

A Reply to Doctor Motyer

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Professor Motyer's claim that our 'knowledge of God is not a wholly or chiefly cognitive thing' is certainly true, and it was not my intent to say that it was. There is, however, a cognitive element in our understanding of any other person. If we wish to truly and intimately understand someone, we must to some degree understand how they conceptualize the world. This is certainly true concerning our understanding of a personal God. At least one of the ways we grow in our knowledge of God is by better understanding how different his concepts are from our own. The same thing can be said, of course, of the way we grow in our knowledge of our spouses. Our understanding of how differently they conceptualize things may not be the most important element of our relationships but it is certainly an element. It may even be an element which grows in importance as we become more intimate.

Professor Motyer also claims that what I suggest is not truly 'postmodern' in the sense that most take that term. That too is true in that I do not accept what many claim are the inevitable consequences of the end of modernity. What I do accept, however, is the fact that modernity has come to an end, and it is in that sense that I refer to the hermeneutics I discuss as postmodern. Furthermore, I have argued that the end of modernity, and in particular the end of some of its guiding principles, is a good thing for biblical Christianity. Most especially, it is a good thing that we no longer think of knowledge as something that requires objective concepts that are narrow and precise after the model of the mathe-

matical sciences of modernity. Our conceptual understanding need not follow that model, and our understanding of God's intentional meaning would be better if it were based instead upon the kind of personal concepts we encounter in our more intimate communions.

As an example of the difference between the kind of concepts I am suggesting and the kind of concepts that modernity set forth as ideal, consider Professor Motyer's discussion of whether our receiving the word of God should be understood as the horticultural concept of sowing or the biological concept of impregnating. He has some interesting points to make about choosing the horticultural concept of sowing over the biological notion of impregnating. Of course, he does concede that the idea of impregnating seems to flow from 'the notion of believers as children of God', and I could argue other points that seem to favour the biological model, but that would be beside the point. The main thrust of my paper was to criticize a modernist hermeneutics which insists that one must be chosen to the exclusion of the other. The very fact that God uses metaphor as the means of his communication should tell us that what he is trying to express cannot be communicated in the kind of narrow and precise way that modernity so prized. Thus, why try to make the metaphorical instances of Scripture fit into one narrow concept or another? Why not let those metaphors expand and enrich our conceptual understanding? Indeed, the truth seems to be that we come to salvation through the word of God by a mysterious process that

bears a resemblance to both the biological idea of impregnating and the horticultural idea of sowing.

The fear seems to be that if our concepts become broader, they will lose meaning, but that is only because of the dominance of the model given us by the sciences of modernity. On that model, narrow and precise concepts are the ideal, and thus to move in the opposite direction is thought to undermine meaning. On another model, however, quite the opposite is the case. In our

intimate communions, meaning increases as our concepts broaden to accommodate the intentional meaning of the other person. On this model, an insistence on narrow and precise concepts prevent others from communicating the richness and fullness of their concepts. On this model, the richness and fullness of meaning is communicated only as we allow our concepts to be broadened. My claim is that in the reading of Scripture this second model should often be preferred over the first.