

Chapter 8

God's Infinitude

Our Heavenly Father: Let us see Thy glory, if it must be from the shelter of the cleft rock and from beneath the protection of Thy covering hand. Whatever the cost to us in loss of friends or goods or length of days let us know Thee as Thou art, that we may adore Thee as we should. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The world is evil, the times are waxing late, and the glory of God has departed from the church as the fiery cloud once lifted from the door of the Temple in the sight of Ezekiel the prophet.

The God of Abraham has withdrawn His conscious Presence from us, and another God whom our fathers knew not is making himself at home among us. This God we have made and because we have made him we can understand him; because we have created him he can never surprise us, never overwhelm us, nor astonish us, nor transcend us.

The God of glory sometimes revealed Himself like a sun to warm and bless, indeed, but often to astonish, overwhelm, and blind before He healed and bestowed permanent sight. This God of our fathers wills to be the God of their succeeding race. We have only to prepare Him a habitation in love and faith and humility. We have but to want Him badly enough, and He will come and manifest Himself to us.

Shall we allow a saintly and thoughtful man to exhort us? Hear Anselm; or better still, heed his words:

Up now, slight man! Flee for a little while thy occupations; hide thyself for a time from thy disturbing thoughts. Cast aside now thy burdensome cares, and put away thy toilsome business. Yield room for some little time to God, and rest for a little time in Him. Enter the inner chamber of thy mind; shut out all thoughts save that of God and such as can aid thee in seeking Him. Speak now, my whole heart! Speak now to God, saying, I seek Thy face; Thy face, Lord, will I seek. †††

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

From the effort to understand, we must not turn back because the way is difficult and there are no mechanical aids for the ascent. The view is better farther up and the journey is not one for the feet but for the heart. Let us seek, therefore, such ~~trances~~ trances of thought and mountings of the mind ~~as~~ as God may be pleased to grant us, knowing that the Lord often pours eyesight on the blind and whispers to babes and sucklings truths never dreamed of by the wise and prudent. Now the blind must see and the deaf hear. Now we must expect to receive the treasures of darkness and the hidden riches of secret places.

Infinitude, of course, means limitlessness, and it is obviously impossible for a limited mind to grasp the Unlimited. In this chapter I am compelled to think one step short of that about which I am writing, and the reader must of necessity think a degree under that about which he is trying to think. O, the depths of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!

The reason for our dilemma has been suggested before. We are trying to envision a mode of being altogether foreign to us, and wholly unlike anything we have known in our familiar world of matter, space, and time.

~~Here~~ Here, and in all our meditations upon the qualities and content of God, ~~writes~~ writes Novatian, ~~we~~ we pass beyond our power of fit conception, nor can human eloquence put forth a power commensurate with His greatness. At the contemplation and utterance of His majesty all eloquence is rightly dumb, all mental effort is feeble. For God is greater than mind itself. His greatness cannot be conceived. Nay, could we conceive of His greatness He would be less than the human mind which could

form the conception. He is greater than all language, and no statement can express Him. Indeed, if any statement could express Him, He would be less than human speech which could by such statement comprehend and gather up all that He is. All our thoughts about Him will be less than He, and our loftiest utterances will be trivialities in comparison with Him.†††

Unfortunately the word infinite has not always been held to its precise meaning, but has been used carelessly to mean simply much or a great deal, as when we say that an artist takes infinite pains with his picture or a teacher shows infinite patience with her class. Properly, the word can be used of no created thing, and of no one but God. Hence, to argue about whether or not space is infinite is to play with words.

Infinitude can belong to but One. There can be no second.

When we say that God is infinite we mean that He knows no bounds. Whatever God is and all that God is, He is without limit. And here again we must break away from the popular meaning of words. †††Unlimited wealth††† and †††boundless energy††† are further examples of the misuse of words. Of course no wealth is unlimited and no energy boundless unless we are speaking of the wealth and energy of God.

Again, to say that God is infinite is to say that He is measureless. Measurement is the way created things have of accounting for themselves. It describes limitations, imperfections, and cannot apply to God. Weight describes the gravitational pull of the earth upon material bodies; distance describes intervals between bodies in space; length means extension in space, and there are other familiar measurements such as those for liquid, energy, sound, light, and numbers for pluralities. We also try to measure abstract qualities, and speak of great or little faith, high or low intelligence, large or meager talents.

It is not plain that all this does not and cannot apply to God? It is the way we see the works of His hands, but not the way we see Him. He is above all this, outside of it, beyond it. Our concepts of measurement embrace mountains and men, atoms and stars, gravity, energy, numbers, speed, but never God. We

cannot speak of measure or amount or size or weight and at the same time be speaking of God, for these tell of degrees and there are no degrees in God. All that He is He is without growth or addition or development. Nothing in God is less or more, or large or small. He is what He is in Himself, without qualifying thought or word. He is simply God.

In the awful abyss of the divine Being may lie attributes of which we know nothing and which can have no meaning for us, just as the attributes of mercy and grace can have no personal meaning for seraphim or cherubim. These holy beings may know of these qualities in God but be unable to feel them sympathetically for the reason that they have not sinned and so do not call forth God's mercy and grace. So there may be, and I believe there surely are, other aspects of God's essential being which He has not revealed even to His ransomed and Spirit-illuminated children. These hidden facets of God's nature concern His relation to none but Himself. They are like the far side of the moon, which we know is there but which has never been explored and has no immediate meaning for men on earth. There is no reason for us to try to discover what has not been revealed. It is enough to know that God is God.

Thine own Self forever filling
With self-kindled flame,
In Thyself Thou art distilling
Unctions without name!
Without worshipping of creatures,
Without veiling of Thy features,
God always the same!

Frederick W. Faber

But God's infinitude belongs to us and is made known to us for our everlasting profit. Yet, just what does it mean to us beyond the mere wonder of thinking about it? Much every way, and more as we come to know ourselves and God better.

Because God's nature is infinite, everything that flows out of it is infinite also. We poor human creatures are constantly being frustrated by limitations imposed upon us from without and within. The days of the years of our lives are few, and swifter than a weaver's shuttle. Life is a short and fevered rehearsal for a concert we cannot stay to give. Just when we appear to have attained some proficiency we are forced to lay our instruments down. There is simply not time enough to think, to become, to perform what the constitution of our natures indicates we are capable of.

How completely satisfying to turn from our limitations to a God who has none. Eternal years lie in His heart. For Him time does not pass, it remains; and those who are in Christ share with Him all the riches of limitless time and endless years. God never hurries. There are no deadlines against which He must work. Only to know this is to quiet our spirits and relax our nerves. For those out of Christ, time is a devouring beast; before the sons of the new creation time crouches and purrs and licks their hands. The foe of the old human race becomes the friend of the new, and the stars in their courses fight for the man God delights to honor. This we may learn from the divine infinitude.

But there is more. God's gifts in nature have their limitations. They are finite because they have been created, but the gift of eternal life in Christ Jesus is as limitless as God. The Christian man possesses God's own life and shares His infinitude with Him. In God there is life enough for all and time enough to enjoy it. Whatever is possessed of natural life runs through its cycle from birth to death and ceases to be, but the life of God returns upon itself and ceases never. And this is life eternal: to know the one true God, and Jesus Christ whom He has sent.

The mercy of God is infinite too, and the man who has felt the grinding pain of inward guilt knows that this is more than academic. ¶¶ Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound. ¶¶ Abounding sin is the terror of the world, but abounding grace is the hope of mankind. however sin may abound it still has its limits, for it is the product of finite minds and hearts; but God's much more ¶¶ introduces us to

infinite. Against our deep creature-sickness stands God's infinite ability to cure.

The Christian witness through the centuries has been that God so loved the world . . . ; it remains for us to see that love in the light of God's infinite. His love is measureless. It is more: it is boundless. It has no bounds because it is not a thing but a facet of the essential nature of God. His love is something He is, and because He is infinite that love can enfold the whole created world in itself and have room for ten thousand times ten thousand worlds beside.

This, this is the God we adore,
Our faithful, unchangeable Friend,
Whose love is as great as His power,
And neither knows measure nor end.
Tis Jesus, the first and the last,
Whose Spirit shall guide us safe home;
We praise Him for all that is past,
And trust Him for all that's to come.
Joseph Hart