

God Is a Name My Soul Adores

Isaac Watts (1674–1748)

God is a name my soul adores,
Th'Almighty Three, the Eternal One!
Nature and grace, with all their powers
Confess the Infinite unknown.

From thy great self thy being springs;
Thou art thy own original,
Made up of uncreated things,
And self-sufficiency bears them all.

Thy voice produced the seas and spheres,
Bids the waves roar and planets shine;
But nothing like thyself appears
Through all these spacious works of thine.

Still restless nature dies and grows;
From change to change the creatures run:
Thy being no succession knows,
And all thy vast designs are one.

How shall affrighted mortals dare
To sing thy glory or thy grace?
Beneath thy feet we lie so far,
And see but shadows of thy face!

Who can behold this blazing light?
Who can approach consuming flame?
None but thy wisdom knows thy might,
None but thy word can speak thy name.



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In the Nick of Time

Analogy and Theology

Kevin T. Bauder

Much, and perhaps all, of what we say about God, we must say by analogy. We use the same words when we talk about God that we use when we talk about ourselves. But we do not use those words in precisely the same way. We say that God exists, for example, or that God knows. At the same time, we say that we exist and that we know. If we think about it for a moment, though, we should realize that the words *exist* and *know* do not mean the same things for both God and us.

Our existence is wholly derived. Something outside of ourselves causes us to exist. Our existence is also contingent. Our being is not necessary. We might not have been. Furthermore, our existence is finite. There was a time when we were not, and there was a particular moment at which we came into being. Even now, our being must constantly be propped up by powers outside ourselves. Ultimately, we owe our existence to God Himself. He sustains all things by the word of His power. If His concentration wavered for only a millisecond, we would dissolve into nothing. In sum, our being is finite, contingent, and derived.

God is not like that. His existence is entirely in Himself. He does not get His being from anyone or anything else. His being is ultimate, the ground of everything else that is. He could not not be. He simply is, and He rightly names Himself *I AM THAT I AM*.

We exist. God exists. Both statements are true. Both statements are meaningful. But they do not mean exactly the same thing. There are points of similarity between our existence and God's existence, but there are also vast stretches of dissimilarity.

Much the same is true of knowledge. We know, and God knows. We know in many ways. We may know—and I think we do know—some things innately and intuitively. Some things we know by sensory experience and observation. Some things we know by logical inference. Some things we know by competent authority. The greatest and most competent authority is God, so we know some things by revelation. Indeed, we can know anything truly, as it ought to be known, when we frame it within the categories that God has revealed. Often, what we think we know turns out to be false. When this

happens, it means that we never really knew it at all. We were deceived. At best, our knowledge is partial and finite.

God is not like that. When I lived in Texas, I once heard someone say, “Did it ever occur to you that nothing ever occurred to God?” I’ve seen this quip attributed to various preachers. I admit that it did *not* occur to me. But it is true. God never has a new idea, observation, perception, or insight.

How does God know? His knowledge is immediate, intuitive, and exhaustive. What do these words mean? They mean that God just *knows*—and He knows everything. He knows everything that is happening now. He knows everything that ever happened in the past. He knows everything that will happen in the future. He knows everything that could have happened but did not and will not. He knows actions, attitudes, and thoughts. He knows His plan—and it is only one plan, because He has never had to revise it. He knows Himself, in full detail. Nothing ever surprises God. Nothing ever disturbs God. Nothing ever sends God back to the drawing board.

God’s existence and His knowledge are like ours in some respects, but they are very different in others. In fact, they are so different that we have invented vocabulary to talk about these things when they pertain to God. When we talk about God’s existence, we use the word *aseity*. God’s aseity is His self-existence. When we talk about God’s knowledge, we use the word *omniscience*. God’s omniscience means that He knows all things immediately and intuitively. So God exists, but He does not exist like we do. God knows, but He does not know like we do.

This same dynamic is at work in everything we can say about God. The attributes that we discover in Him have some analogy in us. We can use the same words to talk about ourselves that we use to talk about God. But some distance always separates what we can say about God from what we can say about ourselves. Wherever an analogy exists between God and us, we discover that we are the partial, finite, contingent, creaturely, and (for now) fallen side of the analogy. There is always a gap.

The larger that gap gets, the more difficulty we have in grasping who God is. In attempting to bridge that gap, one of the worst things we can do is to try to apply language to God in the same way it applies to us. This is the error of Social Trinitarians, for example, who try to understand the divine persons in the same way that they understand human persons. It is the error of those sentimentalists who trivialize God’s love by understanding it in terms of teenage crushes. It is the error of those who charge God with injustice if His sovereignty does not work according to their understanding of what is fair play.

We cannot avoid using analogy to speak about God. When we do, though, we must take care of how we employ this language. We must not make God altogether such an one as ourselves. While we recognize the points of

contact, we must constantly ask how God is different from and greater than ourselves. This is a task that is best performed on our knees as an act of worship.



This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.
