

Conservative theology holds that when God tells us something about His nature in terms of His qualities or perfections, He is telling us something meaningful about Himself. He is not simply telling us something that He wants us to believe, or something that is good for us, or something by which He wishes to regulate our lives so as to accomplish His purposes; He is telling us who and what He really is! When the Westminster divines formulated the answer to question 4 of the Shorter Catechism, they were attempting to gather up the truths given in God's revelation of Himself, and express them in a brief, but not exhaustive summary. They said, "God is a spirit in finite, eternal, and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth."

When conservative theologians attribute characteristics to God, they are not creatively constructing and ascribing to God qualities which they believe He has (although they may believe them); rather they are attempting to receptively reconstruct the perfections of God's nature by attributing to God what He attributes to Himself.

But now what about the modern insistence that a self-disclosure must be complete if it is to be a revelation of God at all? This is a very peculiar concept. For when we think about the question of knowledge in general, or even about the distinction between factual and personal knowledge of persons, we immediately recognize that no human being knows anything completely or exhaustively. Even the model of the "renaissance man", who was conversant in every field of knowledge, know no one field exhaustively. And no "modern man,.. even the most brilliant and erudite, knows even one area of one field in the fullness or completeness. No human being knows everything about any thing or person. Our knowledge of other persons (whether factual or personal knowledge) is always partial, never exhaustive. In fact, we do not even know ourselves exhaustively!

Confining our question to the realm of personal knowledge of persons, does this mean that since we can never know a person exhaustively, we cannot know that person at all? If a person does not disclose himself or herself exhaustively, but only partially, does this mean that we cannot say that that person has revealed himself or herself to us, and that therefore we cannot know him or her? Further, since a person does not even know himself exhaustively, how is it possible for him to reveal himself exhaustively, so that other persons can know him personally?

This claim that revelation of God must be exhaustive if it is to disclose God Himself is absurd. We know many persons personally who do not know themselves exhaustively and do not reveal themselves exhaustively. We know them only partially, only to a certain degree; but we know them nonetheless. Although God knows Himself exhaustively (i.e., He knows Himself, both factually and personally, through and through); and although He reveals Himself only partially, condescends to our creaturely limitations, and lisps with us as with small children; yet through the revelation of His