

THE TRINITY REVIEW

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare [are] not fleshly but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. And they will be ready to punish all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.

February, March 1996

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“A Lie in My Right Hand” Idolatry and Empirical Apologetics John W. Robbins

I will begin by quoting from the prophet Isaiah:

Those who make a graven image—all of them are useless, and their precious things shall not profit; they are their own witnesses: They neither see nor know, that they may be ashamed. Who would form a god or cast a graven image that profits him nothing? Surely all his companions would be ashamed; and the workmen, they are mere men. Let them all be gathered together, let them stand up; yet they shall fear; they shall be ashamed together.

The blacksmith with the tongs works one in the coals, fashions it with hammers, and works it with the strength of his arms. Even so, he is hungry, and his strength fails; he drinks no water and is faint. The craftsman stretches out his rule; he marks one out with chalk; he fashions it with a plane, he marks it out with the compass, and makes it like the figure of man, according to the beauty of a man, that it may remain in the house.

He hews down cedars for himself, and takes the cypress and the oak; he secures it for himself among the trees of the forest. He plants a pine, and the rain nourishes it.

Then it shall be for man to burn, for he will take some of it and warm himself, yes, he kindles it and bakes bread; indeed he makes a god and worships it; he makes it a carved image and falls down to it. He burns half of it in the fire; with this half he eats meat; he roasts a roast, and is satisfied. He even warms himself and says, "Ah! I am warm, I have seen the fire." And the rest of it he makes into a god, his carved image. He falls down before it and worships it, prays to it and says, "Deliver me, for you are my god."

They do not know nor understand; for he has shut their eyes, so that they cannot see. And their hearts, so that they cannot understand. And no one considers in his heart, nor is there knowledge nor understanding to say, "I have burned half of it in the fire; yes, I have also baked bread on its coals; I have roasted meat and eaten it; and shall I make the rest of it an abomination? Shall I fall down before a block of wood?"

He feeds on ashes, and a deceived heart has turned him aside, and he cannot deliver his soul, nor say, "Is there not a lie in my right hand?" *Isaiah 44:9-20.*

We in the United States, professing Christians most, have prided ourselves on being free of idolatry. But our religion has been far from pure; idolatry in many forms, both gross and subtle, has flourished in America. One thinks not only of the ubiquitous images and statues of tens of thousands of Roman and Eastern churches, but of the latest religious fad as well, the idolatry of angels. A few months ago in a gift shop in the state of Washington I found a necklace on which were strung ten small ersatz silver plates containing the Ten Commandments. This necklace, the box informed the buyer, would protect the wearer from harm. As America becomes more religious, it is becoming more obviously idolatrous.

The irrationality—what the Bible calls foolishness—of idolatry is vividly illustrated by God through the prophet Isaiah: The craftsman cuts down a tree, burns part of it in the fire for warmth and cooking, and from the same wood makes an idol that he worships as a god. The people who do such things are useless, the prophet says. They—both the idol and the idolater—neither know nor understand. The craftsman worships, and prays to, a piece of wood. It is not the case that the idolater does not know and does not understand the situation because he is stupid—although there is evidence that idolatry does affect the intelligence of any people who practice it for extended periods—Isaiah's point is not that the craftsman is stupid, but that he is deceived. He does not, because he cannot, recognize the idol as a lie. The idolater is not unintelligent—he is foolish. This fool has said in his heart, Behold, *here is a god*.

God tells us that the blacksmith and the craftsman take part of creation, improve it, deify it, and worship it. Had he continued his illustration, God might have included the empirical theologian and apologist alongside the craftsman and blacksmith, for they, like the craftsman and blacksmith, take part of creation—motion, order, physical existence, to use three actual examples from the history of theology and apologetics—and from them extract, infer, invent, craft, shape, whittle, or design a god. This god, just as much as the iron god of the blacksmith or the wooden god of the craftsman, is a god of their own making, amenable to their own wishes, agreeable to their own desires, and

completely false and unprofitable. The carpenter has been replaced by the scholar, but the method and the result are the same.

The empirical theologian and apologist, like the craftsman and blacksmith, are blinded by their own creations—deceived by their own creativity and ingenuity, fooled by their own cleverness, misled by the beauty of their work, persuaded by the plausibility of their own arguments—so that they do not and cannot see that the god whom they have "proved" or rendered "probable" is not the God of the Bible, but merely an attenuated and tenuous part of creation, a god of their own making.

Sinful man, inveterately religious, has always worshiped gods of his own making, gods of his own imagining. Many times—though not always—those gods have been idols made of wood or gold or silver (or in the twentieth century, plastic); many times the idols have been mental images (the current use of visualization as an aid to "worship" in many churches is a contemporary example of such mental idolatry, based on the philosophy of empiricism); and many times the idols have been theological and philosophical speculations, constructs of foolish minds who have taken some element of creation and shaped it into something that is deified and worshiped. What all these forms of idolatry have in common is their source: They worship and serve the creature, as Paul said, rather than the Creator. It is no accident that the ecclesiastical organization that makes the most extensive use of images and statues in its worship, and whose members are most fascinated by apparitions and wonders and relics, is also the church officially committed to Thomas Aquinas' empirical philosophy. The false epistemology and the false theology logically fit together. Their empirical god is worshiped empirically.

Isaiah's craftsman, beginning with wood, does not understand (for he is deceived) that however he manipulates it, smoothes it, shapes it, and polishes it, he must end with only wood. Apparently he believes that his skill and efforts somehow transform the wood into something divine or something that represents the divine. Isaiah's blacksmith, beginning with iron, does not

understand that he must end with only iron. The goldsmith, beginning with gold or silver, does not understand that he must end with only gold or silver. All are deceived; none either do or can realize that their labors cannot take something mundane, something of this world, and transform it into something divine or representing something divine. Their idols, which they regard as gods, might be precious, things of beauty, pleasing to the eye, but they remain mundane: wood, gold, and iron.

Both the crude idolaters and the more refined scientific and philosophical variety seem to believe in some sort of alchemy or transubstantiation: They believe that their work, whether it be physical or intellectual, transforms a mundane object into a divine object. Indeed, the idolatry of empirical apologetics is a good deal like the idolatry of Roman Catholicism. The Romanist, after the priest pronounces the "*hoc est*," believes that the bread is no longer merely bread and the wine no longer merely wine. The empiricist, after performing his intellectual *hocus-*, believes that "its" become persons, physical causes become immaterial creators, and cosmic designers become the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This philosophical alchemy is at the heart of empirical apologetics.

How smug we are in America—especially American Christians, especially those who call themselves Evangelicals—and how foolish. We look down our educated noses at the primitive savages who worship their wooden idols, while we worship the philosophical idols created by the empirical philosophers and theologians: the Prime Mover, the First Cause, the Ground of Being, the Supreme Being, the Grand Designer, the Architect of the Universe. These gods, no matter what they are called, are idols. Our empirical apologetics have confounded Heaven and Earth, the creature with the Creator, the name of God with that of the Prime Mover; they have done no less than what the ancient Israelites were punished for.

The first and by far the greatest empirical theologian was not a Christian, but the pagan Aristotle. Aristotle's god (or gods) was not the God of the Bible, but an intellectual idol. His arguments

are examples of what Paul means in *Romans* 1 when he refers to unbelievers suppressing the truth in unrighteousness. The arguments are attempts to evade or pervert what Aristotle knew about God.

Nevertheless, there are many professing Christians who follow Aristotle, thinking that they can start where Aristotle started, argue as Aristotle argued, and end with something different from Aristotle's idol. They may give it a different name; they may imagine, as did the Israelites, that they are worshiping God, but they are in fact worshiping an Aristotelian idol.

To be sure, our empirical apologists do not work with their hands as Isaiah's craftsman did, but with their minds. Their tools are not hammers, compasses, fire, and chalk, but sensations, abstractions, observations, analogies, and fallacious arguments. Awed by their own (or Aristotle's or Thomas') ingenuity, blinded by their brilliance, overwhelmed by the beauty of their creation, they cannot understand that the product of all their apologetical labors must remain mundane. Our educated, sophisticated, highly intelligent empirical philosophers and theologians are idolaters like the most primitive savages in the most benighted lands on Earth. They are as blind as the most ignorant savage falling prostrate before his wooden idol. They do not say, because they cannot say, "Is there not a lie in my right hand?"

The idolatrous craftsman thinks that he can transform a piece of wood into a god. Had the craftsman been satisfied, God says, to use the wood for warmth or for cooking, he would have profited from it. But his illegitimate use of the wood condemned him. He tried to change the creature into something divine, something it could never be, no matter how dexterous his hands, no matter how glorious his vision, no matter how ingenious his execution.

So, too, the empirical theologian. The empirical theologian thinks that he can—by mental, not manual, manipulation—transform a sensation, an observation, or an abstraction into a god. Had he been satisfied to use his observations to subdue the Earth, to tend the garden and keep it, he would have

profited; but he turned the use of the creature in an illegitimate direction by trying to discover or invent a god. Natural science has a proper place in a Christian view of men and things: The purpose of science is to enable men to subdue the Earth. But science cannot lead us even to truth about the universe, let alone truth about God. The history of empirical philosophy and apologetics is the history of the attempt to climb from Earth to Heaven, of building a tower from Earth to Heaven, of confounding Earth and Heaven.

The Christian faith—including the most fundamental doctrines of God and Scripture—is not constructed out of materials we find in creation; God reveals it from Heaven in propositions. Propositional revelation, not sensation, is the source of truth. Christianity, just as it has a unique theology, has a unique epistemology. The empirical apologetes do not understand that. Even at this late date they continue to gather Aristotelian and Thomistic logs and whittle them into gods.

It is not my purpose here to list, let alone discuss, the dozens of problems in any empirical epistemology; time will not permit it. I here simply point out that the empirical enterprise stumbles at the beginning on two truths: (1) One cannot validly infer any proposition from something non-propositional; and (2) a *tabula rasa* mind is a contradiction in terms. Logic concerns the relations between propositions. If there are no propositions—if there are simply sensations or perceptions—no inference is possible. And a consciousness conscious of nothing—a *tabula rasa* mind—is a contradiction in terms. Furthermore, there are not the necessary propositions in the universe from which we may deduce God. Unless we start with the Bible as the Word of God, unless we take the original motto of the Evangelical Theological Society as our axiom, we neither can nor will get to God or to the Bible. The diligent and ingenious labors of the empirical theologians will always be vain. Their arguments will always be fallacious. Their confusion will always be fatal. And unbelievers, let me emphasize, will always be correct in rejecting their arguments. Unbelievers, not being confused by their hopes, understand that

wood remains wood; iron, iron; motion, motion; and physical causation, physical causation.

The worse fate that can befall any cause, wrote a nineteenth century economist, is not to be skillfully attacked, but to be incompetently defended. Empirical apologetics is a logically incompetent defense of the Christian faith. Much of the contempt in which Christianity is held in academia is due to the incompetent defense offered by empirical theologians.

The First Experiment

The historical account in *Genesis* 3 is a graphic illustration of the sinful error of empiricism: Adam and Eve, who had received God's propositional revelation about the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, decided to perform the world's first scientific experiment. They were faced with conflicting hypotheses and predictions about the consequences of a certain course of action. God had told Adam, who then told Eve, that if he ate of the tree, he would surely die. The serpent told Eve, while Adam watched, that they would not certainly die, but would be transformed from mere men into gods (rather like the wood of Isaiah's craftsman).

Rather than accepting God's Word on its own authority (as they and we should, for it is the only authority, and it is irrational to accept anything else in its place), Eve the empiricist observed the fruit, noting that it was good for food, pleasant to the eyes, and desirable to make one wise. (Here we seem to have the first appearance of the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.) Trusting her senses rather than God, Eve ate the fruit. Adam, it seems, watched her eat, for she gave the fruit, we are told, to her husband who was with her. Since Eve did not die as God had predicted, God's hypothesis was wrong, and the Devil's hypothesis was right. Adam also ate the fruit. The entire misery of the human race began with Adam and Eve not believing God's revealed Word, with Adam and Eve relying on their own observations, and with Adam and Eve subjecting God's revelation to an empirical test, a scientific experiment. Our empirical theologians and apologists are doing the same still today. Their efforts to prove or render

probable the existence of God or the reliability of the Bible on the basis of experience have no other foundation. They simply do not understand that proving God or his Word is foolishness.

God and his Word are the highest authority; they are the basis of all proof. There can be no greater authority, no more fundamental axiom. It is impious to suppose that the evidence of one's senses is in any way superior to the propositional revelation of God.

Some—both atheists and Christians, I suppose—might wish to argue that Adam and Eve were substituting their own judgment for that of God. The atheists might see that as commendable, and the Christians as sinful. But that is a serious misreading of the temptation. As rational creatures, Adam and Eve—and you and I—must always use our own judgments. We cannot escape doing so. The question is not whether we must judge, but on what basis or ground we should make judgments. Adam and Eve chose to make their judgment based on sense experience rather than propositional revelation. That was fatally foolish. Ever since, their children, as part of the noetic effects of their sin, a sin that began in their minds, have been enthralled by sense experience and hostile to propositional revelation. They would rather do without truth than accept it as a gift from God. They would rather search for truth, endlessly and futilely, than receive it freely from God. Those empiricists who claim to be Christians pride themselves on allegedly discovering the really important ideas—the existence of God and the reliability of the Bible—on their own steam. They do not need propositional revelation, thank you very much.

There are many examples that one might give of empirical apologetics as idolatry, but I shall mention the work of only two contemporary theologians, one American and one Briton, the first a more orthodox Thomist, the second a less orthodox Thomist: Norman Geisler and Alister McGrath.

Norman Geisler

In his book, *Christian Apologetics*, Geisler writes of a necessary being (which he for no good reason spells with a capital B) as an "it," just as Thomas did in his famous five ways (239-249). For example, Geisler writes:

... the cause of all contingent existence ... cannot itself be contingent. If it were contingent, then it would not be the *cause* of the contingent; it too would be an *effect*. But it is the cause of the contingent. ... Hence, the very first cause of my contingent existence is non-contingent, that is, it is a necessary Being. ... 1

The first cause of all else that exists must itself be un-caused. It cannot be self-caused ... and it cannot be caused by another. ... It is literally the not-caused cause of all that is caused. It is the not-affected effecter of all effects. It is the necessary ground of all actualized possibility. ... 2

... this infinite³ cause of all that is must be all-knowing. It must be knowing because knowing beings exist. I am a knowing being, and I know it. ... If my mind or ability to know is received, then there must be Mind or Knower who gave it to me. ... 4 The cause of knowing, however, is infinite. Therefore, it must know infinitely.⁵ It is also simple, eternal, and unchanging. Hence, whatever it knows—and it knows anything it is possible to know—it must know simply, eternally, and in an unchanging way. ...

The only thing such a Mind cannot know is what is impossible for it to know. For example, an infinite mind cannot know what it is like to be finite or changing in its knowledge or experience (246-247).

Now this philosophical manipulation of mundane being (and the contingent being could be wood or iron, plus the intelligence of the craftsman, please note) by which it is transformed first into Necessary Being, and then into Infinite and Infinitely Knowing Being, is a tissue of logical blunders. It deceives

many people who want to be deceived. They already believe or desire to believe in some sort of god, and they are willing to accept any argument so long as it is plausible. The cosmological argument has been analyzed and refuted many times by philosophers and Christians much more proficient than I. But what comes next in the argument is most interesting: On page 248 Geisler slips (or smuggles) and refers to this First Cause, this Necessary Being, this Ultimate Ground, as the Creator, and he begins using the pronoun "him" instead of "it." How does the First Cause become the Creator? Geisler does not tell us. How does "it" become "him"? Geisler is silent. As Barth said—and here Geisler would have done better to read Barth than Tillich—the conclusion of the cosmological argument no one understands to be God. Certainly Aristotle did not. As Christians we can rejoice that Aristotle's and Geisler's arguments are fallacious, for if they were valid, they would prove some god other than the God of the Bible. Note, for example, that Geisler writes that this god cannot know what it is like to be finite or changing. But the God of the Bible certainly knows such things. He is not the anchoritic god of Aristotle. The immutability of God is no impediment to his knowledge of limit or change. Apparently Professor Geisler's god, as well as Professor Geisler, has only empirical knowledge. Professor Geisler has made a god in his own image.

Alister McGrath

Another contemporary example of empirical theology may be found in the work of Alister McGrath. Unlike Geisler, McGrath does not think that Thomas offered his Five Ways as strict proofs for the existence of God, but as merely probable arguments. McGrath's misunderstanding of Thomas is definitely in the minority. Nevertheless, he may be classified as a Thomist—or at least as an empiricist—because of his use of and high regard for Thomas.

In his book *Intellectuals Don't Need God and Other Modern Myths*, subtitled *Building Bridges to Faith Through Apologetics*, McGrath begins with a false view of Christianity, but one that is quite consistent with his empiricism: "Christianity is not a verbal religion; it is experiential. It centers on a

transformative encounter of the believer with the risen Christ. From the standpoint of Christian theology, however, that experience comes before the words that generate, evoke, and inform it. Christianity is Christ-centered, not book-centered" (21). In short, McGrath denies that "in the beginning was the Word" and asserts instead, "in the beginning was the encounter."

Now, one might be forgiven for thinking that the apostle John, who used the word *Logos* to identify Christ, taught that Christianity is a verbal religion. But the apostle John, unlike McGrath, was neither a neo-orthodox nor an empirical theologian. John said the word is basic. McGrath says Christianity is not a verbal religion. Words, says McGrath, are not only secondary at best, they are inadequate: "Even though human words are inadequate to do justice to the wonder and majesty of God, they are nevertheless able to point to him—inadequacy does not imply unreliability" (19). First encounters, now pointers: Will the neo-orthodox claptrap never end? Christ, need I point out, did not say that words were either inadequate or pointers: He said that his words are Spirit and life. Christ, of course, was a man who used human words, which fact destroys all the empiricist drivel about the inadequacy of words.

A few pages later McGrath writes: "Apologetics is able to use words in such a way that they become pointers for those who have yet to discover what it feels like to experience God. It uses words that try to explain what it is like to know God, by analogy with words associated with human experience" (22). Quite frankly, Christianity has nothing to do with what it feels like to experience God. That is the language of unbelief, the language of empiricism, the language of idolatry.

McGrath's experiential religion is quite different from Biblical Christianity. Ignoring Christ's repeated statements that he spoke to people in parables in order to confuse them, McGrath, blinded by his empiricism, writes:

The parables of Jesus are a superb example of the way in which the gospel is presented in terms of the common life of the people. . . . Here was an insider [Christ

was an insider?]) talking to them as one of them and explaining new ideas in such a way that their strangeness was minimized. The ideas may have been new or unsettling, the language and imagery in which they were expressed were reassuringly familiar. An important potential obstacle to the gospel was brilliantly circumvented (27).

Well, McGrath has certainly circumvented the truth of the Gospel by his sophomoric misunderstanding of the purpose of Christ's parables. It is absolutely amazing what passes for scholarship and learning these days.

McGrath tips his hat to Thomas, who offered not strict proofs, McGrath says, but probable arguments for the existence of God. Indeed, probability is all there is:

Those who lack psychological maturity may need to cling to the illusions of certainty; the rest of us [that is, we who are psychologically mature] are content to learn to live in a world in which nothing important is certain and nothing certain is important (155). Probability, not certainty, is the law of the life of experience (79).

All our knowledge about anything that really matters is a matter of probability. The things that we can be really sure about seem rather trivial and petty (80). When it comes to the big things of life—like believing in the Christian faith or believing in democracy—we live on the basis of probability, not certainty. Anyone who disagrees probably has not given it very much thought. . . . (81).

Irrefutability might seem to be a virtue; in reality, it is a vice (83).

Having started by rejecting words, including, by definition, Scripture; having begun by accepting observations, encounters, feelings; and having proceeded by silly analogies and fallacious inductive arguments, McGrath concludes by designing a god to his own liking:

God is neither masculine or feminine (174).

The New Testament proclaims the universal saving will of God. God wishes all to be saved. . . . He very much wants all of us, as his creatures, to respond to his love. But God has created us with freedom to accept or reject Him (142).

God respects our God-given freedom. The offer of salvation is real. God's desire that we accept it is real. But the ball is in our court. A response is needed, but that response need not be forthcoming. It is our decision (143).

McGrath's god, like Aristotle's and Geisler's gods, is not the God of the Bible. McGrath's god is, at best, a Pelagian or Arminian god, a pathetic god thwarted by his creatures' freedom of choice. Made of mundane material, empirical gods remain mundane. Feminists are not the only ones who are manufacturing gods after their own image, gods that they prefer, gods whose powers, characteristics, and duties are what they want: Aristotelians, Pelagians, Romanists, and Arminians have been fabricating gods for centuries. But it is not yet generally recognized that the gods fabricated by Aristotelians, Pelagians, Romanists, Arminians, and other empirical theologians are philosophical idols. The philosophical craftsmen themselves cannot recognize the idols for what they are.

McGrath, making explicit his empiricism, appeals to the imagination in his apologetics: The human imagination, he writes, is "perhaps one of the most powerful allies at the disposal of the apologist."

Argument will always have its place in Christian apologetics. But it urgently needs to be supplemented by an appeal to imagery. . . . Arguments are precise; images are suggestive. We need to meditate on those remarkable words of some Greeks who came to Philip: "Sir, we wish to see Jesus" (*John* 12:21). Here is our task: to help people see Jesus Christ with their own eyes. Let us learn from Christ, who opened his parables, not with

a definition ("The Kingdom of God is. . ."), but with an image ("The Kingdom of God is *like*. . ."). The parables themselves are remarkably effective in inviting their hearers to step inside their narrative worlds and in stirring the imagination. The parables excite; too often, arguments dull (194).

If we listen to Christ, who is not an empiricist, rather than to McGrath, Christ explained in words, not images, that he used figures of speech in order to confuse people, not to enlighten them. One wishes that those who disapprove of words and approve of images would bring out the sort of books that their method requires: comic books—no words, just images. Then their ideas would get exactly the respect they deserve. (One also wishes that those who advocate speaking in tongues would also write in tongues, rather than in intelligible prose.)

According to McGrath, definitions as well as words and arguments are suspect and ineffective:

Definitions are closed off and imprison people in formulas; images are open-ended and invite their hearers to imagine them and be captured by them. We must avoid sounding like theological dictionaries and instead be able to appeal to the imaginations of those to whom we speak (195).

Throughout his book McGrath is enthused about and enthralled by imagery and images. It is these that must become the central tool of apologetics. The unbeliever must be hit with images. Words, definitions, and arguments are inadequate and their use counterproductive. Images are exciting, inviting, and effective. By his emphasis on images, by his attacks on words, definitions, and arguments, McGrath is more consistently empirical than are some other empirical apologists. And for that reason the idolatry of empirical apologetics is more obvious in McGrath than it may be in some others. All of them however, to quote Isaiah, feed on ashes. None say, "Is there not a lie in my right hand?" They do not, because they cannot, recognize the lie. They are deceived by their own idols.

Conclusion

God did not conclude his message through Isaiah by illustrating and condemning the foolishness of idolatry. He continued by describing himself—a description that all who worship idols find disturbing because it is contrary to their own notions of what God ought to be like. Let all other descriptions of God conform:

I am the Lord who makes all things, who stretches out the heavens all alone, who spreads abroad the Earth by myself, who frustrates the signs of the babblers and drives diviners mad, who turns wise men backward, and makes their knowledge foolishness. . . .

I am the Lord, and there is no other; I form the light and create darkness; I make peace and create evil. I, the Lord, do all these things. . . .

Woe to him who strives with his maker! . . . Shall the clay say to him who forms it, "What are you making?" Or shall your handiwork say, "He has no hands"? Woe to him who says to his father, "What are you begetting?" Or to the woman, "What have you brought forth? . . .

Draw near together, you who have escaped from the nations. They have no knowledge, who carry the wood of their carved image, and pray to a god that cannot save. . . .

Look to me and be saved, all you ends of the Earth! For I am God, and there is no other. I have sworn by myself—the word has gone out of my mouth in righteousness and shall not return—that to me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall take an oath. . . .

To that God, and to that God alone, be glory and honor and power, for ever and ever. Amen.

I am the Lord, and there is no other;

I form the light and create darkness;

I make peace and create evil.

I, the Lord, do all these things. . . .

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September, October 1985

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Classical Apologetics

Gordon H. Clark

Classical Apologetics

R. C. Sproul, John Gerstner, Arthur Lindsley

Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1984.

This book is divided, not sharply, for each part somewhat overlaps the others in subject matter, but nevertheless is divided into two parts. The first defends the cosmological argument for the existence of God, an argument which, as in Thomas Aquinas, makes no appeal to the Bible; the second is largely a critique of Van Til's presuppositionalism, including some material from his disciples, with only a page or two—well, maybe six or eight—on distinctly different forms.

This summary is of course extremely brief and is far from giving any adequate picture of the whole book. But the critic thinks it is fair enough for an initial statement.

One other remark is necessary. When the wording of the paragraph is "All presuppositionalists hold," or simply "Presuppositionalism holds that..." one is inclined to object to an unwarranted generalization. However, rather than charging the authors with repeated logical blunders, let it be set down to careless English. Unless they explicitly say otherwise, they mean Van Til's theory.

The first subject then is the cosmological argument. Considering a section in Plato's lengthy *Laws* as a premature birth from an octogenarian, we may well

consider Aristotle as its initiator. It is essentially the argument of Books II to VIII of Aristotle's *Physics*. Book VIII completes the preparation and concludes with the Unmoved Mover. Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century reproduced it without any significant change. Its summary may be found in *Thales to Dewey* (274-275) with what the author considers to be devastating objections.

Now, the three authors introduce their work with an all too short but really excellent description of the intellectual—or better, the anti-intellectual and anti-Christian—forces of the twentieth century. The next three chapters present certain material that the authors think they can and do accept from the Bible. This chapter belongs to the second part of their book. The critic prefers to begin his work with the traditional, purely secular cosmological argument, since the authors appeal to it later on.

On page 72, and in spite of their antipathy toward presuppositionalism, they list three of their own. First, the validity of the law of non-contradiction. Second, the validity of the law of causality. And third, the basic reliability of sense perception. On the same page they then admit: "Though we assert that these assumptions are virtually universal, they by no means enjoy universal assent. [But] no one denies these principles regularly and consistently."

Just how much of a face-saving device the term *consistently* may be, it is not true that "no one denies these principles regularly." At any rate they must bear the burden of proving the alleged

inconsistency, and this they do not do. In fact, they repeat their assertion without this weasel word.

On page 82 they bluntly say, "Causal thinking is an integral part of all scientific examination." This statement must be branded as utterly false. It is such a blunder that although one instance would refute it, a number of instances may be necessary to convince a reluctant reader. And the point is so fundamental to the authors' positions that no loopholes should be left.

In 1893, almost a century ago, C. S. Peirce wrote, "We still talk about 'cause and effect,' although in a mechanical world, the opinion this phrase was meant to express has been shelved long ago" (*Philosophical Works*, 17).¹

In addition to Peirce, Eddington's *The Nature of the Physical World*, chapter XIV, tries to salvage *causation* at the expense of *causality*. He calls the law of gravitation "a mere truism" (299). *Exploring the Universe*, contributions of numerous authors, edited by Louise B. Young, McGraw Hill, 1963, on page 200 has this to say: "Before the quantum theory appeared, the principle of the uniformity of nature... had been accepted as a universal and indisputable fact of science. As soon as the atomicity of radiation became established, this principle had to be discarded."

Finally, to clinch the matter, two more quotations will be made: one by the three authors, the other by one of the best known and most highly regarded scientists of the very recent past. The authors assert, "There is no science ...which is not heavily involved with causal thinking." This statement is false. The evidence is conclusive.

Erwin Schroedinger, of world renown, asserts that no scientific model can ever be true, one reason for which is the impossibility of identifying a particle as the same one the scientist saw or thought he saw a tenth of a second before. "We must not admit the possibility of continuous observation."²

Now comes a most startling bit of information: Jonathan Edwards anticipated Schroedinger and completed the explanation, as Schroedinger could not! Our three authors list Jonathan Edwards as one

who exemplifies their notion of classical apologetics. Since today few people know much about Edwards, it is not too surprising that these three authors do not mention the matter. They are not deliberately trying to deceive the public by omission: They simply do not know what Edwards said on this point. The section is in the treatise *On Original Sin* (Baines edition, 1807, Vol. II, 350ff). At the beginning of these several pages, one too quickly concludes that Edwards and the authors agree. But very soon, speaking first of the moon, Edwards says, "In point of *time* [italics his] what is *past* [italics his] *entirely* [italics mine] ceases when *present* [his] existence begins.... The present existence ... of ... any other created substance cannot be an effect of its past existence.... Therefore the existence of created substances, in each successive moment, must be the *immediate* [Edwards' own italics] agency, will, and power of God." This view is commonly called continuous creation, though discontinuous creation would be a better name because there are temporal gaps between what sensation takes as different positions of the same thing.

Admittedly Edwards, because of the originality of his idea, continued with phraseology to which our three authors would not object. But yet he speaks of "God's ...causing [a thing's] existence in each successive moment [as] altogether equivalent to an *immediate production out of nothing* [italics his] God produces as much from *nothing* [italics his] as if there had been nothing before" (355). They should study his footnote on the moon and images in a mirror.

There is a better, more easily understood, and almost universally known example in this twentieth century. At the movies we see, we really *see* a man or an airplane in motion. But there is nothing on the screen that moves. The man appears at a given spot; then he vanishes from the screen so quickly that the audience is unaware of it; then another picture flashes on at nearly the same spot. This produces the illusion of motion. But nothing moves, and second picture is not the same thing as the first. In the case of motion at least, sensation is always mistaken. Indeed, even when the gentleman on the

screen seems to stand still, it is not the same gentleman who was on the screen a moment before.

Our three authors acknowledge that sensation is at least sometimes mistaken, but they put their faith—they are fideists—in a "basic or rudimentary reliability of sense perception" (87). But they certainly do not give the reader any criterion by which to distinguish a truthful sensation from a false one. And of course they steer clear of the motion picture illustration that all sensations are deceptive, or that they are discontinuous, or that Schroedinger is a good scientist.

Quai cum ita sint, they arbitrarily choose which sensations they prefer to believe and discard the others.

As any drowsy reader can guess, the critic believes that these arguments have completely demolished the theory under scrutiny. However, and although one can ignore the false generalizations about all presuppositionalists when they do not even know them all, there are several types of fallacies—and even clearly false statements—which should be sampled if one wishes to get a more nearly complete picture of the book.

First, some of the ambiguities will be examined. We shall begin with the term *cause*. On page 110: "the first question we ask of those who attack causality is, why? What is the reason for or the cause of the attack on cause? There must be a cause for the denial of cause." This merry-go-round continues for a page or two. The ambiguity and confusion, in the quotation, first appears in the word "why," and second in "the reason for or the cause of," and third in the phrase "a cause for the denial of cause." This is a confusion between alleged physical causes and logical implication. One may say that a building collapsed because someone placed a bomb in it. One may also say that Socrates is mortal because he is a man. But the first *because* is a case of alleged physical causation and the second is a case of logical implication. One *why* asks for a reason; the other asks for a bomb. This explodes the authors' confusion and ambiguity.

Perhaps the authors or a reader will ask, Is not God the cause of the world? In the sense intended the

answer is a resounding, No! God is not a physical body that sets another physical body in motion by contact. God creates, *ex nihilo*. The common assertion that God is the First Cause is not going out of style very soon, but the meaning of the word as thus used cannot be inserted into any cosmological argument so as to lift it into the stratosphere.

In order to avoid the reply that this item of cause is only one ambiguity and can therefore be pardoned, even if it is destructive of the most important points in the authors' theory, it may be well to mention a second. The words now are not *cause* but *above* and *below*. Page 217 argues, "absurd as it may be for us who are here below to begin with where we are not—above—Van Til insists that this must be done." The authors seem to think that arguments begin in some locality: Either they start in a valley and ascend to the mountain peak, or vice versa. The relation of axioms to theorems escapes them. Pythagoras and Euclid did not begin geometry in Africa or Tarentum. Geometry begins in the axiom that through a given point (3/8 inches in diameter?) only one straight line (1/4 inch broad?) can be drawn parallel to a given line. The point is that no one has ever seen a point. "Here below" and "where we are not—above" are such horrendous examples of ambiguity that no others are needed.

The next set of examples is false statements. When we accuse the authors of making false statements, we must make it perfectly clear that we do not accuse them of intending to deceive. If we dare guess at motivation, the guess would be that they are over enthusiastic, that their generalizations are too broad, or that their language is imprecise. In several cases a more carefully worded sentence would have been true. But the critic must take them precisely as they are.

Right at the beginning, on page ix of the Preface, there is a statement that many would accept as true. Its last two words, however, make it false: "Christianity is rational. But... that Christianity involves more, much more, than rationality, is evident." Well, it is not evident to the critic. Even its meaning, let alone its truth, is not evident. Does it mean that though the study of theology is rational, moral behavior is not rational? Then too, the scope

of the phrase "much more" is far from evident. Kind readers, do not dismiss this as triviality. There is so much unsupported assertion in the book that it is a major flaw.

Perhaps it is only repetition to list the following as a false statement. On page 72, speaking both of causation and the basic reliability of sensation, the authors assert that "no one denies these principles regularly and consistently." To say that *no one* denies them is preposterous: The authors have not questioned all the world's population. Nor even with the weasel word *consistently* have they demonstrated the inconsistency of a hundred scientists.

Another one of these nasty little false statements comes on page 212. The authors say, "We consider it self-evident that [apologetics] must start with the person who is making the intellectual journey." No doubt this is completely true, for they merely say "We consider it" so. However, read on. "One simply cannot start outside himself... From time immemorial all [!] people have assumed that they must begin their thinking with themselves." But it is well-nigh incredible that any person should make such an egregiously absurd claim. First, no one has ever interviewed "all people" to determine this alleged fact. Even if all people, including the Tibetans of the fourth century B.C. did so, it does not follow that they assumed they must have done so. Second, neither Parmenides nor Spinoza did so (Spinoza began with eight definitions and seven axioms). No more than Euclid—who began with "Any line may be divided into two parts"—did either of them begin or end with himself. Indeed, the problem has nothing to do with how Euclid began. Maybe he began shooting marbles when he was four years of age, or drinking his mother's milk from birth. The problem is, How does geometry or philosophy begin? Thomas Aquinas did not begin the cosmological argument by making mud pies in the castle of Roccasecca or the town of Aquino. He or it began with the alleged fact that a body moves, or that one can see a body move. Who sees it is of no importance. If the authors want a temporal beginning instead of a logical beginning, why do they not choose his conception in his mother's womb?

Equal confusion continues on the next page (213). The authors state, "Non-Christians cannot use reason and logic to 'keep down the truth.' They have to violate them." Again this is a false statement. Non-Christians do not *have* to violate logic. Many of their arguments are perfectly valid. The Christian rejects the arguments, or should do so, not because of their alleged invalidity, but because of their anti-Christian presuppositions. A valid argument can consist of three true sentences, three false sentences, or two false premises and a true conclusion. The only thing a valid argument cannot have is two true premises and a false conclusion. Accordingly, we charge that the authors' assertion is untrue.

This lethal litany of linguistic laxity must have left the learner either languid or livid. Hence only one more criticism, but important enough to serve as a conclusion.

Beginning on page 29 there is a section on Kant's Copernican Revolution. Concerning Kant the authors say, "Kant declared intellectual independence of God, ... humans cannot know him even partially ... human knowledge only extends to the world's phenomena and not the noumenal realm." The authors also make some remarks about Kant's intuitions of time and space and also about his twelve categories. Their statements are as correct as one could expect in a short summary.

The next point in this concluding criticism is that the authors reject empiricism. "An epistemology established upon a naked empiricism is doomed ... not a single datum can be discovered without an *a priori* making discrimination and individuation possible.... Without *a priori* equipment such as Kant's pure intuitions of space and time ...sensations cannot give rise to perceptions" (85). The authors are not so clear on Kant's categories as they are on his intuitions. Though obviously they accept causality, they say very little about the other eleven. But a satisfactory epistemology requires at least more than one. Kant listed unity, plurality, totality, subsistence, reciprocity, to complete a set of twelve.

However, it is now clear that for them knowledge is a combination of sensory intuitions and *a priori* categories. Consistency requires them to say that categories without intuitions are empty and intuitions without categories are blind. This means that they are essentially Kantians. And if so, causality is restricted to sensory material and has no application to the noumenal world. The cosmological argument therefore is a fallacy and God is no more than a heuristic principle.

Every philosophic or theological system must begin somewhere, for if it did not begin it could not continue. But a beginning cannot be preceded by anything else, or it would not be the beginning. Therefore every system must be based on presuppositions or axioms. They may be Spinoza's axioms; they may be Locke's sensory starting point, or whatever. Every system must therefore be presuppositional.

The first principle cannot be demonstrated because there is nothing prior from which to deduce it. Call it presuppositionalism, call it fideism, names do not matter. But I know no better presupposition than "The Bible alone, and the Bible in its entirety, is the word of God written, and therefore inerrant in the autographs."

1. Compare also the critic's article "The Nature of the Physical Universe," in *Christian Faith and Modern Philosophy*, edited by Carl F. H. Henry, 1964.

2. For those who do not find science so tedious and to spare the others, this endnote will give the pertinent quotation. "As our mental eye penetrates into smaller and smaller distances and shorter and shorter times, we find nature behaving so entirely differently from our surrounding that *no* model shaped after our large scale experience can ever be true ... not even thinkable.... If I observe a particle here and now and observe a similar one a moment later at a place very near the former place, not only cannot I be sure whether it is the 'same', but this statement has absolutely no meaning.... *We must not admit the possibility of continuous observation* [italics his]. Observations are to be regarded as discrete disconnected events.... It is better to regard

a particle, not as a permanent entity, but as an instantaneous event." "Causality and Wave Mechanics" in *The World of Mathematics*, Vol. II, 1056. Compare also Arthur Eddington, "The New Law of Gravitation," 1094.

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For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare [are] not fleshly but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. And they will be ready to punish all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.

September, October 1985

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Comical Apologetics

John W. Robbins

Anyone who is more than superficially acquainted with the bizarre and irrational world of Dutch "Reformed" philosophy can sympathize with the desire of Sproul, Gerstner, and Lindsley (hereinafter SG&L) to present a rational defense of the Christian faith. One American representative of Dutch thought is Cornelius Van Til of Westminster Theological Seminary, and he is the primary target of *Classical Apologetics*. Van Til's books, it is gladly admitted, are positively lucid compared to those of Herman Dooyeweerd, who holds the Guinness record for the greatest number of unintelligible sentences ever printed. But even some of Van Til's works tend to be unreadable, for they are frequently obscure and poorly argued. One can, therefore, sympathize with SG&L's desire to present a rational defense of Christianity, but the execution of their "defense" is so inept that one hardly knows where to begin. *Classical Apologetics* is scarcely an improvement over Van Til. In his review of the book, Dr. Clark annihilates SG&L; permit me to dust off the spots on which they stood. Let me begin with the least significant criticisms and conclude with two demonstrative proofs of the absurdity of classical apologetics.

At one time, Zondervan was a reputable publisher, but the number of errors in *Classical Apologetics* bespeaks slovenliness in form as well as substance. The book is riddled with spelling errors, ranging from the annoying to the amusing. For example, on page 138, "principal" is spelled "principle"; "fibrillations" becomes "fibulations" (97);

vacillate" is printed as "vascillate" (234, 245, 274, 275); and "led" (the verb) becomes "lead" (the metal) (301). Those are some of the annoying misspellings; an amusing error appears on page 187 in the middle of a discussion of the effects of sin on the mind. The sentence reads: "The basic error in traditional thought, being principally Arminian, is that it overlooks the poetic influence of sin." The poetic influence of sin is a subject heretofore largely overlooked by Christian apologists. Now that SG&L have called it to the attention of the Dutch theologians, I am sure we shall be inundated with tomes with titles like *Toward a Cosmonomic Critique of Autonomous Poesy*. But let us move on to some more substantial criticisms of *Classical Apologetics* that cannot be blamed on the publisher.

SG&L uncritically accept an unbiblical separation between the head and the heart and seem ignorant of Clark's treatment of the issue in *Faith and Saving Faith* and *The Biblical Doctrine of Man*. This error vitiates much of the 338-page discussion. In addition to separating the head and the heart, they seem to be able to separate Clark from Clark, for on page 265 he is described as "perhaps the most thoroughgoing presuppositionalist of them all," and on page 334 he becomes "presuppostionalism's most formidable foe." But then perhaps the authors are trying to make an esoteric point about apagogic arguments.

Reading *Classical Apologetics* is, in many ways, akin to walking through a funhouse full of distorting mirrors: One can recognize the men (after all,

SG&L give their names), but the descriptions of their views are sometimes surreal. Not only do some of the descriptions distort the truth, at least one of the quotations does also. On pages 270 and 271 SG&L quote Clark's book, *Religion, Reason and Revelation*, page 43. Here is what SG&L quote him as writing:

Hodge's first sentence bears the form of the main argument, clearly attached to the preceding. He had just said that what is true of three links must be true of a million; but now he adds that nothing multiplied by infinity is nothing still. Aside from its doubtful connection with the preceding, he has not mentioned that zero multiplied by infinity is zero, as one can easily see by realizing the fraction $2/0$ and the fraction $3/0$ are both infinity.

Now compare SG&L's version of Clark with what Clark actually wrote:

Finally, Hodge's third sentence, which seems to bear the form of the main argument, does not clearly attach to the preceding. He had just said that what is true of three links must be true of a million; now he adds that nothing multiplied by infinity is nothing still. Aside from its doubtful connection with the preceding, for he had not mentioned zero or multiplication, the sentence is bad arithmetic. It is not true that zero multiplied by infinity is zero, as one can easily see by realizing that the fraction two over zero and the fraction three over zero are both infinity.

In the space of seven lines on pages 270-271, SG&L commit at least a dozen errors of punctuation, misspelling, unacknowledged omission of words, and unacknowledged insertion of words. They quote Clark as saying exactly the opposite of what he actually wrote. Sloppiness on this scale makes all their quotations suspect, and the reader would be well advised to check the sources SG&L cite rather than accepting their quotations as accurate.

But leaving these matters and many others aside, we must move on to SG&L's argument itself. They call attention to the importance of miracles in their apologetic method. Let me quote their exact words so that it will be clear that I am in no way misrepresenting their views. They write:

What would God give His messengers that all could see could come only from God? Since the power of miracle belongs to God alone, miracles are a suitable and fitting vehicle of attestation (144).

If infinite natural power is the ultimate argument for the existence of God, infinite supernatural power (miracle) is the ultimate argument for the revelation of God. If Satan could do miracles, we could prove neither God nor His revelation. If true miracles could be done by God or Satan, we would learn precisely nothing from them (157).

In summary, we stress again the indispensability of genuine miracles. They and they alone ultimately prove that Christ is the Son of God and that the Bible is the Word of God (161).

The arguments from prophecy and miracles reduce to one, argument from miracles, because prophecy is a species of the generic category of miracle. It is the miraculousness of prophecy which makes it an argument, while what makes miracle an argument is that it requires God to account for it (276).

In traditional apologetics, miracles (as we have seen in chapter 8) play an absolutely crucial role. They are the evidence that certifies messengers sent by God (282).

SG&L's entire book rests on the proposition that "the power of miracle belongs to God alone." SG&L stress the "indispensability of genuine miracles." Miracles "play an absolutely crucial role." "If Satan could do miracles," they write, "we could prove neither God nor his revelation."

But, of course, Satan has done and can do miracles. The Bible says so. For example, *Matthew* 24:24 and *Mark* 13:22 say: "For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect—if that were possible." *2 Thessalonians* 2:9 says: "The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles [miracles of falsehood, not magic tricks], signs and wonders." *Revelation* 13:13 says: "And he [the second beast] performed great and miraculous signs, even causing fire to come down from Heaven to Earth in full view of men." *Revelation* 16:14: "They are spirits of demons performing miraculous signs...." *Revelation* 19:20: "But the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who had performed the miraculous signs on his behalf." *Matthew* 7:22-23: "Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'" *Deuteronomy* 13:1-5:

If a prophet, or one who foretells by dreams, appears among you and announces to you a miraculous sign or wonder, and if the sign or wonder of which he has spoken takes place, and he says, "Let us follow other gods" (gods you have not known) "and let us worship them," you must not listen to the words of that prophet or dreamer.... That prophet or dreamer must be put to death....

All these passages, and many others, indicate that Satan as well as God can perform miracles. It is clearly not true, as SG&L allege, that "the power of miracle belongs to God alone."

Now, SG&L stress the necessity for demonstrative proof. They wax eloquent (and rightly so) about the indispensability of logic. What follows are two proofs that demonstrate the absurdity of traditional, classical, apologetics.

Taking their statements and the Biblical teaching on this subject as premises, we can deduce by good and necessary consequence that SG&L utterly fail in

their efforts to present a rational defense of Christianity. Here are the syllogisms:

"If Satan could do miracles, we [SG&L] could prove neither God nor his revelation" (157). Satan can do miracles (*Matthew* 24:24 *et al*).

Therefore, SG&L can prove neither God nor his revelation.

"If true miracles could be done by God or Satan, we [SG&L] would learn precisely nothing from them" (157).

True, that is, genuine miracles can be done by God or Satan.

Therefore, SG&L learn precisely nothing from them.

A lot of time, effort, and money has been wasted on this book. Had the three authors been a little better acquainted with Scripture and logic, they could have done us all a favor and urged everyone to study Gordon Clark. He has already developed a rational defense of the Christian religion, but few Christian seminary professors seem to be paying attention.