



EXCERPT



Light Unapproachable
Divine Incomprehensibility and the Task of Theology

November 12, 2024 | \$24, 224 pages, paperback | 978-1-5140-0710-5

Ronni Kurtz (PhD, Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary) is an assistant professor of theology at Cedarville University. He is also the author of *No Shadow of Turning: Divine Immutability and the Economy of Redemption* and the *Fruitful Theology: How the Life of the Mind Leads to the Life of the Soul*.

An Invitation into Incomprehensibility

From the waters of God's incomprehensibility flows the double stream of blessing and curse in Christian theology. There is the curse of the task's difficulty; as we seek to name God in Christian theology, the theologian's entire enterprise will be frustrated by how this God seems to be always just out of theological and linguistic reach. On the other hand, there is a profound blessing flowing from incomprehensibility as well since the *otherness* of this God means the glorious well of Christian theology will never run dry; contemplating God's beauty will never be exhausted. Those glorious realities that cause us creatures to marvel at our God are incomprehensibly endless. The theological enterprise of knowing and naming God will not come to full fruition until the church lays hold of her glorious gift of eschatological sight and beholds God with the new vision of the blessed. But until that great day when we move from knowing in part to knowing fully (1 Cor 13:12), the incomprehensibility of God will always be something of an exasperation and thrill for the Christian theologian.

The frustration of knowing and naming the incomprehensible God comes even more into focus as we define the task of Christian theology. If the theological task is the study of God and all things in relation to God, then God's incomprehensibility will bring about a myriad of consequences (This definition of theology comes from many sources, of which the most important for my personal development and the source I pull from here is John Webster, *GWM*, 1:1. Webster enlists Franciscus Junius to reinforce this point. See Junius on God as the principle of theology in *TTT*, 177-79). Putting the pieces together, it may seem a reason to despair for the student of theology who seeks to know and name the triune God if he is as incomprehensible and altogether different as Exodus 33 depicts him to be. We can hear this despair in the prayer of Anselm as he begins *Proslogion*:

Come then, Lord my God, teach my heart where and how to seek You, where and how to find You Lord, if You are not present here, where, since You are absent, shall I look for You? On the other hand, if You are everywhere why then, since You are present, do I not see You? But surely you dwell in "light inaccessible" (1 Tim 6:16). And where is this inaccessible light, or how can I approach the inaccessible? Or who shall lead me and take me into it that I may see You in it? . . . He yearns to see You and Your countenance is too far away from him. He desires to come close to You, and Your dwelling place is inaccessible. . . . I was made in order to see You, and I have not yet accomplished what I was made for.

While at first glance, the doctrine of divine incomprehensibility may seem like reason for the student of theology to despair, when all things are considered, it is instead an invitation to partake in the grace of God. For, as God did for Moses, the Lord has provided shelter for the pilgriming theologian. Like God graciously led Moses to the cleft in the rock as an accommodation for his physical inability to take in an eye-ful of God's glory, he has a remedy for our plight as well.

Therefore, like Moses, we will take to the accommodating cleft. From God's providential and gracious accommodation, we will conduct the task of Christian theology *from the cleft*. Like the prophet Moses, from the theological safety of God's accommodation, we will aim to still catch a glimpse of his glory. In the end, instead of an impetus for despair, God's incomprehensibility will be a wellspring of wonder and majesty of which we will never reach the bottom in this life.

—Adapted from Chapter 1, "Introducing the Doctrine of Divine Incomprehensibility"



Karin DeHaven, senior publicist
kdehaven@ivpress.com or ivpress.com/media



ivpress.com/media