

*[1946. Unpublished writing of Gordon H. Clark]*

On the Minority Report

It seems to me necessary to call attention to certain paragraphs of the minority report.

P. 36 The interrogation was directed so pointedly to the incomprehensibility of the sum total of God's glory and perfections.

To my mind this is not precisely the case. And the Com. Also seems not to agree with the minority alleged fact. Cf. Report p. 11, § One must remember that the transcript reports an exam. Of a few points left over from a previous six or eight hour exam. And the main question was epistemology, or knowledge, not God's Being in general. Had I been asked the definite question, Can man fully and exhaustively under the Being and attributes of God, I should have said simply No. if this question was asked in the main examination, I doubtless said no. The fact that the extra July exam was not conducted with this as the main question is virtually acknowledged in the minority report just below: P. 36 § 4.

But the Presby. hardly hears blame, for it must be remembered that the Presby. had been largely satisfied by the previous exam.

Yet though the July exam did not face the question of God's Being as squarely as the minority seems to think, yet the doctrine of incomprehensibility forms the basis, or a part of the basis, of the pertinent answers.

For example, how could I repeatedly affirm that man will never have comprehensive and complete knowledge, if the doctrine of incomprehensibility was not the premise of the argument?

Note Tr. P.3, 3-7.

Not also the significance of the Tr. 15, 12. The questioner is asking if man can know God apart from revelation. And my answer is that our knowledge of God, in the strict sense of knowledge, is mediated by propositions. Thus I deny that we can know God apart from revelation, and at the same time I assert that our knowledge is always finite. This does not directly envisage the sum total of God's Being and Glory, but the answer I give presupposes the incomprehensibility that the minority report finds lacking. At the same time, however, I also try to make clear, though obviously I failed, but I tried to make clear that the finite proposition is a knowledge of the infinite God. To this end I used an illustration that seemed to confuse more than enlighten. The illustration is: propositions relating to infinite series, or to infinite space, are in themselves finite, but their object is infinite. Of course an infinite series is a poor illustration of an infinite God, and this was seized upon and the point of the comparison neglected.

Perhaps the most definite question relating to the sum total of God's Being and Glory is found in Tr. 33, 8.

Now note my answer, so perfectly understood by the Committee. Not that I say there is only one verse in Scripture that seems to allow man full comprehension of God. I admitted then and confess now that I have no satisfactory exegesis of that verse. It remains a puzzle – a paradox, if you will. But note also that I do not allow my confusion on that verse to overbalance the remainder of Scriptural teaching. It seems to me therefore that in the context of the July exam and in response to that one specific question, the doctrine of the incomprehensibility is

satisfactorily expressed. Naturally it is not a comprehensive statement of incomprehensibility., but it seems satisfactory in its context.

It was in connection with the Incomprehensibility of God, that question were asked about knowing the love of God; and the minority report p. 37 expressed surprise at the form of the answer given.

There I believe the minor has failed to grasp my meaning in much the same manner at the Complainants. First of all, note that the Bible uses the word Know in every colloquial sense. On one occasion I prepared a short list of the various meaning of ידע. Its usage is entirely colloquial. So also for the Greek verbs.

The Com. Also seems to think I have not used an exegetical approach. Report p. 10 § next to last, when the Bible has many meanings, a systematic discussion of epistemology forces me to choose one definite meaning.

But in the exam. Knowledge and know were being used in just one sense, a technical epistemological sense: it referred to the relation of the mind to truth, and to truths in propositional form. Hence it follows that we may know propositions in which love is either subject or predicate; but it is impossible to know a single term. Hence when the Scripture speaks about knowing the love of God, it is using a sense of know different from that used in the exam. Not the tr. 22, 9. I assert we can know the proposition, God is Love. But the questioner does not wish to talk of a proposition, he wants to ask about knowing just Love, a single term.

In view of the fact that the questioner is obviously using another sense of the term know, I cannot understand why the minority should expect me to give an unqualified no. (p. 37) instead of asking the sense in which the questioner was using the word. I even suggested to a possible sense of the word, but the questioner did not accept my suggestion Tr. 22, 14, and then failed to attach any specific meaning to his term.

Of course on my sense of the word, man cannot know the love of God; but as it was evident that the questioner was using another sense, I did not feel free to answer unqualifiedly in my own terminology.

Note also Minority p. 37 § 4. The minority expects a directly negative answer. But no unqualified answer can be given, for the question has two different meanings. It is ambiguous. In fact it has several meanings: it may mean (1) can man know all that God knows. Or (b) can man have any knowledge which is the same for him and for God. And it may (c) include or (d) exclude the subjective aspect of knowledge. Therefore it seems unreasonable for the minority to expect a directly negative answer, when one of the four possible meanings requires a positive answer.

And it is still surprising that the minority should make this demand, when the next paragraph p. 37 § quite correctly reproduces my mind on the matter.

Certainly it is unreasonable to require an unqualified No in answer to a question that has 4 different meanings.

One more remark on the Minority report. Important because it shows the reason for hesitant or qualified answers that seem to surprise some people.

Cf. Minority p. 37. Bottom: "There is nothing absolutely infinite but God."

Would not everyone here agree that God is absolutely infinite. Everyone except one who had read Spinoza.

If God is absolutely infinite, then he is corporeal, i.e. nature i.e pantheism. Obviously the minority does not so intend but this language has been so used. Therefore a Xn who has read Spinoza might well hesitate to say God is absolutely infinite.