

Preface

Knowledge of God is a difficult subject in any age. Only with great difficulty did Karl Barth explain to his students his conviction that the God who is revealed in Jesus Christ is nevertheless a God who is hidden. “It is the *Deus revelatus* who is the *Deus absconditus*, the God to whom there is no path nor bridge, concerning whom we could not say nor have to say a single word if He did not of His own initiative meet us as the *Deus revelatus*.”¹ How can you know God, and yet not know God? How can God be revealed, but never become for a moment the passive object of our intrusive activity of comprehension? For Barth, and his students in the theology of revelation, the answer came in the Holy Spirit. Our knowledge of God does not come by our intellectual penetration of divine things, but by revelation: revelation that the Revealer must control and authenticate to become knowledge of God in the one to whom it has been revealed. The Holy Spirit is necessary for an operation like that. The Holy Spirit produces and governs the knowledge of God in the believer.

Barth’s era was not the first time the self-authenticating revelation of God caused heads to be scratched. Basil of Caesarea wrestled with this issue in his own times, long before the rise of the theologians of revelation. Intent on articulating the possibility of knowledge of God and the divinity of the Holy Spirit, Basil returned again and again to Psalm 36:9, *In your light we see light*. Knowledge of God was an experience of revelation, not a conquest, leading one to humble worship, not intellectual pride. As theologians, those who would use words to speak of God and describe our relationship to God, the material available for our art is found within the divine light whereby we see light. We do not deploy our imaginations to construct notions of God. Rather, within the confines of revelation, the material we take to hand for our art is the content of divine self-disclosure. Basil knew this. In the first known treatise dedicated fully to the theological explication of the divinity of the Holy Spirit, Basil demonstrated this. In his battles with Eunomius, Basil defended this. It is Basil—ecclesial, political, episcopal, monastic, pulpiteering Basil—who proves to be the seedbed of the theology of revelation. Basil’s distinct and unrelenting discipline to respect the confines of divine self-disclosure in the middle of a

1. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* I.1, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, ed. T. F. Torrance and G. W. Bromiley, trans. G. W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2004), 321.

heated debate over the divinity of the Holy Spirit set a tone for theology for all who followed, including his Cappadocian colleagues. That is what this book is about.

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