianity and of rejecting the cosmological argument. Van Til replied in A Christian Theory of Knowledge (pp. 291-292) and charged Buswell with formulating the argument improperly. Quoting partly from one of his earlier works, Common Grace, he says

"The argument for the existence of God and for the truth of Christianity is objectively valid. We should not tone down the validity of this argument to the probability level. The argument may be poorly stated and may never be adequately stated. But in itself the argument is absolutely sound. … Accordingly I do not reject the theistic proofs, but merely insist on formulating them in such a way as not to compromise the Scripture. That is to say, if the theistic proof is constructed as it ought to be constructed, it is objectively valid."

This assertion that the cosmological argument is valid, absolutely sound, a formal demonstration, and not merely a probability argument does not hold true of any cosmological argument published in any book. Van Til pays no attention to the fallacies embedded in Thomas Aquinas. The argument he defends is one that no one has ever yet written. But how does he know that it is possible to formulate this ideal argument? What is the argument he defends? He says he insists on formulating it correctly. For many years some of Van Til's contemporaries have been challenging him to produce this reformulation he insists upon. He has not done so.

Thomas Hobbes is reported to have squared the circle. When the mathematician complained that in his proof three lines should have crossed at a point, but did not, Hobbes replied that they came so close together that a point could cover them all. He might have added that a slightly better reformulation could be made, and therefore the circle could be squared by an absolutely valid argument, and that an angle could be trisected too. But such appeals to an unknown ideal are irrelevant and incompetent.

A cosmologist, eager to squeeze out of a tight spot, might reply: But an angle can indeed be trisected. So it can, but by no geometrical (straight edge and compass) method. All the geometrical arguments are invalid. So too here: perhaps the ontological argument is valid; it is not touched by any of this criticism; but the cosmological argument is a fallacy.

A better example than squaring the circle is Fermat's theorem because, while no one agrees that the circle can be squared, many mathematicians have supposed that Fermat's theorem could be demonstrated. Only recently have some begun to have doubts. But no reputable thinker, regardless of his anticipation, will pronounce an argument valid and sound without having seen it.

Since Van Til and Buswell in the passage cited are engaged in recommending a method of preaching the gospel to unbelievers, it is doubly unfortunate that Van Til cannot justify his position, for unbelievers cannot be expected to be impressed with an argument that the evangelist himself is unable to present to them.

(d) <u>Does Scripture Require an Argument</u>?

The Christian need not be disturbed at the impossibility of proving God's existence. In fact, he should never have expected to demonstrate it, for two reasons: (1) a secular proof must adopt some principle more ultimate than God from which God can be deduced; and (2) the Bible makes no attempt to prove God's existence. It starts right off with God in Genesis 1:1. To be sure there are such verses as

Psa. 8:1 Lord, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth, who has set thy glory upon the heavens.

Psa. 19:1 The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament showeth his handiwork.

Rom. 1:20 … because what is known of God is apparent in them; for God has made it clear for them; for his invisible [attribute] since the creation of the world are perceived, being understood by the things made, namely his eternal power and deity …

The last verse, here translated somewhat more literally than in the standard translations, with which the student may compare it, consulting commentaries also, has actually been used to defend the validity of Aquinas' argument. But none of these verses are arguments, nor do they validate any argument. God has indeed set his glory upon the heavens, and the filaments of the underside of a tiny leaf display through a microscope God's amazing geometrical handiwork; but neither an ancient polytheist nor a modern humanist recognized it. To see the glory of the heavens as the glory of God, one must believe in God first. The verse in Romans sounds more like an argument than the others; and while it cannot be used to guarantee Aquinas against all mistakes, it can plausibly be interpreted to mean that there is a valid cosmological argument if only somebody could find it. Nevertheless such an interpretation seems mistaken: mistaken because it is unlikely that anyone, after the profound labors of Aristotle and Aquinas, not to mention the lesser contemporaries like Hartshorne, Tennant, and others, can do what they could not. Mistaken also because sensation replaces God and the Scriptures as the first principle. The verse in Romans then is best understood as an equivalent of the Psalms quoted.

Furthermore, although Romans can seem to approve an unknown cosmological argument, there are other verses that give the opposite impression. One such passage is

Job 11:7-8 Canst thou by searching found out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty to perfection? It is as high as heaven; what canst thou do?

Although these two verses may state the truth, and imply that there is no valid cosmological argument, one should observe a little caution because at the end of the book (Job 42:7) the Lord expresses his wrath against Job's friends and condemns them for having said some false things. Hence it is not certain that what Zophar said some false things. Hence it is not certain that what Zophar said is true. In any case a doctrine should never be based on one verse alone; not because God might be mistaken, but because we might be mistaken. When many verses say the same thing, and we compare them all, then we may have confidence that we have understood; but when there is nothing with which to compare a verse (such as a phrase in Gal. 3:19 or I Cor. 15:29) we remain in doubt. Therefore in addition to Zophar one may hopefully add:

Psa. 145:3	Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised; and his greatness is unsearchable.
Isa. 40:18 ff.	To whom then will ye liken God, or what likeness will ye compare unto him? … Have ye not known? Have ye not heard? Hath it not been told you from the beginning? … To whom then will ye liken me, that I should be equal to him? … Hast thou not known? Hast thou not heard?
Rom. 11:33	O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and his ways past finding out!
I Cor. 2:9	What things the eye did not see and the ear did not hear … to us God revealed them through the Spirit.

These verses, even the last, teach that sensory perception cannot form in our minds the idea of God. God cannot be searched out or discovered by empirical philosophy. Therefore, since the arguments used by the philosophers are logical fallacies, since the Bible gives no cosmological argument of its own, since it begins with God and insists on revelation, it seems best to reject all natural theology and posit divine revelation as the first principle and basic axiom of our system of thought. The task then is to show how the Bible describes God, as the first half of this chapter has tried to do.

(e) <u>A Meaningless Word</u>.

An additional reason for rejecting natural theology is the utter uselessness of asserting that God exists. If I should say, This cat is black, it would not be useless because some cats are white or some other color. But if all cats were black, and especially if everything, completely everything, were black, it would be useless to say that this cat is black. Or, again, most words have four or five different meanings. In English we speak of domestic animals and domestic as opposed to foreign policy in government. German has two different words here; we get along with the same word, and all languages have words of several meanings. But the meanings must be finite in number. Suppose a word had an infinite number of meanings. We would look up the word <u>tamig</u> in Merriam Webster's unabridged dictionary and see that the meanings of <u>tamig</u> included all the words from A to the end of Z. <u>Tamig</u> means not only cat and dog, it also means long and sharp, as well as run and fly, as well as iodine and uranium, as well as all the other words in the dictionary and then some. As an adjective it could be attached to any noun, and it could be substituted for every verb. But a word that means everything means nothing. An adjective that can be attached to every noun carries no information. The word <u>existence</u> is such a word. Cats exist. Dogs exist. So does the square root of minus one. Dreams exist. They are <u>real</u>: they are real dreams. And God really exists too. But to say that God exists does not distinguish God from a cat or a dream. We want to know <u>what</u> God is. The Westminster Shorter Catechism did not ask, Does God exist? It properly asks, What is God? Proving the existence of God therefore, even if possible, is a useless task.

(f) <u>Can God be Known</u>?

This is another standard question in Christian theology. Yet there is something peculiar about it. Should it precede or should it follow the question, What is God? Suppose we ask, Can <u>rachis</u> be known? Nearly everyone - it is a genuine English word - therefore <u>nearly</u> everyone would immediately reply, what is rachis? How can we tell whether or not it can be known, if we do not know what it is? Or, similarly, suppose we ask a non-mathematician, Can the side of a square and the diagonal be exactly measured by the same ruler? Or, can the square root of two be known? But to answer these two questions, which are in reality identical, one has to know what a diagonal is. Is it not the same with God? Unless we know what God is, we cannot decide whether he is a knowable object. But if we already know what God is, what is the use of asking, Can we know God?

Yet it is not all that simple. There are complications. Complications should have been expected. If geometry requires some careful argumentation, and if the finest mathematicians have not yet been able to solve the Fermat Theorem, would not a serious student expect theology, whose object of study is God, to be even more complicated? If Christianity tells the truth when it says that God created the world, must not theology be more profound than physics? If physics can legitimately claim the intensest efforts of the most brilliant minds, should not a young student of God be willing to do his best?

Well, then, can God be known? It is doubtless obvious enough that a Christian theological must answer this question in the affirmative. Does not the Bible give us a great deal of knowledge about God? Is this not enough? No, it is not enough. There are people who deny that the Bible tells the truth. Like William James they have arguments designed to prove that God is not omniscient, or that the world was not created and is not governed by a transcendent spirit. Ordained theologians, if not communicant lay members, have the obligation of dissecting these anti-theistic theories. We must not shirk our task.

Some of the arguments that deny all possibility of knowing God depend on taking the Christian concept of God and showing that some of its features make God as completely unknowable as the unit that measure the diagonal and the side, thus convicting the Christian view of self-contradiction. For example, one might say: God is regarded as omniscient or infinite; mankind has not the remotest notion of omniscience or infinity; accordingly, if there were such an object, it could not be known.

So far as non-Christian material is concerned, Plotinus, motivated by the philosophic need for unity, posited a One so unitary that it transcended the duality even of subject and predicate. Yet Plotinus had subjects and predicates, i.e. propositional arguments by which to arrive at this conclusion; and he, no doubt inconsistently, made a few assertions about the One; but he tried conscientiously to restrict man's connection with the One to a mystic trance in which he knew neither it nor himself.

A more modern variation (of the) unknowability theme is the theory that human knowledge is entirely based on sensory experience. If so, then God, who is ordinarily regarded as a non-sensory object, cannot be known. Recent Logical Positivists makes sensory verification not merely the criterion of truth but even the criterion of meaning. From which it follows that metaphysical and theological statements are not so much false as completely meaningless.

The Christian must rebut these two views, no doubt with the assertion of a revelation epistemology, but also, with reference to Plotinus, by insisting on the metaphysical impossibility of deducing plurality from an absolutely undifferentiated One; and with references to Logical Positivism by pointing out that their criterion of meaning is by its own assertion meaningless.

Although all orthodox theologians must assert that God is in some way knowable and known, yet they have also affirmed that he is "incomprehensible." This term is a poor one. It may have been properly understood centuries ago; but if it were, it carries fatal connotations today. Since the time of Kierkegaard, and even before, the <u>incomprehensible</u> has been identified with the <u>irrational</u>. For example, philosophers have said that all <u>things</u> can be "thought away," but that the absence of space is <u>inconceivable</u>. Now, obviously, the Bible presents a God who understands or comprehends himself. Therefore God is not incomprehensible. He may doubtless be <u>uncomprehended</u> by mankind; but in himself he is of all objects the most <u>comprehensible</u>. The actual problem is, as above, whether man can know God. Because Christianity must affirm such knowledge, the idea of "incomprehensibility" must be limited to the question of <u>how much</u> a man can know of God. The Biblical position is of course that we can and do know some things about God and do not and by God's decree cannot know some other things. However, this simple argument, which really comprehends everything about incomprehensibility, has been adumbrated by considerable theological confusion.

Louis Berkhof (<u>Systematic Theology</u>, 4th ed., p. 30) states correctly that "Reformed theology holds that God can be known, but that it is impossible 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." So far so good. But the reason he gives for this, viz., "<u>Finitum non possit capere infinitum</u>." is not so good. Descartes was not a Reformed theologian by any means, yet one does well to consider his view that men must know the infinite before they can know anything finite. Calvin himself in the first chapter of his <u>Institutes</u> had earlier said that God is our first object of knowledge, and only after we know God is it possible to know our finite selves. Then too mathematicians know Aleph null -- a type of infinity - and other infinites. Infinite series can be added; and though <u>infinite</u>, their <u>limits</u> can be determined with accuracy. It would seem therefore that the pompous Latin phrase <u>Finitum no capax infiniti</u>, if false.

This should be enough so far as the idea of infinity is used for denying the possibility of man's knowing God. The next sub-heading will introduce the delayed questions, What is God? If infinity is to be made an attribute of God, it will again be discussed in this different connotation.

(g) <u>The Nature or Definition of God</u>.

To state the nature of God is to answer to question, What is God? Some theologians have denied the possibility of defining God because definition is always in the form of subsuming a species under a genus. Thus, to use only a partial definition, a cactus is a succulent. There are various species of succulents, and the cactus is one species of this genus. But if we make God a species of a higher genus, we seem to place something above God. This is impossible, so the objection runs, because nothing is superior to God. If, on the other hand, God is the supreme genus and not an inferior species, it follows that men, plants and rocks are species of God. Man is one type of God, as a cactus is one type of succulent, and a rock is another species of God.

Louis Berkhof (Systematic Theology, 4th ed., p.41) writes, “It is quite evident that the Being of God does not admit of any scientific definition. In order to give a logical definition of God, we would have to begin by going in search of some higher concept, under which God could be coordinated with other concepts: and would then have to point out the characteristics that would be applicable to God only. Such a genetic-synethetic definition cannot be given of God, since God is not one of several species of gods, which can be subsumed under a single genus.”

There are, however, certain unfortunate expressions in this quotation. The words higher, under, co-ordinated, genetic-synthetic, species of gods suggest misleading connotations. Higher and lower give the impression that the genus ipso facto must be more valuable, stronger, more witty, more cuddly than the species or an individual in the species. But only kitten is more cuddly than the genus animal, and the species mercury is more effective for some purposes than the genus metal. Higher and lower are spatial terms, and when used figuratively are likely to mislead. The term co-ordinate also suggests an equality that might not exist. Man, elephant, and mouse are co-ordinate in the sense that they are all species of animal; but they are no co-ordinate in other senses. The term genetic-synthetic hardly applies to the Aristotelian method of definition plus difference. One should note that Berkhof’s argument depends on this Aristotelian method. This method of genus plus difference seems to work well in biology. But it does not work so well in arithmetic. The number two is hardly a species of a higher genus number. Prime numbers might be a species, but hardly two. Some mathematicians do indeed define two as the name of the class of all pairs, and this somewhat resembles genus plus difference. But, first, it is hard to understand what a pair is before we count to two; then, second, other mathematicians, following Leibniz, define two as the number that comes after one, or in figures, 2=1+1. This definition does not seem to fit the genus-plus-difference formula (incidentally, plus in this phrase is not +), and those who use it naturally think it is technically superior to the other. To continue: in Physics F=ma, and Newtonian gravitation may be a species of force; but Einsteinian Energy -- well, perhaps physics is a difficult subject. In theology, however, is justification a species of something? Is an “act of God’s free grace” a genus of which justification is a species? Then sanctification would be a species of the genus work. Accordingly, if there be an alternate method of definition, Berkhof's objections to defining God have no weight.

Berkhof's difficulties multiply. He had said, "God is not one of several species of gods, which can be subsumed under a single genus." But neither is apple tree one of several species of apple trees. It can, however, be subsumed under the rose family; but this does not make every species of that family apple trees. And of course, on Aristotelian principles, a single apple tree is not a species at all, yet it can be subsumed under the species apple tree and under the genus roseaceae as well. Furthermore, to classify God "under" some "higher" species does not imply that God is less real than that from which he is "deduced." Aristotle never deduced a single apple tree from the species; and, more to the point, he assumed that the individual is a primary reality, whereas the species is a secondary reality. Hence if God, the individual, or the three individuals, could be subsumed under some concept or other, it would in no way minimize the divine perfections. But perhaps it is not necessary to rely so greatly on Aristotle.

Buried beneath the surface of this argument lies Plato's Parmenides. Those theologians who dislike Plato forget that Plato's spokesman in the Parmenides gently reminded the youthful Socrates that the theory requires Ideas of hair and mud and filth. However disagreeable this logical extension of Realism may have been to Socrates' idealist sensibilities, it removed some objections to an incomplete theory. Then there follows the Third Man argument. Note that Plato himself as the author of the Parmenides stated this objection with great clarity. Note also that this was one of the objections Plato did not answer: he answered only one of the series. Was he unable to defend his own theory? Or did he think the omitted answers too obvious to state?

Would it now be too bold to suggest that the difficulties with the Aristotelian theory of definition and the Third Man objection to Realism can be solved by the Christian doctrine of the image of God in man? It will be shown in chapter five that God created man in his own image and likeness. Hence both God and man can be classified "under" or, better "by" the concept of spirit. Body is something that is extended but does not think. Spirit is that which thinks but is not extended. The previous material on omniscience showed that God is a thinking being. He has knowledge. This is the sort (species?) of being he is. To respect:

> John 4:24 God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.

It is interesting to note that this profound theological pronouncement, with all its intricate Aristotelian and Platonic implications, was not made to the learned Nicodemus, but to an uneducated Samaritan woman. This verse, and perhaps

> II Cor. 3:17 For the Lord is Spirit

seem to be pertinent and pointed; but though not so obvious there are hundreds of others representing God as thinking, talking, revealing himself, teaching his doctrine, that equally well support the identification of God's essence, nature, or reality as spirit because they all say that God thinks. Later on, in the chapter on Man, some reasons for rejecting behaviorism will be outlined. Thought is not a function of the brain, the larynx, or the muscles. Thought is a spiritual or intellectual activity. God thinks; he is not and has not a body; he is not extended in space; he has no "parts." Therefore God is to be defined as mind, intelligence, intellect, spirit, let species and genera be as they may.

This disposed of Berkhof's objection that "God is not one of several species of gods." God is one of several "species" or types of spirit. Man too is a type or form of spirit; but man is not a species of gods.

For a final ad hominem remark, let us note that any theologian who inveighs in general against the pagan Plato - as if Aristotle were not also a pagan - is for that reason singularly disqualified from using this objection. Rejecting ancient Greek pagan theories of definition, a theologian who can classify carpet tacks with cactus thorns because both can stick you, cannot object to classifying both God and man "under" the concept of spirit.

Perhaps some devout persons would prefer to call God a person. To be more accurate, as the next chapter will try to make clear, God is three persons. At any rate, God is personal. The nineteenth century modernists, influenced by Schleiermacher and Hegel, sometimes denied the personality of the Deity, or sometimes tried unsuccessfully to maintain it. However unorthodox Karl Barth may be, he has a fine analytical section describing why the modernists could not logically defend the personality of God and had to substitute man in his place. At any rate, God thinks and communicates his thought to men. God therefore is a mind or spirit.

(h) <u>Substance and Attributes</u>.

After the Shorter Catechism says that "God is a spirit," its next words are "infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in his being... " The Biblical account of "infinite, eternal, and unchangeable was given in the first half of this chapter. These are differentiae which, where added to the genus, give the species. They are the predicates attached to the subject: this Spirit is eternal. But what has hardly been touched upon is the term "being." The word <u>being</u> is perhaps not the most usual word in this connection. Theological books usually discuss <u>substance</u> and attributes, rather than <u>being</u> and attributes. The doctrine of the Trinity too is expressed in the words <u>substance</u> and persons. But what does the word <u>substance</u> mean? No one is puzzled by the statement that the cat is black. The color black is an attribute or characteristic or quality that the cat has. The judge is just. Justice is a quality of this judge. The judge is the substance in which the justice inheres. Or is he?

The concept of substance is the first of Aristotle's categories. There are two kinds of substance: primary and secondary. Primary substances are things like cats and judges, individual cats and individual judges. Secondary substances are the concept of cat and the concept of judge. These are not individual things, but abstract concepts or forms. The chief difference between the two is that the individual is a composite of matter and form, while the concept is the form and is immaterial. Since matter is actually nothing, for only forms can be seen or touched or thought, and since God is perfect, God can have no matter; therefore God is not an individual person but an abstract form. Well, this is Aristotelianism, but it does not sound like Christianity. Furthermore, Aristotle may not have quite avoided all confusion in his theory of qualities, relations, and quantities. In fact, it may be that finally his distinction between primary substance and quality, his distinction between quality and quantity, and the very notion of an individual fade into nothingness.[4]

The modern philosopher, John Locke, also defends the concept of substance. He insists, as seems so much like common sense, that there must be something <u>standing</u> <u>under</u> qualities such as shape, motion, hard, thinking, and willing. Under the first three of these qualities stands matter; under the last two stands spirit. Matter and spirit are abstract ideas, abstracted out of sensations and introspections respectively. But they are so abstract, and so far from actual experience that Locke calls them "something I know not what." No one has ever seen or touched matter. It is far more abstract than justice, not to mention feline. In short, matter and spirit are not only unknown, but unknowable, Would it not seem therefore that the concept of substance, either material substance for physics, or spiritual substance for theology is a rather useless concept?

Of course the theologians could reject the Aristotelian and Lockean philosophies and give their own definition of substance. But most do not. Charles Hodge, even though he strenuously insists on the necessity of substance, is forced to say, "we have no definite idea of substance, whether of matter or mind, as distinct from its attributes." (Vol. 1, p. 367). H.B. Smith is not so explicit, but what he says amounts to much the same thing. "We start from the position that there is a divine substance, or essence; and an attribute, in distinction from the substance, is any necessary predicate that can be applied to this essence. … The essence and the attributes are not separable. The attributes express the essence, the essence is the ground of the attributes. It is one simple spiritual essence in these different modes" (System of Christian Theology, pp. 12, 14).

[4] G.H. Clark, Thales to Dewey, pp. 108-112, 143-144.

Athanasius, who finally was successful in defending the doctrine of the Trinity in the Nicene Creed (which will be studied in the next chapter), while he insists on Substance for the purpose of unmasking the Arian heresy, is, surprisingly, not greatly enamoured of the term. At least, he recognizes that it will sound foreign to some devout ears. In his De Decretis (V, 22) he says, "If then any man conceives as if God were compound, so as to have accidents in his substance, or any external development, … or as if there is aught about him which completes the substance, so that when we say 'God' or name 'Father' we do not signify the invisible and incomprehensible substance, but something about it, then let them complain of the Council's stating that the Son was from the substance of God; but let them reflect that in thus considering they commit two blasphemies, for they make God material, and they falsely say that the Lord is not Son of the very Father, but of what is about him. … Therefore let no one be startled to hear that the Son is from the substance of the Father. … For they [the church fathers' considered it the same thing to say that the Word was of God, and 'of the substance of God,' since the word 'God,' as I have said already, signifies nothing but the substance of Him Who Is."

At this juncture the point in question is not the doctrine of the Trinity, which was of course Athanasius' main interest, but the identification of God with the substance of God. God is not a compound of substance and attributes, the substance standing under the attributes, supporting them lest they fall to earth; nor are the attributes some addition to the substance, completing it. Today we might have difficulty in seeing that the distinction between substance and attribute is blasphemy, but Athanasius specifies why it is double blasphemy. It makes God material because the substance would be matter and the attribute form, and this results in saying that the Son is not the Son of the Father himself, but the Son of only a part of the Father.

Berkhof is a contemporary example of one who denies the distinction between substance and attribute. His Systematic Theology (p. 62) says plainly that attributes are not distinct from essence. It is possible that the driving force in distinguishing substance from attribute is Romanism, for this distinction is necessary to the Romish doctrine of transubstantiation. In the Mass the miracle is located in the continuing presence of the sensory attributes of bread and wine, while the priest has changed the <u>substance</u> from the natural to the divine. It might prove difficult to find so compelling a reason in evangelical theology for maintaining this distinction.

God therefore is his substance; his substance is his attributes; all his attributes are one; and this One is God.

(i) <u>The Glory of God</u>.

All the material of this chapter can be referred to under the title of the glory or transcendence of God. Because of the mention of Cyrus a few paragraphs above, a conclusion can be formed out of that well-known prophecy.

"Thus saith the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus whose right hand I have holden. … I will go before thee, and make the crooked places straight… and I will give thee the treasure of darkness .. that thou mayest know that I, the Lord, which call thee by thy name, am the God of Israel. … I am the Lord, and there is none else, there is no God beside me; I girded thee though thou hast not known me: that they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that there is none beside me. I am the Lord, and there is none else. I form the light and create darkness; I make peace and create evil; I the Lord do all these things. … Woe to him that striveth with his Maker… Shall the clay say to him that fashioneth it, What makest thou? of thy work, he hath no hands? … I have made the earth, and created man upon it; I, even my hands, have stretched out the heavens, and all their host have I commanded … I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth … that unto me every knee shall bow every tongue shall swear. … Blessing and honor, glory and power be unto him that sitteth upon the throne … for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth."