

Thoughts on Ministry of Healing

(36) Danger in Speculative Knowledge (pages 427-438)

Summary:

Reason should certainly be used to plumb the depths of human experience, but when it comes to a knowledge of God, reason needs to know its limits.

Thoughts:

In many ways the title is more negative than the tone of the chapter, perhaps reflected the conflicted time in which it was written (see below). An alternative title for the chapter could have been “Theology as Doxology (song of praise).”

In the quest for human knowledge there is a danger of exalting human reasoning above its true value and proper sphere. When it comes to God, the clearest knowledge comes from revelation rather than reason. And that knowledge does not bring us under the control of Satan. (427-428)

One of the most dangerous theories about God is the idea that God is an essence that not only pervades all of nature but is equivalent to it (commonly called pantheism). If God and nature are essentially the same, then the solution to human problems comes from within rather than from without, as the Scriptures teach. Pantheism does away with the necessity for the atonement and undermines the message of Scripture. Human power without God is worthless. (428-429)

The context of this part of the chapter is the Kellogg crisis around the turn of the century in Adventist history. Pantheism is the belief that God and the universe are identical. It denies the transcendence and personality of God. Pantheism can sound biblical in the sense that God permeates all things, the difference is that in the biblical view God is not limited to the creation, He both fills and transcends nature. Many doubt that Kellogg was a pantheist in the classical sense, he comes closer to what some have called Panentheism (“God is *in* everything”). In the biblical view, God fills all nature, but is distinct from it, He created nature out of nothing. Nature is a gift from God, not a “given” in its own right. Kellogg emphasized the presence of God in all things but blurred the distinctions between God and nature.

When it comes to God, we are as ignorant as little children, but through revelation our understanding is sufficient to love and obey Him. The mysteries of God’s being are not found by scientific research but by humbly receiving the revelation of Scripture and conforming the life to the will of God. God’s greatness is spelled out by texts like Isa 6:1-7, 40:12-28, Ps 139:1-6, 145:3-21, Rom 11:34-36, and Job 37:5-24. (429-435) Biblical stories like the Israelites who ventured to open the ark, Uzzah, the burning bush, Jacob’s ladder, and the High Priest’s cautious entry into the Most Holy Place all illustrate the reverence and humility we ought to exhibit as we approach the subject of God. (435-438)

Genuine scholarship is compatible with the concerns of this chapter. The greatness of a scholar consists not in how much he or she knows, but rather in the knowledge of how little he or she knows. Those who know the least are often the most confident in their “knowledge.” True scholars are genuinely humble.

In this context it is helpful to remind ourselves of Ellen White’s clearest statement on the nature of God (8T 263):

“The mighty power that works through all nature and sustains all things is not, as some men of science represent, merely an all-pervading principle, an actuating energy. God is a spirit; yet He is a personal being, for man was made in His image.

“God’s handiwork in nature is not God Himself in nature. The things of nature are an expression of God’s character; by them we may understand His love, His power, and His glory; but we are not to regard nature as God. The artistic skill of human beings produces very beautiful workmanship, things that delight the eye and these things give us something of the idea of the designer; but the thing made is not the man. It is not the work, but the workman, that is counted worthy of honor. So, while nature is an expression of God’s thought, it is not nature but the God of nature that is to be exalted.”

Quotable Quotes:

“One of the greatest evils that attends the quest for knowledge, the investigations of science, is the disposition to exalt human reasoning above its true value and its proper sphere. Many attempt to judge of the Creator and His works by their own imperfect knowledge of science.” (427)

“Our condition through sin is unnatural, and the power that restores us must be supernatural, else it has no value. There is but one power that can break the hold of evil from the hearts of men, and that is the power of God in Jesus Christ.” (428)

“The revelation of Himself that God has given in His word is for our study. This we may seek to understand. But beyond this we are not to penetrate. The highest intellect may tax itself until it is wearied out in conjectures regarding the nature of God, but the effort will be fruitless. This problem has not been given us to solve. No human mind can comprehend God. None are to indulge in speculation regarding His nature. Here silence is eloquence. The Omniscient One is above discussion.” (429)

“We are as ignorant of God as little children; but, as little children, we may love and obey Him.” (429)

“Neither by searching the recesses of the earth nor in vain endeavors to penetrate the mysteries of God’s being, is wisdom found. It is found, rather, in humbly receiving the revelation that He has been pleased to give, and in conforming the life to His will.” (431)

“Skeptics refuse to believe in God because they cannot comprehend the infinite power by which He reveals Himself. But God is to be acknowledged as much from what He does not reveal of Himself, as from that which is open to our limited comprehension. Both in divine revelation and in nature, God has given mysteries to command our faith. This must be so. We may be ever searching, ever inquiring, ever learning, and yet there is an infinity beyond.” (431)

“Let none seek with presumptuous hand to lift the veil that conceals His glory. “Unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out.” Romans 11:33. It is a proof of His mercy that there is the hiding of His power; for to lift the veil that conceals the divine presence is death. No mortal mind can penetrate the secrecy in which the Mighty One dwells and works. Only that which He sees fit to reveal can we comprehend of Him.” (438)

Tweets of Healing:

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The revelation of Himself that God has given us in His Word is for our study. (429)

We are as ignorant of God as little children, but, as little children, we may love and obey Him. (429)

Wisdom is found in humbly receiving the revelation that God has been please to give and in conforming the life to His will. (431)

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