

## SOCRATES OR CHRIST: THE REFORMATION OF CHRISTIAN APOLOGETICS

*By Greg L. Bahnsen*

It is not difficult to understand the general idea of apologetics. Simply put, apologetics is the study and practice of *defending* the Christian faith against the array of challenges, critical attacks, and scrutinizing questions leveled contrary to it by unbelievers. As Cornelius Van Til expresses the thought in the opening sentence of his apologetics syllabus, “Apologetics is the vindication of the Christian philosophy of life against the various forms of the non-Christian philosophy of life.”<sup>1</sup> Consequently, to be an apologist, one simply needs “to join the struggle in defense of the faith, the faith which God entrusted to his people once and for all.”<sup>2</sup>

### *The Unsettled and Complex Character of Apologetics*

However, while the general concept of apologetics is uncomplicated, a whole galaxy of issues and questions clusters around the *exercise* of that task. For instance, in his Introduction to *Christian Apologetics*, J.K.S. Reid asks: What does apologetics defend? Can it be faithful to the faith? Against what or whom is the defense conducted? How is the defense to be conducted? What is the relation of apologetics to dogmatics?<sup>3</sup>

The term “apologetics” was first introduced to denominate a specific theological discipline by Planck in 1794.<sup>4</sup> Yet this label was obviously cognate to the titles of certain second century treatises, like the *apology* of Aristides, the *First Apology* and *Second Apology* of Justin Martyr, or Tertullian’s *Apologeticum*. Whether one studies the church’s earliest post-apostolic confrontation with the unbelieving world or the period when apologetics was developed as an academic science, he notes that a complex of material and methodological questions has persisted in generating disputes among various schools of thought, all of which claim to be doing *apologetics*.

Bernard Ramm provides a convenient summary of such key issues in *Varieties of Christian Apologetics*.<sup>5</sup> (1) What is the relation between philosophy and Christian theology? Perhaps philosophy is something for which theology has no need (Tertullian), is inspired (the Alexandrians), is theology’s servant (Augustine), is an independent authority (Aquinas), is a completely separate field (Pascal), or at best a merely temporary alliance (Barth). (2) How valuable are the theistic proofs? They have been seen as valid (Thomists), needing to be supplemented with moral conviction (Hodge), invalid (Clark), inconsequential (Calvin), and irreligious (Kierkegaard). (3) What should be our theory of truth? The mark of truth might be probability (Butler), consistency (Clark), consistency and factuality (Carnell), probability and logical precision (Tennant), paradox (Kierkegaard), dialecticism (neo-orthodoxy), personal encounter (Brunner), or an epistemology of the Holy Spirit (Calvin). (4) Are the intellectual effects of sin negligible (Pelagius), slight (Romanism), engulfing (the Reformers), or mollified by common grace (Masselink)? (5) Should

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<sup>1</sup> Cornelius Van Til, *Apologetics*, class syllabus (Philadelphia: Westminster Theological Seminary, reprinted 1966), p.1.

<sup>2</sup> Jude 3 (N.E.B.).

<sup>3</sup> (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), pp. 10-14.

<sup>4</sup> *Einleitung In Die Theol. Wissenschaft*.

<sup>5</sup> Baker Book House, 1961, pp. 17-27.

special revelation be viewed as completing natural revelation (Romanism), recovering natural revelation (the Reformers), or an event for which Scripture serves as a pointer (neo-orthodoxy)? (6) What is the nature of Christian certainty? It has been found in the church's infallibility (Romanism), scientific probability (Butler, Tennant), inward certitude in the fact of ambiguity (Kierkegaard), and genuine epistemic assurance in contrast to mere probability (Van Til). (7) Is common ground created by common grace and general revelation (Carnell), found in existential pre-understanding (Bultmann), or not to be found at all (Barth)? (8) Should faith be seen as the response to a credible authority (Augustine), in contrast to evidentially grounded conviction (Aquinas), a venturesome act of will, a response of the emotions (Kierkegaard), or the correlate to revelation? (9) With respect to the usefulness of evidence, it has been held as *the* means for certifying Christianity (Montgomery), as something which can be appreciated only after the Holy Spirit's work (Calvin), as the complement to the Holy Spirit's work (Warfield), and is immaterial because it is evaluated in terms of one's more basic philosophical perspective (Clark). (10) What is the relation of reason to revelation? Does it prepare the way for revelation, conflict with revelation, or constitute a completely separate domain?

Such questions as these have continually arisen in the history of apologetics. Indeed, well over a century after Christian scholars inaugurated self-conscious attempts to reduce apologetics to a well-defined field of endeavor (a specific discipline), confusion still persisted with respect to the place of apologetics among the theological disciplines, its proper task and divisions, its value, and its relation to faith—as evidenced by B. B. Warfield's 1908 article, "Apologetics," for *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*.<sup>6</sup> Some attempted to distinguish apologetics from apology, but they differed among themselves respecting the principle of distinction (Dusterdieck, Kubel). Apologetics was variously classified as an exegetical discipline (Planck), historical theology (Tzshirner), theory of religion (Rabiger), philosophical theology (Schleiermacher), something distinct from polemics (Kuyper), something belonging to several departments (Tholuck, Cave), or something which had no right to exist (Nusselt). H. B. Smith viewed apologetics as historical-philosophical dogmatics which deals with *detail* questions, but Kubel claimed that it properly deals only with the *essence* of Christianity. Schultz went further and said that apologetics is concerned simply to defend a generally *religious* view of the world, but others taught that apologetics should aim to establish *Christianity* as the final religion (Sack, Ebrard, Lechler, Lemme). Still others held that the task of apologetics is to present *evidences* for Christianity, and Warfield claimed that apologetics should seek to establish the presuppositions of theology: namely, the *facts* of God, religious consciousness, revelation, Christianity, and the Bible. Accordingly, he divided the discipline into philosophical apologetics, and biblio-logical apologetics. F. R. Beattie more simply divided the field according to philosophical, historical and practical apologetics. In the tradition of Aquinas, some apologists made it their goal to show Christianity to be worthy of belief for *reasonable* men; yet others, like Brunetiere, proclaimed that faith was most powerful as a heartfelt response *apart from* reason.

Therefore we observe that, while the *general* idea of apologetics is easy enough to grasp, it is by no means a simple project to settle upon an incisive *analysis* and decisive *operating method* for the discipline. Amidst a maze of conflicting answers to the fundamental questions rehearsed above, settling upon a course to follow in defending the faith can be very perplexing. Just as the church at large has not settled upon a unified doctrinal perspective, so the many-faceted and theologically oriented issues of apologetics have not been given clear and agreed upon answers. Consequently, when one engages in defending his faith, it is requisite for him to think through complicated

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<sup>6</sup> Ed. S. M. Jackson (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1908), I, 232-238.

questions and make responsible theological judgments, for his apologetic approach will of necessity be selected from a beehive of competitors. And no Christian wishes to be stung with a misguided, incongruous or fault-ridden line of defense.

### *The Basic Question of Method*

How then should the Christian defend his faith? The answer to this question will determine the character of one's apologetic. "The serious question in apologetics," says Ramm, "is the question of strategy."<sup>7</sup> The urgency of arriving at the proper answer to this question is underlined by the example of Simon Peter, who solemnly determined and adamantly proclaimed that he would never deny Christ or stumble in his adherence to confessing the Lord.<sup>8</sup> However, though Christ was in need of defense at his trial, Peter stood outside in the courtyard, denying his Lord with increasing vehemence at every confrontation.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, the forsaken Messiah later restored Peter and instructed him to feed His sheep.<sup>10</sup> Accordingly, Peter writes in his first epistle that God resurrected and glorified Christ in order that the believer's *hope* might be *in god*; indeed, by the resurrection of Christ the Christian has been born again unto a *living hope*. The Christian can, with a *diligent mind*, set his *hope without reserve* on the grace brought unto him.<sup>11</sup> Having fed Christ's sheep with the good news about this living hope, and poignantly remembering his own past failure, Peter commands us to set apart Christ as Lord in our hearts and to *be prepared* at all times to *present an apologetic for that hope* (assured confidence) which is in us.<sup>12</sup> It may be that developing a responsible and solid apologetic approach takes discernment and diligent thought, but Peter places an obligation for such thought and preparation upon each believer.

The question of apologetic strategy *must* be answered, and answered properly, lest we become unfaithful in defending the faith or even deny it, as did Peter. We are exhorted to hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering,<sup>13</sup> and obedience to that exhortation requires sound preparation with respect to apologetic method—a method which should reflect unwavering *loyalty* to the Lord. As Peter expresses it, the *prerequisite* to apologetics is setting Christ apart *as lord* in the heart. How then should the Christian defend his faith? How should one's apologetic remain *faithful* to the faith which is defended? How does the apologist stay true to his *Lord*?

The Greek word *apologia* (from which we derive the English word "apologetics") denotes a speech made in defense, a reply (especially in the legal context of a courtroom) made to an accusation. The word originated in the judicial operations of ancient Athens, but the word occurs several times in the New Testament as well. The difference between the Greek and Christian methods of apologetic can be illustrated by contrasting the *Apology* of Socrates (as Plato records it) with the approach of the apostle Paul, who described himself as 'set for the defense (*apologia*) of the gospel.'<sup>14</sup> Despite the *complex* of material and methodological questions which surround the intramural debates over Christian apologetics, in the long run the array of various ways in which believers have defended their faith can be reduced to *two fundamental perspectives*: that of Socrates *or* that of Christ (for whom Paul, as an official representative, or "apostle," spoke with authority). One's understanding

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<sup>7</sup> Ramm, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

<sup>8</sup> Matthew 26:31-35.

<sup>9</sup> Matthew 26:69-75.

<sup>10</sup> John 21:15-19.

<sup>11</sup> 1 Peter 1:3, 13, 21.

<sup>12</sup> 1 Peter 3:15.

<sup>13</sup> Hebrews 10:23.

<sup>14</sup> Philippians 1:16.

of apologetics is ultimately guided by either the paradigm of Socrates' *Apology* or the example of Paul, who was set for the *apologia* of the gospel.

### *The Socratic Outlook*

In Plato's eyes, Socrates was not a mere sage, cosmologist, or Sophist; he was a *philosopher par excellence*.<sup>15</sup> Plato's esteem is manifest in his description of Socrates as "the finest, most intelligent, and moral man of his generation."<sup>16</sup> It was clear even to the ancients that Socrates' influence was sure to be weighty, as evident in the testimony of Epictetus: "Even now, although Socrates is dead, the memory of what he did or said while still alive is just as helpful or even more so to men."<sup>17</sup> And judging from the history of philosophy, Epictetus was correct. Commending his immanentistic motif, Cicero taught that 'Socrates was the first to call philosophy down from the heavens.'<sup>18</sup> Commending his foreshadowing of the Renaissance spirit, Erasmus placed Socrates among the saints and prayed '*sancte Socrates, ora pro nobis!*' [Holy Socrates: pray for us!]<sup>19</sup> Commending his anticipation of Kant's emphasis upon epistemic subjectivity, Werner Jaeger extolled him as "the greatest teacher in European history."<sup>20</sup> And commending his agreement with the modern spirit of autonomy, Antony Flew presents Socrates' discussion in *Euthyphro* as a paradigm of philosophic argument and progress.<sup>21</sup> Socrates provided a foretaste of *idealism's* resolution of the debate between Parmenides (static logic) and Heraclitus (historical flux), and yet by teaching the role of prediction in the notion of knowledge, Socrates looked ahead to *pragmatism*; his independent spirit and reliance upon an inner voice were a forecast of *existentialism*, while his method of critical, dialectical questioning anticipated linguistic *Analysis*.<sup>22</sup> Obviously his influence has been pervasive even though his apology before the Athenian jury did not carry the day. "Indeed, his real defense, as Plato reports it, was directed to future generations."<sup>23</sup> Throughout those generations Socrates' seminal teaching has gained an extensive hearing among intellectual leaders, and through these implicit disciples Socrates has even exercised sway over the major defenders of the Christian faith.

Notwithstanding the fact that Socrates is popularly remembered *per se* as a philosopher, the comparison between his *method of defense* and that of Paul (or other scriptural writers) is not an uneven one. For Socrates was an intensely *religious* thinker (despite the accusation against him of atheism—which, in Athens, was closely allied to the charge of treason against the democracy).<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Paul Edwards (New York: Macmillan, 1967), VI, 216.

<sup>16</sup> *Phaedo*, 118.

<sup>17</sup> *Discourses*, IV, 1, 169.

<sup>18</sup> *Tusculum Disputations*, V, 4, 10.

<sup>19</sup> Cited by Werner Jaeger, *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1945), II, book 3.

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *An Introduction to Western Philosophy* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1971), p. 28.

<sup>22</sup> S.P. Peterfreund and T. C. Denise, *Contemporary Philosophy and Its Origins* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1945), II, book 3.

<sup>23</sup> W. T. Jones, *A History of Western Philosophy* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1952), I, 96.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 58, 95-96. The actual indictment, recorded for us by both Xenophon and Diogenes Laertius, read, 'Socrates is guilty of refusing to recognize the gods recognized by the state and introducing other, new divinities. He is also guilty of corrupting the youth.' Because the state was a 'religious institution dedicated to Athena, the charge of 'irreligion' could apply to any offense against the state. Socrates was a critic of the traditional establishment education (cf. Aristophanes' *The Clouds*) and thereby a corruptor of youth; Socrates saw *this* as the real issue, as evidenced by his conversation in the *Euthyphro* (2c-3d). Zeller states that, while it was not the primary motive, 'Socrates, it is true, fell as a sacrifice to the democratic reaction which followed the overthrow of the Thirty. . . . His guilt was sought first of all in the undermining of the morality and religion of his country. . . .' (*Die Philosophie Der Griechen*, 2. Teil, I. Abteilung, *Sokrates* . . ., 5. Auflage, Leipzig, 1922, p. 217).

Socrates was religiously motivated and aimed to provide a religious apologetic. He viewed himself as *divinely commissioned* to be “the Athenian gadfly.” In the *Apology*, as related through Plato, Socrates recounted how he would preface his critical discussions with men in Athens by asking if they did not care for the perfection of their souls. Then Socrates explained to the jury: “For know that the god commands me to do this, and I believe that no greater good ever came to pass in the city than my service to the god” (30a). His divine mission to teach philosophy so as to perfect men’s souls was deadly serious; with words remarkably like those of Peter in Acts 5:29, Socrates declared (29d),

If you say to me, Socrates, this time. . . you shall be let off, but upon one condition, that you are not to enquire and speculate in this way anymore, and that if you are caught doing so again you shall die;—if this was the condition on which you let me go, I shall reply: Men of Athens I honor and love you; but I shall obey God rather than you, and while I have life and strength I shall never cease from the practice and teaching of philosophy. . . .<sup>25</sup>

So dedicated was Socrates to his divine calling that he would not accept his legal option of exile as an alternative to execution (cf. *Apology*, 37; *Crito*); he explained that to leave Athens would be a betrayal of his divine mission as a philosopher. In the *Phaedo* dialogue, Plato recounted the final conversations between Socrates and his friends shortly before the death sentence was executed upon him. Here we gain insight to the high regard Socrates had for philosophy. He says only those souls purified from bodily taint through philosophy (which aims to behold truth with the eye of the soul) can escape the cycle of reincarnation and pass into the company of the gods. Hence philosophy is no mere academic discipline; it is a way of life and the path to salvation. In philosophy, then, Socrates found his own self-established version of “the way, the truth, and the life.”

Salvation would be found, held Socrates, through the exercise of one’s *rational soul*. For Socrates, the human mind is a spark of the wisdom that is immanent in the universe.<sup>26</sup> Socrates states in the *Alcibiades* (133c), “Can we mention anything more divine about the soul than what is concerned with knowledge and thought? Then this aspect of it resembles God, and it is by looking toward that and understanding all that is divine—God and wisdom—that a man will most fully know himself.” Elsewhere he declared, “The soul is most like that which is divine” (PHAEDO, 80b). The logos was present within man, and as Jaeger rightly observed, “in Socrates” view, the soul is the divine in man.” After a detailed examination of Socrates’ view of the soul W. K. C. Guthrie wrote,

To sum up, Socrates believed in a god who was the supreme mind. . . . Men moreover had a special relation with him in that their own minds . . . were, though less perfect than the mind of God, of the same nature, and worked on the same principles. In fact, if one looked only to the *arête* of the human soul and disregarded its shortcomings, the two were identical.<sup>27</sup>

In the Platonic dialogue, *Symposium*, Socrates taught that the supreme life is that of the soul’s contemplation of ultimate beauty in its absolute form; hereby a life of intellectual communion paves

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<sup>25</sup> B. Jowett, trans., *The Dialogues of Plato* (New York: Random House, 1937). I, 412. The reader should note that in the account of Socrates which follows I have not attempted to separate the historical Socrates from Socrates-the-spokesman-for-Plato. Such a delicate and debated task would be tangential to this essay. For present purposes the view of ‘Socrates: given herein stems uncritically from the Platonic dialogues; thus ‘Socrates’ tends to become a label for a Platonic-Socratic hybrid. This is adequate for the purposes of *contrast* with the scriptural outlook.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Xenophon, *Memorabilia* I, iv, 8.

<sup>27</sup> W. K. C. Guthrie, *Socrates* (Cambridge: University Press, 1971), p. 156.

the way for sharing in the divinity of love. In the inner center of mental contemplation, the soul encounters deity and discovers ethical virtue. As Van Til notes:

He could find no footing for morality except in the soul as somehow participant in the laws of another, a higher world. . . . Socrates sought for a principle of validity by means of his appeal to the logos . . . by means of the idea of man's participation in deity or in an abstract principle of rationality, the logos.<sup>28</sup>

Whereas the Council of Chalcedon declared that in *Christ* the eternal and temporal are united without intermixture, Socrates proclaimed that the eternal and temporal are combined in MAN by way of admixture.<sup>29</sup> And so it is that Socrates was the prophet of the religion of immanent reason. He had a divine commission and a message to be proclaimed even upon pain of death—a message of salvation through the incarnate logos, that is, the rational soul within man. All of life and every thought had to be brought under obedience to the lordship of man's reason. Let there be no doubt then, that Socrates was a religious apologist, just as J.T. Forbes recognized:

By the testimony of his principal disciples, the whole life of Socrates was pervaded by *the thought of God*. . . . It was the sane religion of one who had found a faith that could bear the examination of his mind. . . . As he comes before us, it is as one who has reasoned and wrought his way to a rational creed.<sup>30</sup>

With such a view of man's rational faculty as outlined above, Socrates was quite naturally led to exalt the *intellect*, to commend a *neutral methodology*, and to insist upon *autonomy* as an epistemological standard.

In the *Protagoras*, Socrates established that virtue is not a skill, but is knowledge; consequently, virtue can be taught. The same conclusion was wrought in the *Meno* dialogue, where virtue is identified with knowledge, and knowledge is taken to be a gift of the gods. The result of Socrates' stress upon the intellect and his equation of virtue and knowledge was the doctrine that *no man knowingly does evil*. This point is argued in the *Gorgias*. Socrates said that all men desire to act for the sake of some good, and hence any man who acts wrongly must be acting in ignorance of the evil he does (in which case punishment should aim at *rehabilitation through education*). If "virtue is the knowledge of the good," then an unvirtuous act is one done without knowledge of the good; thus, no man deliberately or knowingly does evil. Wrongdoing must be involuntary or ignorant. In this Socrates declared, against the testimony of Paul in Romans 7, that men are not totally depraved—in which case man's reason is not defective due to the domination of sin. Indeed, just the opposite: man's intellect, as the faculty whereby knowledge is gained, must be viewed as virtuous. Socrates exalted the intellect of man as the primary faculty, one which as a charioteer must hold in check the horses of will and passion (*Phaedrus*); all the particulars of human experience must be subordinated under the ordering domination of the reason. Therefore, according to Socratic anthropology, man's reason is not steeped in sin, but man's virtuous intellect keeps control over his irrational drives. One can and must trust his reason to guide him toward the good.

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<sup>28</sup> *Christian Theistic Ethics*, In Defense of the Faith, vol. III (Nutley, N. J.: den Dulk Christian Foundation, 1971), p. 183.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Cornelius Van Til, *A Survey of Christian Epistemology*, In Defense of Faith, vol. II (Nutley, N.J.: den Dulk Christian Foundation, 1969), p. 31.

<sup>30</sup> J. T. Forbes, *Socrates* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1905), pp. 212, 213. No less an authority than W. K. C. Guthrie has said with respect to the religious character of Socrates' thought: 'Belief in a special, direct relation between himself and divine forces must be accepted in any account of his mentality which lays claim to completeness' (*Socrates*, p. 84).

There are three notable characteristics of knowledge in the view of Socrates. *First*, as he argued in the *Meno*, in the course of endless reincarnations, men should have become acquainted with the eternal forms and thus know all things. When man comes to know something in this life, then, it is not a matter of acquiring some new thing but simply the *recollection* of something previously known. Hence knowledge is *innate* in man. *Secondly*, we find out in the *Theaetetus* that mere sense perception is inadequate as a source of knowledge. There must be something which is exempt from the constant, Heraclitan flux of historical particulars that are perceived by the senses; otherwise, there could be no knowledge whatsoever. The world of sense experience is, as recognized by Heraclitus, in continual movement or alteration. Yet insofar as this world is known, it must be viewed against an unchanging set of concepts having the character of the Parmenidean *One*. The principle of unity as well as the principle of diversity must be incorporated in knowledge. The absolute flux of historical particulars, all diverse from each other, would be unknowable; however, the supremely knowable, unifying forms or concepts of reason are purely abstract and void of content. Therefore, knowledge is a combination of both the changing and the unchanging. Knowledge combines sense perception with an ordering judgment of the mind. *Sense perception triggers a recollection of permanent, immutable forms of the non-material realm above history* (cf. *Phaedo*, 75e). Socrates' characteristic contribution to the advance of epistemology, said Aristotle, was twofold: (1) induction, and (2) general definition.<sup>31</sup> Socrates was inductive because he moved from the many or particulars to the one or universal; yet he aimed at logical precision by organizing the particulars under general principles.<sup>32</sup> Induction led to general definition, for a definition consists of a collection of essential (rather than accidental) attributes which are jointly sufficient to delineate one class of objects from another. This general definition was called the form (*eidōs*) of the class, its essential nature. In a unique and forceful way Socrates (as spokesman for Plato) dialectically *combined* continuity (general principles) and discontinuity (particular facts) in his epistemological theory. *Thirdly*, according to Socrates (again in the *Meno*) knowledge requires the ability to give the *grounds* upon which an answer is established—the *logos* of an *ousia* mentioned. True opinion is insufficient as a criterion of knowledge, for like the statue of Daedalus, unless it is tied down it walks away. Holding an opinion which is in fact correct, but being unable to give a reason for that opinion, does not qualify as knowledge (cf. *Symposium*, 202a). The proper grounding of true opinion is to be found in *recollection* of the truth, a kind of *intuitive* or *direct apprehension* of the absolute idea or form. Hereby true opinion is converted into completely adequate knowledge.

Since Socrates viewed man's reason as normal or untainted by the effects of sin, because he had a rationalized view of knowledge and the inward adequacy of man's mind, he was led to extol *intellectual independence and neutrality* in the search for truth. The philosopher supposedly has learned to avoid the deceptions of sense perception and to refrain from following the untrustworthy leading of emotions; for the philosopher, the soul relies on its own intellectual capability. In the *Phaedo*, Socrates taught that the soul "will calm passion, and follow reason, and dwell in the contemplation of her, beholding the true and divine" (84a). Expanding upon this in the *Crito*, Socrates described the rational man as an independent thinker who is neutral in his approach to truth. The philosopher should be a completely detached, rational thinker who refuses to heed popular opinion in order to follow after the truth wherever it may be. Here we find the self-sufficient, impartial, intellectual. Hear the Socratic exhortation:

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<sup>31</sup> *Metaphysics*, 1078b, 27.

<sup>32</sup> Francis N. Lee, *A Christian Introduction to the History of Philosophy* (Nutley, J. J.: Craig Press, 1969), p. 83.

My dear Crito, . . . we must examine the question whether we ought to do this or not; for I am not only now but always a man who follows nothing but the reasoning which on consideration seems to me best. . . . Then, most excellent friend, we must not consider at all what the many will say of us, but what he knows about right and wrong, the one man, and truth herself will say.<sup>33</sup>

It is significant that, having claimed that he *followed nothing but reason* in his intellectual queries, Socrates came to the conclusion of his line of thought and said, “Then, Crito, let be, and let us act in this way, since it is in this way that *God leads us*.”<sup>34</sup> Reason’s leading is tacitly assumed to be God’s leading-in which case the philosopher really is inwardly sufficient, and therefore he is in need of no transcendent revelation in order to carry out the epistemological enterprise. Moreover, nothing could be a more secure method of countenancing and vindicating God’s thoughts than utter self-reliance upon one’s reasoning ability. To such intellectual independence and self-confidence Socrates was dedicated, advocating that men should follow the critical test of reason alone: “The life not tested by criticism is not worth living,” he declared in his *Apology* (38a). Dogmatism is to be forever banished from philosophy in favor of a completely detached, impartial, neutral search for truth and reality. In short, conclude Peterfreund and Denise: “The procedures of analysis themselves must be metaphysically neutral, in the sense that they involve the testing of philosophical proposals by universal standards of reason. . . . This feature of neutrality is well illustrated in the dialogues of Plato.”<sup>35</sup>

The motto which Socrates set forth to the world was the Delphic inscription, “Know thyself” (e.g., *Philebus*, 48c), from which it is evident that his challenge to relativistic and agnostic Sophism did *not* include renunciation of the *anthropocentricity* of the Sophists. Socrates countered the skepticism of the Sophists by stressing rational, inward self-sufficiency as the crucial foundation of epistemology. Socrates took the *autonomous man* as his starting point—the man who, as a law unto himself, can adequately arrive at self-knowledge through rational introspection and from that base move out to comprehend the truth beyond him. The Sophist, Protagoras, said, “Man is the measure of all things,” meaning that all sense experience is subjective and all laws are mere conventions. That perspective led to skepticism and cynicism. In order to restore objectivity to knowledge, Socrates appealed to reason, but reason which was nevertheless man-centered or autonomous, just as it was for the Sophists.

Thus, by appealing to reason, that is to the universal aspect in man, Socrates saved the objectivity of both knowledge and ethics. He saved both because saving one is, in effect, saving the other. Saving knowledge is saving virtue, for knowledge is virtue. Thus, Socrates was a “restorer of faith.” . . . There is only one remedy for the ills of thought, and that is, more thought. If thought, in its first inroads, leads, as it always does, to skepticism and denial, the only course is, not to suppress thought, but to found faith upon it. Socrates agreed with the Sophists that the truth must be my truth, but mine “in my capacity as a rational being.”<sup>36</sup>

Socrates did not take an approach fundamentally different from the Sophists; he simply placed *faith* in man’s autonomous intellect (as a spark from the wisdom or logos above the material world). Reason is a divine element in man, worthy of religious trust and devotion. The Sophists had not

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<sup>33</sup> H.N. Fowler, tr., *Crito*, in the Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1924), at 46b.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, emphasis my own.

<sup>35</sup> Peterfreund and Denise, *op. cit.*, p. 237.

<sup>36</sup> Van Til, *Christian Theistic Ethics*, pp. 160, 161.



heeded this gospel, this good news which saves the epistemological enterprise. ‘Socrates was destined to restore order out of chaos because, though with Sophists appealing to the self, he appealed to the self as carrying within itself the universal principle of reason and order.’<sup>37</sup> Like the Sophists, Socrates *began with man* and centered his attention on man;<sup>38</sup> unlike the Sophists, he placed supreme *confidence in reason* as something within man which participates in the abstract and universal laws of a higher world.<sup>39</sup>

Thus, it was appropriate that the Danish irrationalist, Søren Kierkegaard, characterized Socrates as having a “passion of inwardness.” While Socrates exalted reason and Kierkegaard deprecated its ultimate usefulness, they both found it necessary to begin their respective philosophies with man’s self-sufficient, *inward* experience of *eternity in time*. Man’s inward autonomy was crucial to Socratic thinking. Van Til explains that “the Socratic spirit of Inwardness” is “the concentration of all interpretation upon man as the final reference point.”<sup>40</sup> Socrates took the knowledge of himself to be so clear that he could use it as the basis for intelligibly interpreting the world outside him. Man’s mind supposedly participates in the abstract principle of absolute truth; a knowledge of the forms is innate to man. Consequently, to understand anything at all, man has to look to himself and autonomously interpret his experience in the authoritative light of his own reason.

“Socrates sought to answer the skeptics in his day by thinking of the individual soul as participant in an objective world of intelligence”; however, as entrapped in the prison of the body, man’s soul (said Plato) has to be lifted to this world of light by Diotima the inspired.<sup>41</sup> Man in his *individuality*, man as *discontinuous from others* because of his particular body, man in his character as participant in the *irrational flux of history*, is made the sovereign judge of truth by Socrates. But in order to determine the truth for himself, this man must somehow loosen the shackles of the body and philosophically contemplate the *abstract, universal forms of the world of pure being*. In the long run, as Antony Flew has observed, knowledge for Socrates ceases to have any connection with the historical world.<sup>42</sup> In the *Phaedo*, Socrates says that the philosopher who seeks knowledge is always pursuing death, seeing that the body hinders the soul’s search for knowledge; the attempt to apprehend the forms and thereby find knowledge is an attempt to leave behind the historical world of particulars. Therefore, Van Til rightly parallels Socrates to his Sophist opponents:

The objectivity for knowledge and ethics . . . which Socrates found by appealing to reason as the universal aspect in man, turns out to be an empty form, and there is no connection of this abstract universal with particulars except in terms of an irrational principle. In other words, Socrates, as well as the Sophists, has finally come back to the realm of pure contingency. Thus, we are back to the Sophistic notion that in practice there is no known validity to any moral law except what man, irrational in his individuality, is willing to approve.<sup>43</sup>

Making man epistemologically autonomous requires the combination of rationality and irrationality. For historical, particular man to *know* anything he would finally have to cease being an *individual*

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 159.

<sup>38</sup> Lee, p. 81.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Herman Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, tr., D. H. Freeman and H. De Jongste (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1955), I, 51, 355.

<sup>40</sup> Cornelius Van Til, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1969), p. 144.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 153.

<sup>42</sup> Flew, p. 77.

<sup>43</sup> *Christian Theistic Ethics*, p. 162.

man, and for knowledge to be grasped by *individual man* it would have to cease being *universally* objective truth in some supra-historical realm. Socrates attempted to make *man* the measure of *truth*, thereby trying to combine oil and water—trying to mix universally rational truth into irrationally particularized (historical) man. The autonomy involved in the Socratic “passion for inwardness” could lead to nothing but a dialectical epistemology.

Regarding Socratic inwardness, Van Til says, “This principle is that the ultimate distinctions between true and false, right and wrong, are to be made by man as ultimate.”<sup>44</sup> Perhaps this *anthropocentric, autonomous epistemology* is nowhere more clearly expressed by Socrates than in the *Euthyphro* dialogue. The *Euthyphro* portrays Socrates shortly before his trial in Athens. Socrates, having been charged with corrupting the youth and with religious offenses, happened to meet Euthyphro, who was piously bringing charges against his own father, at the Porch of King Archon. Socrates asked Euthyphro to instruct him in order that he might more adequately defend himself against Meletus in court. Socrates inquired as to the distinction between piety and impiety. When Euthyphro justified the piety of what he was doing to his father by appealing to the fact that Zeus had punished his own father, Cronos, for committing a similar crime, Socrates treated the answer as merely *one more report among many* of what happens in history. There is nothing special about the activity of the gods. What is needed, said Socrates, is not an *example* of piety, but a general statement of the *essential characteristic* of piety. Indeed, general knowledge is crucial for correctly *identifying* the particular cases. Hence Euthyphro offered a definition which is formally more adequate: “What is pleasing to the gods is pious, and what is not pleasing to them is impious.” Then the crucial reply of the dialogue was rendered by Socrates: Do the gods love piety because it is pious, or is it pious because the gods love it? Socrates holds that piety has certain characteristics which make it pious in itself—irrespective of what the gods may think about it. Thus man should seek a knowledge of piety (or anything else) by self-sufficient, autonomous investigation into the nature of things, not by relying upon the actions, attitudes, or revelation of the gods. At best, the word or *opinion of the gods* is just *one hypothesis among many* to be confirmed or disconfirmed by the rational man. Man is the ultimate judge or discerner of goodness, truth, and the like; as such, he can and must critically scrutinize even the opinions of the gods. *By what standard* should truth or knowledge be measured? *The rational intellect of man*, not the revelation of the gods. To find the truth, man’s soul must look to itself; to regard the word of an authority as anything more than incidental information would conflict with the very idea of man’s knowledge as sufficient to itself. Here is illustrated, then, the *Socratic exaltation of the intellect*, the absolute requirement of *impartial or neutral investigation* for the truth, and the *final epistemological standard of sheer autonomy*. Socrates was the prophet of the religion of sovereign, self-sufficient, authoritative reason; to put it as Werner Jaeger does, Socrates was

the apostle of moral liberty, *bound by no dogma*, fettered by no traditions, *standing free on his own feet*, *listening only to the inner voice* of conscience—preaching *the new religion of this world*, and a heaven to be found in this life by our own spiritual strength, not through grace but through tireless striving to perfect our own nature.<sup>45</sup>

The *religion of this world* has a definite doctrine of authority; whether in epistemology or any other field, the *voice of authority* must be found in *man himself*. Socrates would not have man relinquish his autonomy at any cost. If man is to follow the gods, it must be on man’s own terms—namely, that the gods first be scrutinized and approved by the rational judgment of man. In Athens, the views of

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 173.

<sup>45</sup> Jaeger, *loc cit.*, emphasis mine.

deity were expressed through the public opinion of the democracy. Socrates resisted such dogma in favor of a more self-conscious and consistent religion of autonomy—for which he finally stood trial. J. T. Forbes has aptly commented:

The question of the seat of authority has lasted through the ages, and the Socratic transference of it to the reflective reason, of which his very discussions on piety and justice were the claim, demanded an insight and moral earnestness too great for the mass of his fellows. [Yet] the trend of progress of the human mind was with him.<sup>46</sup>

Socrates was a pioneer and religious apologist for the religion of the world; his martyred blood served as just so much seed for spreading the gospel of man's epistemological self-authority, a dogma which he had brought to purest expression.

With this background to the influence, religion, and epistemology of Socrates, we can now take note of the way in which Socrates carried on his apologetic before the Athenian jury. The *Apology*, along with *Cri* and *Phaedo*, forms a trilogy dealing with the final days of Socrates. The enmity of Socrates' accusers had been generated by his disdain for the democracy and public opinion; Socrates practiced a religious devotion to the pursuit of ultimate truth by following the guidance of independent reason alone. The accusations brought by Meletus had now put Socrates in the position of presenting an apology for his faith. Five strands of defense can be traced in his apologetic strategy.

*First*, there is the *validation* of the Oracle's statement by *factual testing*. Chaerephon had asked the Oracle at Delphi whether anyone was wiser than Socrates, and he received "No" for his answer. That puzzled Socrates, and so he set out to find a wiser man. Socrates took it to be his religious duty to determine the Oracle's meaning, to prove by factual methods that the god was right. To establish that the Oracle was neither lying nor incorrect, Socrates made it his job to expose the ignorance of supposedly wise men in Athens—thereby corroborating that he was, by recognition of his lack of wisdom, really the wisest of men, just as the Oracle had said.

*Secondly*, in his apologetic strategy Socrates made use of the *logical test for coherence*. Socrates had been charged with atheism or impiety; as children, his audience had heard (for instance, in Aristophanes' comedy, *The Clouds*) that Socrates pursued *naturalistic* scientific investigations; additionally one of the youths whom Socrates had corrupted, Alcibiades, had been blamed for the *mutilation of the statues of Hermes*—the obscene adornments of every Athenian front doorway—on the night before the military expedition to Sicily. These things might be behind the charge of atheism. However, Socrates rehearsed that Meletus, in the statement of the charges, had accused Socrates "of believing in deities of his own invention *instead of* the gods recognized by the State." As demonstration of his own logical prowess, Socrates pointed out that Meletus had contradicted himself. Socrates was charged simultaneously for believing in no gods, and yet for believing in new deities and super-natural activities (namely, the divine inner voice). Socrates tied other logical knots in the prosecution's case. By questioning Meletus, Socrates got him to say that the best influence on *youth* comes from the *many citizens* of Athens (rather than from the individual, Socrates), but the best training in *other fields* (e.g., raising horses) comes from the one *individual expert* (rather than the incompetent many). Moreover, it is unlikely that he would *intentionally* corrupt the youth, for that would generate a corrupting influence upon himself through his own associates. Thus, if indeed

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<sup>46</sup> Forbes, *op. cit.*, p. 270.

Socrates had corrupted the youth, it must have been unintentional—in which case he has an admonition coming, but not punishment. Logic was a tool in Socrates’ arsenal.

*Third*, Socrates followed the apologetic line that the jury should take into account the *great benefit* which his *divine service* has been to the city. Socrates had urged men to put the welfare or their souls above all else, and Socratic philosophy demonstrated how they should do this. Therefore, if the Athenians executed Socrates, they would actually be inflicting great harm on themselves. They would lose the restraining voice of Socrates, asking “Are you not ashamed that you give your attention to acquiring as much money as possible, and similarly with reputation and honor, and give no attention or thought to truth and understanding and the perfection of your soul?” (29e). Socrates defended himself, then, by appealing to the elevated, noble, and beneficial results of his service and outlook.

*Fourth*, Socrates took the apologetical approach of asking the jury to examine the *life of the speaker*. Socrates had given loyal service to the military. He had continually sought to follow the path of acting rightly, whatever the personal outcome would be for him. He was not fearful of death. He had given his life in the service of others, being sent as a gadfly by God to Athens in order to keep it from becoming lazy like a large thoroughbred horse. His sincerity is evident from the fact that he lived in poverty, neglecting private affairs so as to fulfill his divine duty. Obviously, the religious philosophical outlook of Socrates had transformed him into a praiseworthy individual, good citizen, and public servant. And so he proclaimed in his defense, “You will not easily find another like me, gentlemen, and if you take my advice you will spare my life” (31a).

*Finally*, after the appeal to fact, logic, beneficial effect, and personal betterment, Socrates came to use in his apology the appeal to inner *guidance*. In answer to why he had not entered political service which would have been consonant with his convictions (if sincerely stated), Socrates claimed that he had been forbidden to carry his convictions to that consistent Outcome by a *divine voice* which occasionally came to him. “Plato explicitly represents Socrates turning to an inner voice (daimon)—a voice that is a product neither of social conditioning nor of reason—at crucial moments of decision.”<sup>47</sup> “There is no question whatever that he himself regarded it as Heaven sent.”<sup>48</sup> Socrates explained this inward, validating, convicting voice in this way: ‘something divine and spiritual comes to me. . . I have had this from my childhood; it is a sort of voice that comes to me, and when it comes it always holds me back from what I am thinking of doing’ (31d). Socrates even used this subjectivistic apologetic to lend support to his *four other* lines of defense. At the end of the trial, after the guilty verdict had been presented, Socrates said that in nothing he had done or said that day had the inner voice opposed him, even though in the past it sometimes would stop him in the middle of a sentence. Thus, his other apologetic devices received subjective validation.

Here we have the five-point apologetic method of Socrates. He was dedicated to the autonomy of man’s reason and to neutrality in the search for truth, wherever it should be found. He enthroned man’s intellect as the epistemological authority, even over the opinions of deity. He was the rational man, unfettered by dogma and public opinion. Whatever views were to be held had first to pass the scrutiny of his self-sufficient mind. His apologetic strategy was both *rational* (appealing to logical coherence) and *irrational* (appealing to subjectivistic conviction), *factual* (verifying the Oracle’s words through experimentation) and *pragmatic* (looking to the beneficial results, both public and personal, of his practice and convictions). As Peterfreund and Denise rightly observe, Socrates’

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<sup>47</sup> Peterfreund and Denise, *op. cit.*, p. 184.

<sup>48</sup> J.T. Forbes, *op. cit.*, p. 221. Guthrie says, ‘he put himself unreservedly in the hands of what he sincerely believed to be an inspiration from heaven’ (*op. cit.*, p. 163).

efforts to meet his own criterion of the critically examined life were “characterized by a strange tension.”<sup>49</sup> Somehow, he was simultaneously the unique, self-determining, inner-directed adjudicator of all claims to knowledge and the dispassionate, objective observer of that realm of truth which unifies all minds. W. T. Jones says,

He must have seemed to his fellow citizens more like a Sophist than anything else. But he had a profound, and entirely un-Sophistic, conviction of the reality of goodness, the goodness of reality, and the immortality of the human soul. He combined an intensely realistic and down-to-earth common sense with a passionate mysticism; a cool and dispassionate skepticism about ordinary beliefs and opinions with a deep religious sense.<sup>50</sup>

Socrates could claim in one and the same dialogue (as he did in the *Meno*) that he was both as *ignorant* as his opponents and yet *omniscient* as a result of his preexistent awareness of the forms. He claimed to accept nothing except upon *critical* and *reasonable* scrutiny, and yet he accepted the authority of the *expert* (as in the *Crito*) and followed the leading of a *non-rational* daimon (as evidenced in the *Apology*). He said that *nobody* knows about death, and yet that *he knew* enough not to fear it (cf. *Apology*, 29a). His autonomous apologetic was a strange combination of omniscient reason and mysticism, faith in himself alone, yet ready trust in the divine. To protect his autonomy Socrates was forced back and forth between the poles of rationality and irrationality. “What Socrates did was to rationalize the known, and to make the mysterious the divine.”<sup>51</sup>

This procedure is virtually identical with the two-step apologetic method of Roman Catholicism and Arminianism (represented by Aquinas and Butler respectively). The field of knowledge is *dichotomized* into truths known by reason and truths known by “faith.” At the outset, the apologist proceeds with self-sufficient reason to establish *general truths* about God or a probability in favor of them, but after (his first level is built, the apologist then completes the edifice by appeals to *faith and revelation*. Supposedly a set area of the known can be rationalized, but the remainder must be relegated to divine mystery. A dialectical dance between rationality and irrationality always results from taking an autonomous, neutral approach to apologetics; such an approach is inherently destructive of the concept of authority in Christianity. Speaking of the Romanist and Arminian notion of authority, Van Til says:

But such a concept of authority resembles that which Socrates referred to in *The Symposium* when he spoke of Diotima the inspired. When the effort at rational interpretation failed him, Socrates took refuge in mythology as a second best. The “hunch” of the “wise is the best that is available to man with respect to that which he cannot reach by the methods of autonomous reason. No ““wise man” ought to object to such a conception of the ‘supernatural’ - If the Roman Catholic method of apologetic for Christianity is followed then Christianity itself must be so reduced as to make it acceptable to the natural man. The natural man need only to reason consistently along the lines of his starting point and method in order to reduce each of the Christian doctrines that are presented to him to naturalistic proportions.<sup>52</sup>

Socrates transferred the seat of authority to man’s autonomous reason; Roman Catholic and Arminian apologetics follow suit, thereby evidencing the justice of J. T. Forbes’s earlier comment

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<sup>49</sup> Peterfreund and Denise, *op. cit.*, p. 183.

<sup>50</sup> Jones, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

<sup>51</sup> Forbes, *op. cit.*, p. 230.

<sup>52</sup> *The Defense of the Faith* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1955), p. 127.

about the Socratic view of reason and authority: “The trend of progress of the human mind was with him.”

### *The Christian Perspective*

A fundamental antithesis exists between the thinking of Socrates and that of the apostle Paul; they radically differ even in the area of philosophical method. The contrast is evident in the following exposition or Paul’s apologetic (which thematically corresponds to the exposition or Socrates). As one who had been set apart (sanctified) from the world by God’s word of truth,<sup>53</sup> Paul founded his thinking on the solid rock foundation of Christ’s words,<sup>54</sup> realizing that no one could improve upon the wisdom of God.<sup>55</sup> Paul had, then, no agreement with the darkness of Socrates’ unbelieving approach to knowledge.<sup>56</sup> Along with the other apostles, Paul presupposed the” wisdom and veracity of God’s word, in contrast to Socrates, who started with the autonomy of man’s intellect. The antithesis could not be greater—the antithesis between truth and error. “They are of the world; therefore, they speak of the world and the world hears them. We are of God; the one who knows God hears us, and the one who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.”<sup>57</sup>

Paul elaborated upon this stark antithesis between believing and unbelieving philosophy in I Corinthians 1-2. Those who perish see the word of the cross as foolishness, while those who are saved view it as the very power of God.<sup>58</sup> *The gospel is contrary to the presuppositions of unbelieving thought, for it does not cater to rebellious man’s demand for factual signs and logical argumentation that will pass the test of autonomous scrutiny.*<sup>59</sup> Infatuation with worldly wisdom was the last thing that would characterize Paul!<sup>60</sup> Christian wisdom glories rather in the *Lord*. Socrates was anthropocentric, while Paul was theocentric. Thus, when Paul came to Corinth, he did not rely upon the intellectual tools of the Athenian philosophers; instead, he came with the powerful demonstration of the Spirit in order that faith might *not be in the wisdom of men* but in the power of God.<sup>61</sup> Socrates would have been completely unable to receive this God-centered, presuppositional viewpoint of Paul as anything but foolishness.<sup>62</sup> Their respective epistemological methods were as different as darkness and light.<sup>63</sup>

Paul recognized that he had been divinely commissioned; he had been sent as an apostle, not by men, but by the resurrected Christ.<sup>64</sup> Hence he did not seek to please *men*, for that would have been incongruent with his status as a *servant of Christ*.<sup>65</sup> Paul was not commissioned to be a gadfly who, through dialectical questioning or research, seeks to spur men on to the self-betterment of their souls. As the ambassador for Christ, he beseeched men in Christ’s stead, *not* to recognize their inherent

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<sup>53</sup> John 17:17.

<sup>54</sup> Matthew 7:24-25.

<sup>55</sup> I Corinthians 2:16.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. II Corinthians 6:14-15.

<sup>57</sup> I John 4:4-5.

<sup>58</sup> I Corinthians 1:18; cf. Romans 1:16.

<sup>59</sup> I Corinthians 1:22-23.

<sup>60</sup> I Corinthians 1:26-31.

<sup>61</sup> I Corinthians 2:1-5.

<sup>62</sup> I Corinthians 2:14.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Ephesians 5:6-11.

<sup>64</sup> Galatians 1:1.

<sup>65</sup> Galatians 1:10.

*participation* in a higher divine realm of reason, but to be *reconciled* to God.<sup>66</sup> This required the attempt to *persuade* men;<sup>67</sup> yet his persuasion rested not on the self-sufficient reason of man, for Paul walked by *faith* and not by sight.<sup>68</sup> The *gospel* he preached was not based on man,<sup>69</sup> and thus the *weapons of his warfare* were not after the flesh but instead mighty through God for casting down every imagination that exalts itself against the knowledge of God.<sup>70</sup> His aim was *to bring every thought into captivity* to the obedience of Christ. Therefore, in diametric contrast to Socrates, Paul had no high regard for autonomous philosophy. He warned that vain, deceitful philosophy which is directed by the traditional presuppositions of the world instead of by Christ will rob man of all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, which treasures are to be found in Christ.<sup>71</sup> Paul did not oppose the use of persuasion and philosophy, but he absolutely rejected any persuasion and philosophy that were patterned after man's alleged self-sufficient intellectual abilities. True love-of-wisdom ("philosophy") brings every thought captive to Christ and, thereby, shuns autonomy. Consequently, rather than preaching salvation through (or dependence upon) the rational soul in man as an incarnate divine logos, Paul stressed the *Creator/creature* distinction<sup>72</sup> and proclaimed that men, suppressing the truth in unrighteousness,<sup>73</sup> are *alienated and enemies in their minds* against God and thus must be *reconciled* through the *cross* of Christ in the *body of His flesh*.<sup>74</sup> It is this Savior who is the eternal yet en-fleshed Logos of God, the incarnate word full of grace and truth.<sup>75</sup> Jesus Christ himself is the Truth,<sup>76</sup> the wisdom of God,<sup>77</sup> the reposit of all knowledge,<sup>78</sup> and as such the life-giving light of men.<sup>79</sup> Paul's perspective stands squarely over against that of Socrates. Paul refused to utilize the pseudo-wisdom of the Socratic outlook lest the *cross* of Christ be made of none effect.<sup>80</sup> The rational religion of worldly wisdom knows not God, Paul maintained, for God saves men by the foolishness of preaching the cross of Christ.<sup>81</sup>

With such views as these, Paul certainly did not exalt the intellect of man, commend neutrality in one's thinking, or insist upon autonomy as an epistemological standard.

One of the key reasons why Paul did not exalt and trust the intellect or reason of man is found in his doctrine of *total depravity*. That depravity, held Paul, extends to the intellect of man. "The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can it be."<sup>82</sup> Because the unbeliever does not base his life and thinking upon the words of Christ, he is nothing less than foolish.<sup>83</sup> To approach the field of knowledge without presupposing the truth of God is to preclude arriving at a proper understanding. The beginning of knowledge is the fear of the Lord,<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> II Corinthians 5:20.

<sup>67</sup> II Corinthians 5:11.

<sup>68</sup> II Corinthians 5:7.

<sup>69</sup> Galatians 1:11.

<sup>70</sup> II Corinthians 10:3-5.

<sup>71</sup> Colossians 2:8, 3.

<sup>72</sup> Romans 1:25.

<sup>73</sup> Romans 1:18.

<sup>74</sup> Colossians 1:20-22.

<sup>75</sup> John 1:1, 14.

<sup>76</sup> John 14:6.

<sup>77</sup> I Corinthians 1:24.

<sup>78</sup> Colossians 2:3.

<sup>79</sup> John 1:4.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. I Corinthians 1:17.

<sup>81</sup> I Corinthians 1:8, 21.

<sup>82</sup> Romans 8:7.

<sup>83</sup> Matthew 7:26-27.

<sup>84</sup> Proverbs 1:7.

but there is no fear of God before the eyes of the sinner.<sup>85</sup> Hence he needs to have his eyes opened and to turn from darkness to light;<sup>86</sup> in his natural state he has a blinded mind,<sup>87</sup> loving darkness rather than light.<sup>88</sup> Those who are enemies of the noted Paul, are those who mind earthly things,<sup>89</sup> being a child of wrath in his sinful mind,<sup>90</sup> the man of worldly wisdom has vain thoughts.<sup>91</sup> The unbeliever, therefore, has no understanding,<sup>92</sup> cannot receive the Spirit of truth,<sup>93</sup> cannot discern spiritual things,<sup>94</sup> cannot see God's kingdom,<sup>95</sup> and is nothing short of an enemy in his mind against God.<sup>96</sup> *The thinking of the natural man is never a suitable patient or starting point for Christian apologetics!* Unlike Socrates, Paul did not trust man's reason to guide him naturally toward the good. Man's mind is dominated by sin, and thus knowledge is *not* identical with virtue. Knowing God, all men fail nevertheless to obey Him - resulting in vain thinking and foolish, darkened hearts.<sup>97</sup> The unbeliever's reason is not omni-competent according to Paul; instead, unbelievers walk in vanity of mind, with darkened understanding, ignorance, and blindness of heart - arriving at nothing but a "knowledge" *falsely* so-called.<sup>98</sup> Therefore, in his apologetic methodology, Paul refrained from exalting man's fallen intellect or building his case for the truth of Christianity upon its misguided standards. The carnal mind was seen for what it is: at enmity with God.

However, this conclusion did not lead Paul to give up the task of apologetics as hopeless. On the one hand, the unbeliever abuses his intellect and cannot avoid foolishness; on the other band, the sinner yet has a knowledge of God which cannot be eradicated. All men are always accessible to the witness and persuasion of the Christian apologist. This is so because, as Paul teaches in Romans 1:18-21, there is a kind of "innate" knowledge of God which each and every man possesses, even though he mishandles and suppresses that knowledge. Such knowledge is not innate, with Socrates, in the sense that man's mind is in contact with the eternal realm of the forms and recollects them based on endless reincarnations; such innateness as this assumes the *continuity* of man's reason with *divinity*. Paul's doctrine of innate knowledge - a knowledge of God, rather than of Platonic "archetypes" of things in the world of "becoming" - assumes rather the *distinction* between the Creator and creature. It is because God has created man as His image<sup>99</sup> as well as creating everything in the world,<sup>100</sup> that man cannot avoid knowing his Creator. *Man is inescapably confronted with the face of God within him and the imprint of God's work all about him; God's revelation is constantly bearing in upon him, whether he seeks self-knowledge or understanding of the world. God reveals himself through nature unceasingly, universally, and inescapably.*<sup>101</sup> The silent communication of God continues to the end of the world, day unto day and night unto night showing forth knowledge. In virtue of *creation*, every man images God; man is the climax of creation, not being made after his

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<sup>85</sup> Romans 3:18.

<sup>86</sup> Acts 26:18.

<sup>87</sup> II Corinthians 4:3.

<sup>88</sup> John 3:19.

<sup>89</sup> Philippians 3:18-19.

<sup>90</sup> Ephesians 2:3.

<sup>91</sup> I Corinthians 3:20.

<sup>92</sup> Romans 3:11.

<sup>93</sup> John 14:17.

<sup>94</sup> I Corinthians 2:14.

<sup>95</sup> John 3:3.

<sup>96</sup> Philippians 1:21.

<sup>97</sup> Romans 1:21.

<sup>98</sup> Ephesians 4:17-18; I Timothy 6:20.

<sup>99</sup> Genesis 1:26-27.

<sup>100</sup> Colossians 1:16.

<sup>101</sup> Psalm 19:1-4.



own kind (as with the animals), but being made in the likeness of God. In knowing himself, man simultaneously knows his God. Moreover, (here is a sense in which Christ enlightens every man.<sup>102</sup> Hence, there is nowhere man can flee in order to escape confrontation with God.<sup>103</sup>

Paul's teaching of these points is plain to see. He asserted that God's invisible nature is clearly perceived and intellectually apprehended by man.<sup>104</sup> God is definitely known both from within man<sup>105</sup> and from the created world.<sup>106</sup> "What can be known about God is plain within them." and therefore man is categorically characterized as "knowing God."<sup>107</sup> It is because of these things that the apologist always has a *point of contact* with the unbeliever. Indeed, because of the unavoidable knowledge of God possessed by all men, the apologist is assured of success in his task of defending the faith. While men suppress the truth in unrighteousness, God nevertheless makes himself so clearly manifest to them that men are without excuse for their rebellion. They are fully responsible. As the Greek original suggests, "they are *without an apologetic*."<sup>108</sup> The presuppositional apologetic of Paul, then, could never encounter an intellectual fortress which exalts itself against the knowledge of God in an effective manner; by making his apologetic captive to the obedience of Christ, Paul was guaranteed the victory in pulling down such strongholds.<sup>109</sup> He was set for the *apologia* of the gospel against men who had no *apologetic* for their foolish rebellion against the knowledge of God.

In contrast to the dialectical epistemology of Socrates, Paul taught that knowledge for man has to be the *receptive reconstruction of God's thoughts*. In this case, God's revelation is foundational to human knowledge; man's reasoning is *not* self-sufficient,<sup>110</sup> autonomous,<sup>111</sup> or somehow profitable as an independent source of knowledge.<sup>112</sup> As is evident from what was said above, Paul denied the *normative* character of the human mind and its thinking. We should go on to see that Paul also denied the *ultimacy* of man's reason as the standard of knowledge and the final category or interpretation. Unlike Socrates, Paul did not seek to determine the nature and possibility of knowledge without reference to God.<sup>113</sup> By making man the final epistemological court of appeal, Socrates was led to a dialectical mixing of continuity and discontinuity, or unity and diversity, of logic and fact, in man's mind. For Paul, it is not man (reflecting on logic and fact) but God and His revelation which constitutes the final reference point or knowledge.<sup>114</sup> Human knowledge can never be comprehensive, but neither does it need to be in order for man to attain to veridical apprehension of reality.<sup>115</sup> Comprehensive knowledge is possessed by God,<sup>116</sup> and since He is the determiner of all things,<sup>117</sup> there is no "realm of possibility" behind Him.<sup>118</sup> Consequently there is no mystery or contingency which can threaten God's knowledge. The temporal realm, with its created unity and

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<sup>102</sup> John 1:9.

<sup>103</sup> Psalm 139:8.

<sup>104</sup> Romans 1:20.

<sup>105</sup> Romans 1:19.

<sup>106</sup> Romans 1:20.

<sup>107</sup> Romans 1:19, 21.

<sup>108</sup> Romans 1:20.

<sup>109</sup> II Corinthians 10:4-5.

<sup>110</sup> I Corinthians 4:7; II Corinthians 3:5.

<sup>111</sup> Colossians 2:4, 8; Job 11:12; Romans 1:21; I Corinthians 1:20.

<sup>112</sup> Romans 11:34; I Corinthians 2:16; Isaiah 40:13-14; 41:28.

<sup>113</sup> Colossians 2:3; Isaiah 46:10.

<sup>114</sup> Romans 11:36; John 14:6; I Corinthians 1:24; Colossians 2:3.

<sup>115</sup> E.g., I Corinthians 2:11-12; 13:11-12; Ephesians 3:19.

<sup>116</sup> Romans 11:33; Psalm 147:5.

<sup>117</sup> Ephesians 1:11; Psalm 103:19.

<sup>118</sup> Isaiah 43:10; 44:6; cf. 'Fortune' and 'Fate' in Isaiah 65:11. (ASV)

diversity, finds its *interpretive* unity in the mind and decree of God.<sup>119</sup> God's self-sufficient, absolutely rational, comprehensive, and coherent *plan* for creation and historical eventuation<sup>120</sup> provides the *integrating category of interpretation* for man's knowledge. God's creation of the world establishes the reality of *particulars*<sup>121</sup> and yet provides a genuine, pre-interpreted, *order* to things.<sup>122</sup>

Therefore, we must recognize two levels of knowing,<sup>123</sup> and man must thus think God's thoughts after Him in order to understand God, the world, or himself.<sup>124</sup> That is, God's creative and constructive knowledge<sup>125</sup> is determinative for man's receptive and reconstructive knowledge.<sup>126</sup> What man learns from nature and history must be seen in the context of God's revelation. Even when man is not consciously speaking of God, man must *know* God in order to find intelligibility in *anything* else. Man cannot gain knowledge by looking within himself for the final reference point or interpretative category of experience. *Human knowledge is completely dependent upon the original knowledge of God, and thus God's revelation is foundational for man's epistemological endeavors.* The Psalmist gives succinct expression to this, saying "In Thy light shall we see light."<sup>127</sup> Only God is wise,<sup>128</sup> and it is the Lord who teaches man knowledge.<sup>129</sup> Because Jehovah is a God of knowledge, arrogance must not be expressed by man;<sup>130</sup> instead, "attend unto my wisdom; incline thine ear to my understanding that thou mayest preserve discretion and that thy lips may keep knowledge."<sup>131</sup> The Lord must enlighten man's darkness.<sup>132</sup> Accordingly, it is the entrance of His words which gives light and understanding.<sup>133</sup> Paul would not allow any man to deceive himself: in order to be genuinely wise one must become a fool according to worldly standards<sup>134</sup> (i.e., base his thinking upon the word of the cross rather than the pseudo-wisdom of this world) because all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hid in Christ.<sup>135</sup> In His light alone can men see light.

It is quite evident now that the scriptural perspective on knowledge is *theocentric*, in sharp contrast to the anthropocentricity of Socratic epistemology. Only by making God one's starting point for thought and standard of truth can the objectivity of knowledge be preserved. For Paul, God is the final reference point in interpretation. His knowledge has unfathomable depth and wealth; "who hath known the mind of the Lord?"<sup>136</sup> Paul's answer could only be, "we have the mind of Christ."<sup>137</sup> For man to apprehend *any* truth, he must relate his thinking back to God's original knowledge. "For of him and through him, and unto him, are all things."<sup>138</sup> Our thinking requires a theistic Orientation: we must see things as Christ does, thinking God's thoughts after Him. Therefore, man's mind needs

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<sup>119</sup> Isaiah 40:26; Acts 15:18.

<sup>120</sup> Isaiah 40:28; cf. I Corinthians 14:33.

<sup>121</sup> Colossians 1:16; Ephesians 3:9; John 1:3.

<sup>122</sup> Colossians 1:17; Psalm 104:24; Proverbs 3:19.

<sup>123</sup> Isaiah 55:8-9.

<sup>124</sup> Proverbs 22:17-21; John 16: 13-15; Ephesians 4:20; 8:31-32; I Corinthians 2:6-13, 16; Colossians 3:10; Ephesians 4:23-24.

<sup>125</sup> Proverbs 3:19; 8:1, 12, 22-35 with John 1:1-4.

<sup>126</sup> Proverbs 2:1-9; II Corinthians 4:6; 10:5; I Timothy 6:3-4, 20.

<sup>127</sup> Psalm 36:9.

<sup>128</sup> Romans 16:27.

<sup>129</sup> Psalm 94:10.

<sup>130</sup> I Samuel 2:3.

<sup>131</sup> Proverbs 5:1-2.

<sup>132</sup> Psalm 18:28.

<sup>133</sup> Psalm 119:130.

<sup>134</sup> I Corinthians 3:18.

<sup>135</sup> Colossians 2:3.

<sup>136</sup> Romans 11:33-34.

<sup>137</sup> I Corinthians 2:16.

<sup>138</sup> Romans 11:36.

to be renewed unto genuine knowledge after the image of his Creator,<sup>139</sup> rather than fashioned according to this world.<sup>140</sup> Man must reflect God's thoughts on a creaturely level, making God the measure of all things, instead of being driven ultimately to skepticism by holding man to be the measure. In contrast to the Socratic dictum, "know thyself," Paul declared that he counted all things to be loss for the excellency of the *knowledge of Christ*; indeed, he reckoned everything as refuse in order that he might *know Him*.<sup>141</sup> While Socrates sought union with the eternal realm by self-knowledge, Christ taught "This is life eternal, that they should *know thee* the only true God, and him whom thou didst send, Jesus Christ."<sup>142</sup>

The scriptural outlook is undaunted in its theocentric epistemology. By centering his thinking on God's word, man is delivered from sin and its epistemic offspring, skepticism.

Thy commandments make me wiser than mine enemies, for they are ever with me. I have more understanding than all my teachers, for thy testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the aged, because I have kept thy precepts. . . . Thou hast taught me. How sweet are thy words unto my taste. . . . Through thy precepts I get understanding; therefore, I hate every false way.<sup>143</sup>

If man applies his heart unto God's knowledge, then he can know the certainty of the words of truth.<sup>144</sup> A knowledge of God's Son prevents one from being tossed about with every passing doctrine,<sup>145</sup> and full assurance of knowledge comes through looking in unwavering faith to the promises of God.<sup>146</sup> One such promise is that of Jesus, "If ye *abide in my word*, then you are truly my disciples, and *you shall know the truth*, and the truth shall make you free."<sup>147</sup> Man in his created individuality has no problem, in the scriptural perspective, with knowing objective truth. Man was created<sup>148</sup> and is now being recreated<sup>149</sup> unto that end.

From the vantage point of the epistemology traced above, it is not surprising to find that Scripture does not extol neutrality as Socrates did. The Lord created all things *for himself*,<sup>150</sup> and He directs every event of history according to His wise plan.<sup>151</sup> He rules over all,<sup>152</sup> and everything in heaven and earth is His possession.<sup>153</sup> Consequently, in *all things* God is to be glorified.<sup>154</sup> Man is commanded to do *everything* he does to God's glory,<sup>155</sup> being consecrated to Him in "all manner of living."<sup>156</sup> This command extends to man's noetic (intellectual) activities. The first and great

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<sup>139</sup> Colossians 3:10.

<sup>140</sup> Romans 12:2.

<sup>141</sup> Philippians 3:8, 10.

<sup>142</sup> John 17:3.

<sup>143</sup> Psalm 119:98-104.

<sup>144</sup> Proverbs 22:17-21.

<sup>145</sup> Ephesians 4:13-14.

<sup>146</sup> Ephesians 4:13-14.

<sup>147</sup> John 8:31-32.

<sup>148</sup> Genesis 1:28.

<sup>149</sup> Ephesians 4:24; II Timothy 2:25.

<sup>150</sup> Proverbs 16:4

<sup>151</sup> Ephesians 1:11.

<sup>152</sup> Psalm 103:19.

<sup>153</sup> I Chronicles 29:11.

<sup>154</sup> I Peter 4:31.

<sup>155</sup> I Corinthians 10:31.

<sup>156</sup> I Peter 1:15.

commandment calls for man to love the Lord with *all his mind*<sup>157</sup> every word and thought must be under the authority of Christ.<sup>158</sup> Thus, Christ does not allow one to take a detached, open-minded, free-thinking approach to the truth; man's thinking must be committed to the truth and glory of God. Neutrality is impossible. "No man can serve two lords; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will hold to the one and despise the other."<sup>159</sup> One is either submissive to God's word in all his thinking, or he is not; he is deluded to think that an uncommitted spirit characterizes his thought. "He that is not with me is against me."<sup>160</sup> One either has the mind of Christ or the vain mind of the Gentiles,<sup>161</sup> brings every thought captive or is an enemy in his mind against Christ.<sup>162</sup> To be friendly toward the world - even in the area of scholarship or presuppositional commitment - is to be an enemy of God.<sup>163</sup> The lordship of Christ extends to all thinking, thereby precluding any endorsement of neutrality. Instead of a detached following of reason alone, Paul (and the other writers of Scripture) commended a whole hearted commitment to God's revelation. *Dogmatism cannot be banished*. It is simply a question of whether the foundational dogma shall be the autonomous dictates of reason or the truth of God.

It should be perfectly obvious by this point that everything in the scriptural perspective on truth and knowledge dictates against any attitude which is even remotely similar to that of Socrates in the *Euthyphro* dialogue. Socrates reduced the word of God and the opinion of man to a common environment, subject to the same epistemic conditions and requirements, with a standard of truth or criterion of verification higher than both. God's word is irrelevant to establishing a point or position; the outlook of deity is not crucial to knowledge, but rather endorsed only after *independent* establishment by autonomous man. The revelation of God might or might not *accidentally coincide* with the autonomously discovered truth of man's mind. Socrates said we have to try the spirits, not to see whether they are of God, but whether they agree with self-sufficient evaluations of reason.

Scripture is to another effect. Here we are taught to try the spirits by the absolute standard of God's revealed truth.<sup>164</sup> No one and no consideration is allowed to draw the word of the Lord into question;<sup>165</sup> so God's word cannot be tested by any higher standard or principle of truth. God himself is the absolute, unconditioned, eternal *standard* of truth.<sup>166</sup> His word is infinitely more sure than man's direct, eyewitness experience,<sup>167</sup> which is why faith is not based on sight.<sup>168</sup> God's word is epistemologically foundational or logically *primitive* (i.e., the first priority). It brings all other worlds into judgment, but it itself is to be judged by no man. There exists *no independent* standard of truth higher than God. Thus, when a question of truth arises, the godly response is "To the law and to the testimony!"<sup>169</sup>

God's word is *never* just "one hypothesis among many others." It *alone* has self-attesting authority. Only the fool will subject God's word to his own autonomous testing, failing to understand the depth

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<sup>157</sup> Matthew 22:37.

<sup>158</sup> II Corinthians 10:5; Colossians 3:17.

<sup>159</sup> Matthew 6:24.

<sup>160</sup> Matthew 12:30.

<sup>161</sup> I Corinthians 2:16 with Ephesians 4:17.

<sup>162</sup> II Corinthians 10:5 with Colossians 1:21.

<sup>163</sup> James 4:4.

<sup>164</sup> I John 4:1ff.

<sup>165</sup> Matthew 20:1-16.

<sup>166</sup> John 14:6.

<sup>167</sup> II Peter 1:19.

<sup>168</sup> Hebrews 11:1, 7-8.

<sup>169</sup> Isaiah 8:20.

of God's thoughts<sup>170</sup> and that nobody can improve upon His thinking.<sup>171</sup> The word of God has a unique authority, one which does not require it to depend on the endorsement of other experts or authorities.<sup>172</sup> When the word of God is questioned, the proper reply is to call into question the *competence* of the autonomous critic, pointing out that in reality it is this very word which is the standard that draws *him* into judgment.<sup>173</sup> God's sure word is the final criterion of truth, the ultimate authority in the world of thought. Therefore, woe to him who strives with his maker!<sup>174</sup> The creature does not have the right to question the Creator. "shall he that contendeth with the Almighty instruct him? He that argueth with God, let *him* answer."<sup>175</sup>

This perspective was foundational in Paul's philosophy. Because God's word is the ultimate, authoritative, standard of knowledge and truth, Paul refused to submit it to the arrogant scrutiny of the sinner in order to have it established and accepted. In a spirit diametrically opposed to that of Socrates in *Euthyphro*, Paul declares "Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God?"<sup>176</sup> Rather than being irrelevant, God's revelation had the *greatest* relevance in establishing the truth for Paul. God's word would never "accidentally coincide" with the truth, for God's word is the necessary presupposition for all true knowledge. Without the word of God, this world would be 'sound and fury signifying nothing.' Therefore, in *all* of Paul's thinking God's word was taken as his genuine authority. Rather than having God pass the tests of fact, logic, beneficial effect, and subjective satisfaction, Paul realized that logic and fact (along with all the other criteria) would be *senseless without God*. Rather than God's needing such credentials to be admissible to the mind of man, these things themselves *need God* to be meaningful and useful for man's thinking. The *fool* overlooks this, trusting his own heart,<sup>177</sup> uttering his own mind,<sup>178</sup> being right in his own eyes,<sup>179</sup> and taking utmost confidence in himself.<sup>180</sup> Professing self-wisdom, the fool suppresses the truth of God<sup>181</sup> and delights in discovering his own heart's conclusions<sup>182</sup> - returning to his folly like a dog to his vomit.<sup>183</sup> It is impossible to arrive at knowledge in this fashion, and *a fortiori* it is impossible autonomously to verify the word of the God of all knowledge. If one does not *begin* with the truth of God, he cannot conclude his argumentation with *either God or truth*. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction."<sup>184</sup> By refusing to presuppose the word of the Lord, the autonomous fool *hates knowledge*.<sup>185</sup> Therefore, Paul would not submit to the presuppositions of worldly philosophy and traditions of men; the elementary principles of learning which do not follow Christ have to be rejected in order to avoid vain deception.<sup>186</sup> Paul's starting point in thought was not autonomous but theonomic; no truth was more basic for him than God's revelation. Consequently, Paul hearkened to the Lord's reaffirmation of the law, "Thou shalt not put

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<sup>170</sup> Psalm 92:6.

<sup>171</sup> Romans 11:34.

<sup>172</sup> Matthew 7:29.

<sup>173</sup> John 1:15-17; 12:48.

<sup>174</sup> Isaiah 45:9.

<sup>175</sup> Job 40:2.

<sup>176</sup> Romans 9:20.

<sup>177</sup> Proverbs 28:26.

<sup>178</sup> Proverbs 29:11.

<sup>179</sup> Proverbs 12:15.

<sup>180</sup> Proverbs 14:16.

<sup>181</sup> Romans 1:18, 22.

<sup>182</sup> Proverbs 18:2.

<sup>183</sup> Proverbs 26:11.

<sup>184</sup> Proverbs 1:7.

<sup>185</sup> Proverbs 1:22, 29.

<sup>186</sup> Colossians 2:8.

the Lord thy God to test.”<sup>187</sup> If God’s authority needed to be *authorized* by some other consideration, it would cease to be the *final* authority. Hence Paul sought to bring *every thought captive to the obedience of Christ*,<sup>188</sup> not allowing his or any other person’s mind to lord it over the word of God. Absolutely nothing would be permitted to question God’s authoritative word. And therefore, the central thrust of Paul’s apologetic was summarized in this bold declaration, “Let God be true, but every man a liar!”<sup>189</sup> He presupposed the truth of God and defended the faith from that sure foundation, challenging the very possibility of truth or knowledge on unbelieving assumptions: “Hath not God made *foolish* the wisdom of the world!”

### *Paul’s Apologetic Method: Acts 17*

Some four hundred and fifty years after Socrates stood trial in Athens for subverting the youth and teaching new deities, the apostle Paul was brought before the Areopagus Council in Athens, the most venerable court of its day, in order to determine whether or not he was subverting the public welfare by his teaching of new deities. The dissimilarity between his apologetic and that of Socrates is conspicuous. Paul did not appeal to autonomous reason or stress that he had in common with his audience a lack of wisdom. Paul did not attempt to bolster his contentions with factual demonstrations, logical exhibitions, references to social or personal betterment, or appeals to subjective guidance.

His *hearers* were noticeably aware of the *antithesis* between his outlook and their own: he brought to them new gods, strange things, and new teachings.<sup>190</sup> In his address, *Paul* underscored the *ignorance* of his hearers in their religiosity.<sup>191</sup> On the other hand, he emphasized his *authority*, his prerogative to proclaim the truth about God unto them. “That which you worship openly demonstrating your ignorance *I proclaim* unto you.”<sup>192</sup> In accord with his description of the unregenerate mind in Romans 1:23, 25, Paul characterized the Athenians as very idolatrous.<sup>193</sup> He realized that he could not build the gospel of Christ upon the foundation of pagan natural theology. Paul would not have his declaration of the truth from God *absorbed* into the immanentistic philosophy of heathen speculation, where the resurrection would merely be an oddity springing from the realm of chance. Paul knew that, given their presuppositions, the Athenians were far more ignorant than *they* even thought.<sup>194</sup> Thus, he directly attacked their philosophic assumptions, challenging them with the presuppositions of the Christian faith.

Against the common Greek assumption that all being is at bottom one, Paul clearly declared the doctrine of *creation*.<sup>195</sup> While his hearers gazed upon the Parthenon, Paul asserted that God does *not* dwell in temples made with hands.<sup>196</sup> Paul diametrically opposed the Epicurean notion of a teleological fate, as well as Stoic idolatry and its notion of an exclusive knowledge of divinity for the elite. Instead, he proclaimed God’s *providential* control of history and His natural revelation within

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<sup>187</sup> Matthew 4:7.

<sup>188</sup> II Corinthians 10:5.

<sup>189</sup> Romans 3:4.

<sup>190</sup> Acts 17:18-20.

<sup>191</sup> Cf. Ned B. Stonehouse, *Paul Before the Areopagus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), pp. 18-23.

<sup>192</sup> Acts 17:23.

<sup>193</sup> Acts 17:16.

<sup>194</sup> Cornelius Van Til, *Paul at Athens* (Phillipsburg, N. J.: Lewis J. Grotenhuis, n.d.).

<sup>195</sup> Acts 17:24.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*

*each* man.<sup>197</sup> Upon the founding of the court of the Areopagus, Aeschylus had said that Apollo declared, “there is no resurrection.” Standing in that same court, Paul diametrically contradicted him, proclaiming the *resurrection of Jesus Christ* as God’s assured pledge that Christ shall judge the world in the *eschatological* day<sup>198</sup> - another doctrine which clashed with Greek philosophy: its cyclic view of history. Throughout his address, Paul *undermined* the presuppositions of his hearers and established the foundational doctrines of Christianity, standing forthrightly upon *biblical* ground, making abundant allusions to Old Testament passages instead of arguing from first principles in philosophy.<sup>199</sup> The authority of God, rather than that of autonomous reason, stood behind his preaching of God’s demand that the Athenians have a “change of mind”- that is, that those living in ignorance *repent*.<sup>200</sup>

The themes which Paul rehearsed in Athens were the same as those discussed in Romans I: *creation, providence, man’s dependence upon God, future judgment*. Paul knew that he had a *point of contact* with his hearers, and that they had abundant reason to acknowledge” the truth of his words. Just as he taught in Romans 1:18-20, Paul explained to the Athenians that *God was already known* by them through *general revelation*, even though they have *suppressed and misused* that knowledge. God’s revelation of himself within and without man left the Athenians fully responsible to the truth. They were very religious by nature and felt a duty to worship.<sup>201</sup> God’s providential control of history was calculated to lead them into a knowledge of God.<sup>202</sup> God had so engulfed men with the clear revelation of himself that He is not far from anyone-so much so that even pagan poets, despite their suppression of the truth, cannot help having the revelation of God be reflected at isolated points in their teaching.<sup>203</sup> God has given regular witness of himself to all men, and thus He holds all men under responsibility to repent of their culpable ignorance (i.e., their unrighteous and ineffective suppression of the truth about God).

In his apologetic before the Areopagus, then, Paul appealed to the truth *held down deep within the heart of the unregenerate man*, but insisted that this truth could only be properly apprehended when placed within the proper context of apostolic proclamation. He attacked the religious presuppositions of his hearers with the *voice of authority*, indicting their rebellion against the proper knowledge of God. He stressed ideological antithesis, recognized noetic depravity, made God the reference point of his interpretation of facts and logic, appealed to the revelation of God bearing constantly upon his hearers, avoided both a neutral method and the elevating of man’s autonomous standards of piety or truth above God, and reasoned in terms of the ultimate epistemological authority of God. ~While Socrates’ apology was man-centered, piecemeal, and dependent upon certain *autonomous and root less tests* for truth, the apologetic of Paul was God-centered, presuppositional, and rooted in the *ultimate standard of meaningfulness* and truth: God’s authoritative revelation. In the Socratic outlook, God is subject to the self-sufficient testing of man’s reason, while in the Christian perspective, God is the necessary presupposition for the use of man’s reason and (through His self-attesting revelation) the final criterion of all truth.

### *An Overview of the History of Apologetics*

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<sup>197</sup> Acts 17:25-29.

<sup>198</sup> Acts 17:31.

<sup>199</sup> Cf. F. F. Bruce, *The Defense of the Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), pp. 38ff.

<sup>200</sup> Acts 17:30: cf. vs. 23.

<sup>201</sup> Acts 17:22-23.

<sup>202</sup> Acts 17:26-27; cf. Romans 2:4.

<sup>203</sup> Acts 17:27-28.

A detailed history of the way in which men throughout the centuries have attempted to defend the Christian faith is not feasible in the space available here. However, it is possible to get a *general* characterization of apologetical strategies through history for, as Avery Dulles says in his *History of Apologetics*,<sup>204</sup> “A careful reading of the old masters in the field reveals that the same basic problems continually recur and that it is almost impossible to say anything substantially new.” And the *most characteristic* thing about the apologetic arguments which one encounters in the history of the church is that they were *Socratic* in their outlook: they tended to divide the corpus of dogma into that which can be *rationalized* and that which is *mysterious*; they held that man’s mind is *competent* and *authorized* to prove truths in the former category by means of autonomous tests; they subjected God’s word to validation by the sinner’s (allegedly) *neutral* and *self-sufficient* intellect; and they played down *both* the antithesis between believing and unbelieving epistemology and the sufficiency, clarity, and authority of natural *revelation* (as distinguished from natural theology, of which there has been an overabundance). Like Socrates, historically most apologists have taken the *piecemeal* approach of proving a few items here and there by argumentative appeal to factual evidence, logical coherence, social and individual benefit, and/or inward personal experience. Their attitude (at least in apologetic writings, if not also in theological discourses) has been similar to that of *Euthyphro*, rather than that of Paul’s Areopagus address.

During the Patristic Period, up until about A.D. 125, the faith and discipline of the Christian community were the central concerns of the Apostolic Fathers, not the credibility of their message. However, we do find Clement attempting to interpret the resurrection in terms of man’s common and natural experience. During the second century *all the major motifs in apologetical history came to be foreshadowed*. It is a telling Commentary upon these apologies that they are modeled after (1) the assaults of the pagan philosophers upon polytheism, and (2) the attempts of Hellenistic Jews to show the superiority of Mosaic revelation to pagan philosophy. The recurring themes are illustrated by the following examples. The *Letter to Diognetus* exposed the folly and immorality which are fostered by pagan idolatry, and then it went on to emphasize the moral effects of the gospel on the mind and heart of believers—as does Aristides in his brief *Apology* to the emperor Hadrian. In customary style, Tatian attempted to prove that the Mosaic revelation was more ancient than the Greek writers. In his *Apologies*, Justin Martyr said that the philosophers were enlightened by the divine Logos and thus were Christians with-out realizing it. Aristides confronted the problem of a plurality of religious options, arguing from comparative studies that Christianity is the least superstitious. Athenagoras argued on philosophical grounds that there cannot be a plurality of gods. In the same vein as Quadratus” stress on the gospel miracles, Athenagoras wrote *On the Resurrection of the Dead*. Justin’s *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew* argued for the deity of Christ from the messianic prophecies of the Old Testament. And finally, Theophilus appealed in *Ad Auto-lycum* to the subjective testimony of the heart. An *epistemological continuity* with the *intellectual perspective* and *interpretation of experience* in unbelieving thought was openly propounded, then, as early as the second century (witness Clement, Athenagoras, and especially Justin). The kinds of arguments which Socrates utilized in his apology were all reflected in the Christian apologetic strategies of the second century (namely, appeals to fact, logic, beneficial effects, and the heart). That is not surprising, seeing that both Socrates and the apologists took a neutralistic, autonomous approach to knowledge. God was in the dock before the bar of human reason and experience. As a result, the apologetic strength of Paul was lacking.

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<sup>204</sup> Theological Resources Series, ed. J. P. Whalen and J. Pelikan (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971), pp. xvi-xvii.



None of the apologists showed Christianity to be the *definitive truth* of God. No argument was forthcoming that the *truth* of the gospel was the necessary condition for the *changed lives* of Christians; indeed, the Christians could have been morally motivated and transformed simply by *believing* that the gospel is true. By arguing that the Greek philosophers had plagiarized Moses and had been inspired by the Logos, the apologists assumed the *veracity* of the philosophers' perspective (yet maintaining that the Jews had the truth *first*). This had certain deleterious effects on the argument for Christianity. If you agree with the philosophers in their *presuppositions*, it appears to be arbitrary selectivity to refrain from agreeing to their *conclusions*. Besides, the educated pagan would say, if you appeal to the philosophers to *validate certain* truths of the faith but *hot others*, then this simply shows that the better (validated) teachings of Christianity are *also* taught by the philosophers-thus rendering the Christian revelation *superfluous*. Where Christianity is questionable, the unbeliever *does not want* to follow it; where Christianity agrees with the philosophers, the unbeliever *need not* follow it. Moreover, when the Christian message is placed upon the foundation of pagan thought, it is *naturalized* and distorted; for instance, given the Greek view of fate (where *anything* is said to be possible in history), the resurrection of Christ is a mere oddity of irrational historical eventuation. Appeals to fact are ultimately futile unless the apologist recognizes and avoids the unbeliever's presupposed *philosophy of fact*. For various reasons, the argumentative appeal to fulfilled prophecy and the evaluation of pagan religions as leading to immorality and superstition are mere examples of *begging the question*. From a *non-biblical* perspective, *Christianity* would be immoral and superstitious. And from an unbelieving perspective the arguments from prophecy all appear to rely on *tendentious* readings of the Old Testament. After all, the orthodox Jewish authorities did not interpret the texts in the fanciful and ax-grinding manner of the Christians. Why then should an educated pagan feel *compelled* to believe the Christian apologist? Finally, the fact that a believer has an *inward* indication of the truth of his faith may tell you some-thing about the *believer*, but it says nothing about the *objective truth* of the believer's faith. Thus the second century's Socratic apologies for the faith were just so much grist for the mills of unbelieving thought. The intellectual *challenge of the gospel* was not sounded.

Third-century apologists, especially those of Alexandria, continued to assimilate arguments from Platonic and Stoic philosophers as well as Jewish controversialists. Clement of Alexandria argued that the best aspirations and insights at work throughout *pagan history* (e.g., in the mystery cults and Hellenic philosophy) had been *fulfilled* in their apex, Christianity. Having studied philosophy under the father of Neo-Platonism, Origen argued against the criticisms of Celsus by saying that the Bible agrees with *sound philosophy* and that the Christian's inability to prove historical assertions of Scripture is no defect, since the Greeks cannot prove their history either. The *necessity* and *uniqueness* of the Christian message, then, were to a great extent hidden in the apologies of the Alexandrians. The Latin apologists were not much better. In *Octavius*, Marcus Minucius Felix proclaimed that the philosophers of old were unconsciously Christians, and that Christians of his day were genuine philosophers. It is only in Tertullian that we begin to see some return from the epistemological "Babylonian captivity" of Christian apologetics. However, along with Tertullian's refusal to integrate Jerusalem with Athens, we also find the counterproductive recommendation of Christian teaching "*because it is absurd*" - rather than *in spite of its apparent* absurdity. The teaching of Athens must be unmasked for *its* presuppositional absurdity and not simply allowed to stand as an (erroneous) option over against the faith. As did the other third-century apologists, Cyprian merely repeated second century arguments for the faith, adding to the evidences the spectacle of Catholic unity-an argument with *assumptions* which might seem to *disprove* the truth of Christianity with the arrival of the Protestant Reformation.

The fourth and fifth centuries witnessed the attempt by apologists to construct a *new religious synthesis*, a global vision constructed from materials in Stoic and Platonic philosophy, yet reshaped by the gospel. The overriding problem of the previous age had been the relationship between Christianity and classical culture, and now with Christianity seeing amazing success (e.g., the heroic martyrs, advances in doctrinal formulation, the conversion of Constantine), the leading apologists were very open to the solution offered by synthesis. Typical of the era was *The Case Against the Pagans* by Arnobius, who evidently was more familiar with Stoic thought than with Christian theology. Arnobius subscribed to the *tabula rasa* theory of the human mind and argued that, even though all intellectual options are uncertain, we should believe the one which offers more *hope* than the others (thus foreshadowing Pascal, Locke, and Butler). Christianity becomes an eschatological insurance policy. Arnobius admitted that he had pagan gods, and left us with an apologetic more suited to deism than to Christianity. Lactantius made extensive use of Plato, Cicero, and Lucretius in his apologetic, establishing with the competence of reason the existence and providence of God. From there, he pleaded the *limitations* of philosophy and went on to accept the deity of Christ on the grounds of inspired prophecy.

An instructive contrast can be seen between the attitudes of Ambrose and Eusebius. The former said that, "It is good that faith should go before reason, lest we seem to exact a reason from our Lord God as from a man." For Eusebius, faith undergirded knowledge, and yet knowledge prepared the way for faith (as is evident from his two-part work, *The Preparation of the Gospel*, and *The Proof of the Gospel*). Eusebius was a forerunner to Augustine in two major respects: he pioneered the apologetic of world history (arguing for the truth of Christianity from its *amazing success* in the world), and he Platonized the Bible almost as much as he baptized Greek speculation.

The domination of the Socratic outlook in Christian apologetics is further witnessed in Theodoret's work, *The Truth of the Gospels Proved from Greek Philosophy*. Theodoret felt able to incorporate the highest insights of neo-Platonic speculation into his Christian philosophy, yet he argued simultaneously that Christians *alone* live up to the best insights of the pagans. The same problem with *arbitrary selectivity* afflicted the *early* thinking of Augustine, when he felt that unaided human reason is capable of establishing God's existence by indubitable arguments. Augustine was confident that if Socrates and Plato had been alive in his day, they would certainly have been Christians. Augustine also argued from the moral miracle and superlative success of the church to the truth of the faith; in *The City of God*, he expounded the common argument that the growth of the church and the death of the martyrs are incredible except upon the assumption of the historical resurrection of Christ. Of course, to the extent that Augustine "proved" the existence of God in Platonic fashion - Plato's god, like Plato's static forms, was the *only* god Plato's logic could prove - he testified that God could not come into contact with the temporal realm of history. This God would then be in external dialectical tension with His creation as in all Greek speculation. On the other hand, when Augustine turned from this a-historical, rationalistic god to the evidential apologetic of world history, he encountered difficulties again. With Eusebius he had found evidence for the truth of Christianity in the beneficial affects it brought the empire as well as in the church's success. But now that the course of history and the conditions in state and church had been attributed to God (in order that they could serve as evidence for Him) Augustine was compelled to turn around and argue in *The City of God* that the state of affairs was *not* the responsibility of the Christians; he felt compelled to vindicate (the Christian faith and its God from culpability for the sack of Rome by Alaric in 410. Augustine had wanted to prove the truth of Christianity from the hard evidence of history, and to the hard facts his opponents now forced him to go - landing him right in the midst of the problem of *theodicy*. (Later, Salvian completed the turning of the apologetic of world history on its head, arguing that the course of events evidences the *judgment* of God rather than His beneficence. It is

clear that, from Eusebius to Salvian, it was *not* the *simple facts* of history that could be taken to prove the truth of Christianity, for facts of a conflicting character - facts of both weal and woe - were appealed to in order to prove the same conclusion. Obviously, a presuppositional commitment to the Christian faith was brought to bear in an interpretative way upon the facts, rather than the brute facts leading to Christian commitment.) As for Augustine's argument for the credibility of Christ's resurrection, his considerations merely showed that the martyrs either *believed* a false tale or that they were *willing to sacrifice* their lives, not for a specific story, but for a *broad ideal* which (for the sake of winning popular attention) incorporated elements of historical exaggeration. The *presuppositions* brought by unbelievers to the facts would determine whether one of *these* interpretations with respect to Christ's resurrection should be preferred over the believer's interpretation-just as *Augustine's* presuppositions determined what interpretation *he* should give the facts of *world history* (allowing them to evidence *both* God's beneficence and God's judgment).

In the later writings of Augustine, however, we do recognize a movement toward a clearer understanding that *by faith alone* does the Christian accept the existence of the triune God, that the Bible is accepted on its own terms, and that all of history and life must be interpreted in the light of God's revelation in order to be intelligible. Augustine moved away from the dialectical epistemology of Greek thinking and toward an epistemology consonant with the doctrine of salvation by grace alone (which he urged against Pelagius). In his *Retractions* Augustine expressed the conviction that "there is no teacher who teaches man knowledge except God." In a manner parallel to that of Ambrose, Augustine came to appreciate more accurately that one must *believe in order to understand*. Such a non-Socratic perspective would not be propounded with force again until the time of John Calvin.

In the period intervening between Augustine and Calvin, the key apologists were Qurrah, Anselm, Peter the Venerable, Abelard, Thomas Aquinas, Martini, Lull, Duns Scotus, Henry of Oytha, Sabundus, Denis the Carthusian, Nicholas of Cusa, and Ficino. The most significant light was of course that of Thomas," but all contributed toward turning the tide of apologetical argument into more *mystical* and *metaphysical* channels. Qurrah's famous allegory emphasized the necessity for man to compare the competing world religions and make a decision between them based on his own autonomous standards of plausibility. Christianity was simply one hypothesis among many which had to be judged by the sinner's anticipatory ideas of divinity. Characteristically for such autonomous apologetics, Qurrah failed to give any adequate resolution or basis for choice between *competing anticipations!* In Anselm, we find the beginning of very sophisticated reflections upon the relationship between faith and reason. Anselm understood the necessity of spiritual renewal and held that man needs faith in order to have understanding. However, he was not consistent with this Augustinian perspective, for he did agree to write in such a way "that *nothing* from Scripture should be urged on the authority of Scripture itself, but that whatever the conclusion of *independent* investigation should be to declare to be true" (*Monologion*). Anselm did not completely divorce himself from the pitfalls of autonomy. Peter the Venerable was the most eminent apologist of the twelfth century, appealing in his arguments against Jews and Moslems to the objectivity of philosophical study as a model for the *impartiality* he thought should characterize apologetics. Abelard complemented this theme by holding that *human reason*, making use of evidences, could pave the way for an *initial* faith, which in turn prepared for the *supernatural* act of faith elicited under divine grace. Abelard assigned *reason* the jurisdiction to select which authority to follow, and he maintained that the divine Logos had illumined not only the Old Testament prophets but also the *Greek philosophers-both* of which prepared for the revelation of Christ. Socrates could not have been more satisfied. *His* autonomous reason could then have dealt with the prophets as just *one more* tradition among many.

In the conflict between Anselm and Abelard, Thomas Aquinas agreed with Abelard that it is possible to prove from *reason* the basic truths of theism, especially with the help of Aristotelian philosophy. However, in order to guarantee that there is some need for *faith* (which must be sharply distinguished from knowledge, with its rational foundations) Thomas went on to argue, in agreement with the Jewish theologian Maimonides, that there is a *higher level of religious truth* that is impenetrable except by means of revelation from God. Reason builds the lower story of religious truth, and revelation completes the superstructure. Yet even in the *upper* story, reason can show the *credibility* and *probability* of the truths believed on faith. In the lower preamble to faith, Thomas used his famous Five Ways to prove God's existence; in the upper story dealing with the mysteries of the faith Thomas utilized arguments which we have seen propounded many times previously. Subsequently, however, Thomas stopped penning his *Summa Theologica* after undergoing a mystical experience which he felt dwarfed his previous argumentation. And thus, all the elements of the Socratic apology finally came to expression in the approach of Thomas Aquinas: neutrality, autonomy, dialectical epistemology, subjecting God to test, dichotomizing the field of knowledge, assuming the natural ability of human reason, and locating the seat of authority in man's thinking process. Aquinas would have been warmly *welcomed* at the Areopagus, without the mockery Paul received. He would have appealed to *facts, logic, beneficial effects, and mystical experience* in a way which would have been congenial to the philosophers of Athens; Thomas would have helped them to absorb totally the Christian message into an alien philosophy and thereby *transform* and *naturalize* it.

Martini and Lull expounded the position of Aquinas with missionary fervor, both giving *primacy* to *reason* over faith. Martini propounded the Thomistic apologetic to Saracens and Jews, and Lull devised a set of diagrams (with concentric circles and revolving figures) that he claimed could, when used properly, answer the most difficult theological questions to the satisfaction of Averroists, Saracens, Jews, and Christians alike. Like Richard of St. Victor, Lull even contended that all the *mysteries of the faith* could be supported by *necessary reasons*. The Thomistic lower story or autonomous reason began to *engulf* the upper story of authoritative revelation. John Duns Scotus held a similar position, holding that *faith* could be objectively *justified* before the bar of autonomous reason; he produced a list of ten extrinsic reasons which he felt demonstrated the credibility of the Bible. His medieval list represents the non-presuppositional apologetic arguments which are in vogue even *today!* Henry of Oytha distinguished between intrinsic evidence (internal, rational demonstration) and extrinsic evidence (external reasons which point to the probability of something), maintaining that "any man of reasonable and uncorrupted judgment" (where we are to find such men was not indicated) must rightly conclude that the combination of intrinsic and extrinsic evidence undoubtedly *proves* the Bible to be divine revelation. Catalan Raimundus Sabundus composed the *Book of Creatures*, which aimed to lead the mind to rise through the various stages of the chain of being to a contemplation of God. Like all "chain of being" schemes, this one effectively denied the *Creator-creature distinction*. Sabundus held that human reason had the power to *prove* most *everything* in the Christian faith *without* reliance upon the authority of revelation. Contrary to Isaiah 55:8-9, God's thoughts really are quite like man's thoughts, apparently. He ~w *both* his *Book of Creatures* and the Bible as authoritative and infallible; thus, they were held to be concordant-with the *Book of Creatures* having *priority* as the necessary road to accepting the trustworthiness of Scripture! Here it becomes quite clear that *autonomy* in apologetics leads to the undermining of Scripture's self-attesting *authority*; if Sabundus were correct in his estimates of reason's capability, there would be little if any *need* for supernatural revelation. The progress of post-Augustinian, intellectual self-sufficiency in apologetics resulted finally in the disintegration of the *faith defended!*

In the fifteenth century, the scholastic apologetical method was best supported by Denis the Carthusian, who is known for his *Dialogue Concerning the Catholic Faith* - wherein he explained that faith cannot proceed from self-evident principles, since it is not a form of worldly wisdom, *and yet* historical arguments can *verify* the miracle stories. He is also remembered for a chapter-by-chapter refutation of the Koran based upon *historical validation* of the Bible, *Against the Perfidy of Mohammed*. Denis wrote this work at the urging of Nicholas of Cusa, who himself wrote on the same subject in his *Sifting the Koran*. Nicholas held that the Koran could be sifted and used as an *introduction* to the gospel; indeed, principles in the Koran, he imagined, lead one naturally to accept the Trinity, incarnation, and resurrection. In harmony with this spirit, Nicholas also composed a *synthesis* of the major religions of the world, outlining their *lowest common denominator* in *On Peace and Concord in the Faith*. Marsilio Ficino, whose principal work was entitled *Platonic Theology*, thought of the philosophers of the ancient world as *precursors* to Christianity and attempted to use Platonic reason to support Christian faith (in contrast to the prevailing Aristotelianism of his day). However, after an initial commitment, has been made to a positive use of the world religions or Greek philosophers in apologetics, the Christian faith is eventually distorted and modified. Once you have said “yes” to the principles of apostate philosophy, it is too late to say “but” when you subsequently want to disagree with its conclusions. And thus, Ficino was led to believe that, since Plato was only “Moses speaking the Attic language,” the variety of religions found in the world are permitted by God in order to give the creation luster; Christianity is simply the most perfect among the various religions. It is just one more testimony among many, albeit the “best” one.

In the history of apologetics up to the Reformation, then, Christians wedded themselves for the most part to a Socratic approach, which in turn undermined the definitiveness of Christianity, the significance of miracles, the self-attesting strength of Scripture, the necessity of special revelation, the clarity of general revelation, the prerequisite of faith for understanding, the necessity of faith at all, and even the uniqueness of the Christian message. What emerged was the exaltation of the intellect, the natural integrity of reason, the delusion of neutrality and autonomy, and the dominating authority of Greek philosophy. By beginning with Socrates, apologetics could not conclude with Christ.

While there is a multitude of apologetical works which could be rehearsed between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, there is little need for our purposes to consider them. No *new* grand syntheses or new metaphysical inroads were attempted in any noteworthy fashion. Instead, initiative was profitably assumed by Christianity’s *adversaries* in these centuries; since the presuppositions of unbelieving thought were being *shared*, instead of being challenged, by Christian apologists, critics were able to make the faith’s defenders rush to answer detail-objection after detail-objection. Especially during the eighteenth century was this the case, as blatant, positivistic attacks upon Christianity became stylish for Enlightenment thinkers. The emphasis in apologetics steadily shifted toward the ‘shotgun’ method of adducing a variety of particular evidences for the credibility of Christianity. That is, Christian apologists undertook to answer their positivistic critics in kind. However, the highly destructive philosophy of David Hume vanquished the evidential approach. Hume effectively illustrated that, given the assumptions of autonomous thinking, *induction* could not lead to anything better than *psychologically* persuasive conclusions. Hume’s nominalism, representationalism, and undermining of the uniformity of nature guaranteed that the “brute facts” of experience would be *mute* facts, incapable of demonstrating anything - either conclusively *or* probabilistically. Hume’s consistent empiricism was the definitive death blow to the empiricistic apologetic schemes that were in vogue (e.g., Butler’s *Analogy of Religion, Natural and Revealed, to*

*the Constitution and Course of Nature*, 1736). Men like Toland and Tindal converted the case for *natural* evidences into *deism*, and men like Lessing and Reimarus effectively countered the autonomous case from *historical* evidences, the former with respect to *principle* and the latter with respect to *fact*.

In terms of general approach, the apologetics of the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries produced nothing remarkably new. Christianity was defended by appeals to pagan philosophers (Steucho), moral effects (Suarez), prophecy (Gonet), common religious notions (Herbert), historical indications (Bosseut, Lardner), inductive proofs (Houtteville), natural teleology (Bentley, Ray), and natural theology (Clarke). The diversity of defensive stances was remarkable. Pascal defended Christianity from the subjective reasons of the heart. Others like Elizalde, Huet, and Wolff strove to produce quasi-mathematical proofs for the faith. Appeals were made to the inevitability of general skepticism in order to justify blind faith for the Christian (Montaigne, Charron), while others argued in favor of the presumption and probability of Christianity's veracity (Banez, Gregory of Valencia, Butler, Paley). Evidence was culled from natural facts (Locke, Butler, Paley, Nieuwentijdt, Bonnet), the strength of miracles (Juan de Lugo, Boyle), especially the resurrection (Sherlock, Euler, Less). And because none of these approaches was convincing in its own right, appeal was also" made to the *convergence* of many signs in favor of Christianity (Hurtado).

However, despite all of this variety, apologists were still bound to the crucial defects of the Socratic approach taken by their predecessors. There was no conscious and consistent attempt to distinguish the Socratic outlook from the Christian perspective and to argue in terms of the latter. The reformation of theology effected in the sixteenth century had made no noticeable modification of apologetic strategy, for apologists continued to view their reasoning as *independent* of their theological commitments. Indeed, the ideal seemed to be that apologetics would *autonomously* establish the basic truths of theology. The deeper mysteries of the faith were to be erected upon the self-sufficient foundation of reason and evidential probability.

The volume and complexity of apologetical treatises in the nineteenth century prevent any convenient detailing or cataloguing, but the trends simply remained constant. This was the century in which attempts were made to reduce apologetics to a special science-without achieving, how-ever, any unity in the field (as discussed earlier in this article). For the most part, Schleiermacher's call for apologetics to establish the prolegomenon to theology was heeded. This project was initiated by both the Romanists (Drey) and the Protestants (Sack); it was worked out to its consistent end by Thomists (Perrone) and Reformed thinkers (Warfield) alike. In the wake of Kantian criticism and Hegelian idealism, many apologists assigned matters of science, history, and reason to one domain while setting religious faith apart as a distinct mode of knowing-thereby surrendering completely the transcendental necessity of God and His revelation for intelligible reasoning, which is the inevitable outcome of divorcing faith from knowledge and granting autonomy to human reason. The outcome - blind faith - was *fideism* in apologetics (Kierkegaard, Maurice, Herrmann, Bautain), and apologetical appeals to the *heart* (Schleiermacher, Tholuck, Chateaubriand, Ventura), *intuition* (Gratry), and *religious pragmatism* (Hermes, Ritschl, Kaftan). Some apologists resorted to arguing that Christianity fosters social order, welfare, and progress as a reason for accepting it (Cortés, Newman, Brownson, Hecker, Luthardt, Weiss). Since apologists had surrendered the battle at the *presuppositional* level already, it is no surprise that we find them accommodating to the *methods* of idealistic philosophy (Orr), higher criticism (Lightfoot, Harnack, A. B. Bruce), and Darwinian

science (Mivart, Drummond).<sup>205</sup> The same arguments which appeared throughout the history of the church were again rehashed, with all of the ensuing defects of the Socratic outlook thwarting their success.

By taking as its starting point an agreement with apostate thought and presuppositions, Christian apologetics has throughout its history ended up in captivity behind enemy lines. Having said “yes” to unbelieving epistemology or interpretation at the *outset*, the *later* attempt to say “but” and correct the conclusions of non-Christian thinking has been manifestly unsuccessful. In this we see again the justice of J. T. Forbes’s comment to the effect that the progress of the human mind has been with Socrates. A striking illustration of the dreadful outcome fostered by taking a Socratic approach to apologetics is afforded by Alec R. Vidler in his book, *Twentieth Century Defenders of the Faith*.<sup>206</sup> The seed of autonomous (Socratic) thinking was planted within Christian apologetics in the second century; it was finally harvested in the twentieth century in the fact that *not one* of the “apologists” discussed by Vidler holds to the faith once for all delivered to the saints! Vidler takes as the key defenders of the faith in this century: Harnack, Reville, R. J. Campbell, Loisy, Tyrrell, Le Roy, Figgis, Quick, Spens, Rawlinson, Barth, Brunner, Hoskyns, Niebuhr, Davies, Robinson, and Van Buren - that is, the proponents of liberalism, modernism, neo-orthodoxy, and radicalism.

While Socratic apologists will not be impressed by the following fact (given their Socratic presuppositions), consistently biblical apologists should remind themselves from time to time that Socrates *lost* his case before his own Athenian peers. If the logical armor of Socrates resulted in a belly full of hemlock tea, it would seem reasonable for Christians to put on a different kind of armor - specifically the “whole armor of God” (Eph. 6:13-17). Socrates came to his own, and his own received him not. The same is the general experience of autonomous apologists in speaking to autonomous unbelievers. When the commitment of “Athenians” is tested, they will be found to *tolerate* the presence of Socrates only because they prefer Socrates to Jesus Christ. In hell, there are no Socratic dialogues. And in their hearts all Athenians know this to the true: the whole of their lives is spent in a systematic attempt to suppress this truth. The sinner will use any means at his disposal to evade the claims of Christ, and the autonomy of Socratic apologetics is just one such means.

The principal implication and ultimate outcome of a Socratic apologetic for Christianity is a grotesque transformation of the orthodox faith and a failure to challenge the unbeliever to renounce his autonomy for the gospel of Christ. Nevertheless, the influence of Socrates continues to be influential in Christian apologetics. It is seen in the non-evangelical, Richard Kroner, who held that Socrates demonstrated the ability of the human mind by its own effort to approach the truth revealed in the Bible.<sup>207</sup> And it is seen in the popular evangelical, C. S. Lewis, who wrote in “The Founding of the Oxford Socratic Club”: “Socrates had exhorted men to “follow the argument wherever it led them”: the club came into existence to apply his principle to one particular subject-matter - the *pros* and *cons* of the Christian religion.”<sup>208</sup> The proper evaluation of such an autonomous and neutralistic approach was expressed in the title of Willard L. Sperry’s critique of compromising defenses of the faith: “*Yes, But - The Bankruptcy of Apologetics*.”<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> The foregoing abridged history of apologetics is indebted to the works of Dulles, Ramm, and Reid cited previously; their works can be profitably consulted for an expansion and filling out of the history. See also Van Til’s three-volume syllabus, “Christianity in Conflict.”

<sup>206</sup> (New York: Seabury Press, 1965).

<sup>207</sup> *Speculation in Pre-Christian Philosophy*; cited by Van Til, *Christian Theistic Ethics*, p. 218.

<sup>208</sup> *God in the Dock*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), p. 126.

<sup>209</sup> (New York, 1931).

## *The Reformation of Apologetics*

It is highly fitting that just one year after the appearance of the acknowledgment of apologetics' bankruptcy, the first extensive work of Cornelius Van Til should appear, for it is in the approach which Van Til takes to the defense of the faith that apologetics is called back from its Socratic bondage and restored to solvency and full wealth. Van Til fully realizes that an irradicable, principial antithesis exists between the outlook of Socrates and the perspective of Christ, and thus he seeks to set his apologetic self-consciously over against the autonomous and neutralistic methodology of Socrates and correspondingly to align his apologetic strategy with that of Scripture.

If Socrates be regarded as the highest product of the Greek spirit, this only points up the striking character of Paul's words: "Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For seeing that in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom knew not God, it was God's good pleasure through the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe" (1 Cor. 1:20, 21). . . . The ideal or perfect man of Greece is the perfect covenant-breaker; the ideal man of Scripture is the perfect covenant-keeper.<sup>210</sup>

Van Til is conscious of the fact that the failure to bring every thought into captivity to Christ, *even in the area of apologetic argumentation*, is itself a violation of the *covenantal obligations* under which all men live "the creatures of God. Thus, while so many schools of apologetics are more than willing to assume the philosophic perspective of Socrates in order to gain men to Christ, Van Til declares that the *principle* of Socrates (an honorary saint of the Enlightenment spirit) stands *antithetically* over against every principle of the Christian position.<sup>211</sup>

The attitude assumed in the *Euthypro* epitomizes for Van Til man's intellectual rebellion against God; it is the same attitude that was assumed by Adam and Eve in the garden. If revealed truth is to be accepted by man's mind, then it is to be accepted, not because it is authoritatively revealed from God, but because man can *independently* satisfy himself that it passes *his* tests for truth. This *subordinates* revelation to speculation. To the contrary effect Van Til teaches that we must adopt

...the presupposition that revelation is primary and that human speculation is, when properly conducted, the attempt of covenant-redeemed man, man in Christ, to submit his every thought, his every conceptual thought, captive to the obedience of his Lord. if this approach is not taken from the outset, the subordination of revelation to speculation is a foregone conclusion. And with this subordination goes the destruction of human speculation.<sup>212</sup>

The "perfect man" (the perfect covenant-breaker) in the Socratic perspective is the autonomous intellectual, unfettered by the authority of his Creator; yet Van Til is aware that such a thinker brings about the ironic effect of destroying *that very rationality* in which he prides himself. In suppressing the truth of God, he professes to be wise, but in reality, becomes a fool.

The bankruptcy of apologetics stems from an overlooking of this fact. By allowing even a small measure of autonomy into his thinking at the outset, the traditional apologist cannot prevent his system from sharing the crucial defects, rootlessness, and dialectical tensions of unbelieving thought. A little leaven leavens the whole lump.

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<sup>210</sup> *Christian Theistic Ethics*, p. 219.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*, p.184; cf. *Christian Theory of Knowledge*, p.144.

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*, p.209.



The Christian revelation is imperious in its nature. Christ wants to be Lord of the conceptual thoughts of men as well as of every other aspect of their personality. And the autonomous intellect and moral consciousness of man is equally imperious. It seeks to withdraw the realm of conceptual thought from the Lordship of Christ by claiming the honor of its origination in man instead of in God.<sup>213</sup>

The Christian apologist must not halt between two opinions; because the Lord is God, the apologist must serve Him—with his *whole* heart, strength, and *mind*. His argumentation must reflect the crown rights of Jesus Christ, not the usurping claims of autonomous reason. For no man (not even the apologist) can serve two masters. Van Til is acutely conscious that for apologetics the choice is clear: Socrates *or* Christ. The two cannot be synthesized, as traditional apologetics had vainly attempted to do.

When Socrates assumes the autonomy of the moral consciousness and when in modern times Kant does likewise, they are finding their absolute, their absolute ideal, their absolute criterion and their self-sufficient motive power in man as autonomous. Neither the Socratic nor the Kantian position can ever be harmonized with the Christian position, no more in ethics than in the field of knowledge.<sup>214</sup>

It is because of the clarity of this insight that Van Til has been able to activate a momentous *reformation* in the field of apologetics. The incisive and decisive analysis of apologetics which was lacking in Warfield's day was being supplied a generation later by a young scholar who realized that he was standing on the shoulders of his Reformed fathers: Calvin, Hodge, Warfield, Kuyper, Bavinck. From that vantage point, he could more clearly see the fundamental need for a Reformed apologetic—that is, an apologetic true to the fundamental insights of Reformed theology. The absolute sovereignty of God in epistemology, as in every other order, led Van Til to repudiate the influence of Socrates (as well as his historical and implicit disciples) in the defense of the Christian faith. The methods of Socrates could not be harmonized with the teachings of Christ.

Van Til answered the basic question of *methodology* in apologetics by propounding a *presuppositional* defense of the faith. The foundation of Christian scholarship was taken to be the presupposed truth of God's in-spired word. This presupposition stands over against the autonomous effort of the unbeliever. "In the last analysis we shall have to choose between two theories of knowledge. According to one theory God is the final court of appeal; according to the other theory man is the final court of appeal."<sup>215</sup> The former approach holds that there are two levels of thought, the absolute and derivative, and thus that man must think God's thoughts after Him in a receptively reconstructive manner; the latter approach holds to the ultimacy and normative quality of man's mind, and thus that he should seek to be creatively constructive in his interpretation of reality.<sup>216</sup> "The essence of the non-Christian position is that man is assumed to be ultimate or autonomous. Man is thought of as the final reference point in predication."<sup>217</sup> In contrast,

The Protestant doctrine of God requires that it be made foundational to everything else as a principle of explanation. If God is self-sufficient, he alone is self-explanatory. And if he

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<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*, p.210.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*, p.209.

<sup>215</sup> *The Defense of the Faith*, p. 51.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.64-66.

<sup>217</sup> *Christian Theory of Knowledge*, pp.12-13.

alone is self-explanatory, then he must be the final reference point in all human predication. He is then like the sun from which all lights on earth derive their power of illumination.<sup>218</sup>

The presuppositionalist must challenge the would-be autonomous man with the fact that *only* upon the presupposition of God and His revelation can *intelligibility* be preserved in his effort to understand and interpret the world. Christian truth is the *transcendental* necessity of man's epistemological efforts.

Now the only argument for an absolute God that holds water is a transcendental argument. . . . Thus, the transcendental argument seeks to discover what sort of foundations the house of human knowledge must have, in order to be what it is. . . . A truly transcendent God and a transcendental method go hand in hand.<sup>219</sup>

Van Til's presuppositional defense of the faith allows him to start with *any fact whatsoever* and challenge his opponent to give an intelligible interpretation of it; the presuppositionalist seeks to show the unbeliever that his epistemology reduces to absurdity. Nothing less will do. Standing firmly within the circle of Christianity's presupposed truth, "We reason *from the impossibility of the contrary*."<sup>220</sup> This is the most fundamental and effective way to defend the faith.

How then, we ask, is the Christian to challenge this non-Christian approach to the interpretation of human experience? He can do so only if he shows that man *must* presuppose God as the final reference point in predication. Otherwise, he would destroy experience itself. He can do so only if he shows the non-Christian that even in his virtual negation of God, he is still really presupposing God. He can do so only if he shows the non-Christian that he cannot deny God unless he first affirms him, and that his own approach throughout its history has been shown to be destructive of human experience itself.<sup>221</sup>

Van Til's Reformed, presuppositional defense of the faith requires us to repudiate the assumed *normative* character of the unbeliever's thinking as well as his supposed *neutrality*. In this Van Til is simply applying the Scriptural perspective of Paul, as examined earlier.

To argue by presupposition is to indicate what are the epistemological and metaphysical principles that underlie and control one's method. The Reformed apologist will frankly admit that his own methodology presupposes the truth of Christian theism. . . . In spite of this claim to neutrality on the part of the non-Christian, the Reformed apologist must point out that *every* method, the supposedly neutral one no less than any other, presupposes either the truth or the falsity of Christian theism.

The method of reasoning by presupposition may be said to be indirect rather than direct. The issue between believers and non-believers in Christian theism cannot be settled by a direct appeal to "facts" or "laws" whose nature and significance is already agreed upon by both parties to the debate. The question is rather as to what is the final reference-point required to make the "facts" and "laws" intelligible.<sup>222</sup>

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<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*, p.12.

<sup>219</sup> *A Survey of Christian Epistemology*, p. 11.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.204, 205.

<sup>221</sup> *Christian Theory of Knowledge*, p. 13.

<sup>222</sup> *The Defense of the Faith*, pp. 116-117.

It is only within the theological school of Reformed interpretation of Scripture that the strength of presuppositional apologetics could develop. By their compromising stands on man's depravity and God's total sovereignty, Romanism and Arminianism are hindered from issuing the transcendental challenge of presuppositionalism.

Roman Catholics and Arminians, appealing to the "reason" of the natural man as the natural man himself interprets his reason, namely as autonomous, are bound to use the direct method of approach to the natural man, the method that assumes the essential correctness of a non-Christian and non-theistic conception of reality. The Reformed apologist, on the other hand, appealing to that knowledge of the true God in the natural man which the natural man suppresses by means of his assumption of ultimacy, will also appeal to the knowledge of the true method which the natural man knows *but suppresses*. . . . He suppresses his knowledge of himself as he truly is. He is a man with an iron mask. A true method of apologetics must seek to tear off that iron mask. The Roman Catholic and the Arminian make no attempt to do so. They even flatter its wearer about his fine appearance. In the introductions of their books on apologetics Arminian as well as Roman Catholic apologists frequently seek to set their "opponents" at ease by assuring them that their method, in its field, is all that any Christian could desire. In contradistinction from this, the Reformed apologist will point out again and again that the only method that will lead to the truth in any field is that method which recognizes the fact that man is a creature of God, and that he must therefore seek to think God's thoughts after him.<sup>223</sup>

A *covenantal* theology of *sovereign grace* absolutely requires this kind of *presuppositional* method; no measure of human autonomy can be permitted, since man, as a covenantal creature, has been created to glorify God and subdue all of creation under the direction of his Creator, and also since man's restoration from the effects of his fall into sin can be accomplished and applied solely by the work of Christ and the Spirit.

Underlying this covenantal theology of sovereign grace is the presupposed *authority* of God's inspired, infallible word. For Van Til, Scripture is our most basic authority, which means that there is nothing higher by which it could be proven.

We have felt compelled to take our notions with respect to the nature of reality from the Bible. . . . We have taken the final standard of truth to be the Bible itself. It is needless to say that this procedure will appear suicidal to most men who study philosophy. . . . To accept an interpretation of life upon authority is permissible only if we ~ looked into the foundations of the authority we accept. But if we must determine the foundations of the authority, we no longer accept authority on authority.<sup>224</sup>

At the end of every line of argumentation there must be a self-evident or *self-attesting* truth, or else we are committed to either an *infinite regress* or *question-begging*. The basic authority for the Christian must be God's word. In the very nature of the case, then, this word must be self-attesting; it must be accepted on *its own* authority.

It is impossible to attain to the idea of such a God by speculation independently of Scripture. It has never been done and is inherently impossible. Such a God *must* identify himself. . . .

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<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 118-119.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*, p.49.

Such a view of God and of human history is both presupposed by, and in turn presupposes, the idea of the infallible Bible. . . . It thus appears afresh that a specifically biblical or Reformed philosophy of history both presupposes and is presupposed by the idea of the Bible as testifying to itself and as being the source of its own identification. . . . *It was against such a specific self-identification that man sinned.* . . . Thus the Christ as testifying to the Word and the Word as testifying to the Christ are involved in one another. . . . It is of the utmost apologetical importance. It is precisely because God is the kind of God he is, that his revelation is, in the nature of the case, self-attesting. In particular, it should be noted that such a God as the Scripture speaks of is everywhere self-attesting. . . . Objectively the Scriptures have on their face the appearance of divinity while yet none will accept its self-attestation unless the holy Spirit, himself divine, witness to the Word which he has inspired the prophets and apostles to write.<sup>225</sup>

According to Van Til *only Christ can testify to himself and interpret His acts and words.* This avoids the dual problem of spiritual *subjectivism* (irrationalism) and intellectual *autonomy* (rationalism); one does not approach divine truth through the Spirit *apart from* the word, nor does one first interpret himself and his world, only then to *add* Christ's word to his own (as though his problem were merely a lack of information). Fact, logic, and personality must be interpreted by Christ, not *vice versa*, or else Christ's testimony would be subordinated and absorbed into man's self-testimony and self-sufficient interpretation. Consequently, the word of Christ must be its own authority; it must be self-attesting. One cannot reason up to the authority and truth of Christ's word from a point outside of that position.

Complementing this understanding of the authority of God's word is Van Til's insistence on the necessity, sufficiency, and clarity of God's revelation, both general and special.<sup>226</sup> The sinner has no excuse for rebelling against the truth. He recognizes the voice of his Lord speaking in *Scripture*, and that which may be known about God is continually being manifested unto him by God through the *created* order.

Whatever may happen, whatever sin may bring about, whatever havoc it may occasion, it cannot destroy man's knowledge of God and his sense of responsibility to God. Sin would not be sin except for this ineradicable knowledge of God. . . . This knowledge is that which all men have *in common*.<sup>227</sup>

However, sin *does* explain man's refusal to *acknowledge* his Creator, his *suppression* of the revelation of God within and without him, and his *rejection* of the salvation found in God's Son. Thus, Van Til is aware that *the success of apologetics finally depends upon the work of God's sovereign Spirit in the hearts and minds of men.* In addition to *transcendental necessity* of presupposing the existence of the *Creator* God, the *self-attesting authority* of Christ the *Son* speaking in *Scripture*, and the concrete biblical understanding of *man as both possessing yet suppressing* the knowledge of God, Van Til should be known for his apologetical dependence upon the powerful work of *God's Spirit* in bringing men to renounce their would-be autonomy (which is in principle destructive of all experience and intelligible understanding) and bow before Christ as He commands them to in His inspired word.

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<sup>225</sup> *Christian Theory of Knowledge*, pp.28,30,31,32.

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 52-71; cf. 'Nature and Scripture,' *The Infallible Word*, ed. Paul Woolly (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, reprinted 1967), pp. 263-301.

<sup>227</sup> *The Defense of the Faith*, p. 173.

As for the question whether the natural man will accept the truth of such an argument, we answer that he will if God pleases by his Spirit to take the scales from his eyes and the mask from his face. It is upon the power of the Holy Spirit that the Reformed preacher relies when he tells men that they are lost in sin and in need of a Savior. The Reformed preacher does not tone down his message in order that it may find acceptance with the natural man. He does not say that his message is less certainly true because of its non-acceptance by the natural man. The natural man is, by virtue of his creation in the image of God, always accessible to the truth; accessible to the penetration of the truth by the Spirit of God. Apologetics, like systematics, is valuable to the precise extent that it presses the truth upon the attention of the natural man.<sup>228</sup>

By refusing to follow a presuppositional approach to defending the faith, apologists throughout history have seen their witness absorbed into the autonomous schemes of unbelief; indeed, the very position of those who profess to defend the faith has been both compromised by, and transformed into, the perspective of unbelief. If one's theology is not to be made over into the image of autonomous man, then *his theology must ground his apologetic* and inform its argumentation with respect to *starting point, method, and epistemological standard*. In contrast to Warfield (as well as the rest of traditional apologists), who held that apologetics must establish the presuppositions of theology, Van Til has reformed the field of apologetics by unashamedly holding that *theology must supply the presuppositions of apologetics*. The biblical truth of Reformed theology requires a *specific approach* to defending the faith; just as Reformed theology alone *proclaims* good news which fully and actually saves men, so a Reformed apologetic alone can remain faithful to the faith and be successful in *defending* the good news before Christianity's cultured despisers.

If there is not a distinctively Reformed method for the defense of every article of the Christian faith, then there is no way of clearly telling an unbeliever just how Christianity differs from his own position and why he should accept the Lord Jesus Christ as his personal Savior.<sup>229</sup>

The faith is best defended by that method of argumentation which does not entail an alteration of the faith defended. By allowing his Reformed theology to guide his presuppositional apologetic, Van Til has signaled the crucial difference between the Socratic outlook and that of Christ. He has done for apologetics what Calvin did for theology. By aiming to bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, Van Til's presuppositional apologetic has triggered the reformation of Christian apologetics. The foundation of Christian scholarship is to be found in the rigorously biblical epistemology to which Van Til adheres in his defense of the faith.

Although he undoubtedly intended it as a compliment, C. F. H. Henry inaccurately designated Cornelius Van Til as one of the three "men of Athens" in his dedication of *Remaking the Modern Mind*. We may be thankful that this has not been the case. The Lord has given Dr. Van Til a love and dedication for that city which *has foundations*, whose builder and maker is God. Van Til's citizenship as a Christian apologist belongs, not to Athens, but to the New Jerusalem. He has been a loyal follower in Christ rather than Socrates; in his extensive writings, his unceasing personal evangelism, and his loving counsel, he has continually demonstrated that "unless the Lord build the house, they labor in vain who build it." May God grant that his presuppositional apologetic will indeed signalize the *remaking* of the modern mind.

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<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 121-122.

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 335.