

Dr. Bahnsen Debates Atheist Lawyer at University of California, Davis

By Dr. Greg Bahnsen

By the time you have received this issue of *Penpoint* the student organization which calls itself "Truth Seekers" at the University of California, Davis, will have sponsored a major, public debate over the existence of God, scheduled for Wednesday, December 1, 1993.

Dr. Bahnsen, the resident scholar at SCCCS, was invited to argue the case for Christian theism. His atheist opponent - who had previous debate background arguing at U. C. Davis against God's existence - was an A.C.L.U. lawyer, Edward Tabash. Dissatisfied with the response given to Mr. Tabash by their theist proponent in a previous debate on campus, the "Truth Seekers" sought out Dr. Bahnsen's apologetical services for the "rematch."

Edward Tabash received his B.A. from U.C.L.A. and went on to earn the J.D. at Loyola University. As a piece of relevant but ironic family background, he comes from five unbroken generations of orthodox Jewish rabbis in eastern Europe. His grandfather and uncle were victims of Hitler's holocaust; his mother from Hungary was a survivor of Auschwitz.

Nevertheless, Tabash is an active and vocal supporter of abortion rights. He prides himself as a staunch political liberal, advocating the legalization of prostitution and free speech on college campuses. He serves as a surrogate debater for senators Diane Feinstein and Barbara Boxer, VP Al Gore, and President Bill Clinton. Tabash expresses brash, some would say arrogant, challenges against the Almighty. For example: "If the God of the Bible actually exists, I want to sue Him for negligence for being asleep at the wheel of the universe when my grandfather and uncle were gassed to death in Auschwitz."

Dr. Bahnsen replies that, if the God of the Bible does not exist, then Mr. Tabash loses all principled moral complaint about what Hitler did to the Jews. In a godless universe, what one "animal" does to other "animals" is ethically irrelevant. There is no basis for indignation or outrage. What happens, happens: period. We are left with Tabash's feelings and desires versus the feelings and desires of Hitler - with neither having any more "right" than the other. Indeed, as a staunch liberal supporter of personal freedom, Tabash should, in terms of the atheist worldview, defend Hitler's freedom to do as he desired!

Here's another of Tabash's "in-your-face" challenges: "If Christianity is the one and only true religion, let God appear to the world directly, rather than relying on ancient human-made writings, and tell us face to face how to worship and what to believe!"

Dr. Bahnsen wonders, in response, where Tabash has been - maybe asleep at the wheel in his studies. For it is precisely the definitive and glad proclamation of Christianity that God has indeed appeared to the world directly - in the person of His incarnate Son, Jesus the Messiah. The God-man confirmed the ancient writings (the scriptures) as well as telling us "face to face" what we are to believe and how we are to approach God. Jesus said: "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man comes to the Father except by me" (John 14:6). His utterly amazing claim was that He is the center of the one and only true religion - and He made that claim "in person," in the midst of human history for mankind to see and hear. It is obvious that Tabash is insincere and ingenuine in laying down his prerequisites for belief. His problem with God is not intellectual, but moral. Tabash is a rebel against Heaven who has an ax to grind against God, in defense of his personal rebellion.

Hear Tabash again: "The idea that Jesus resurrected from the dead and rose bodily to heaven is even less plausible than the notion that 2,000 years ago, little green Martians, flying in a red flying saucer, visited the site of the University of California at Davis."

Dr. Bahnsen answers by observing that what a person takes as "plausible" or as "implausible" is a reflection of his fundamental presuppositions - his own crucial assumptions about the nature of reality and how we know what we know. Therefore, when Tabash dismisses the resurrection of Christ as "implausible" (in his own eyes), he is not offering the slightest bit of evidence against the existence of God, but simply giving vent to his personal, chosen atheism. That is, he merely reasons in a circle, assuming the very thing he is supposed to be proving: viz., that God does not exist. For quite obviously, if the God portrayed in the Bible does exist - the Creator of heaven and earth who has almighty power and infinite understanding, who sovereignly governs every historical event that transpires on earth - then there is absolutely no "implausibility" about His ability to raise the dead. As Paul put it to King Agrippa years ago: "Why should it be judged a thing incredible with you that God does raise the dead?" (Acts 26:8).

The fact is that Mr. Tabash has a worldview, an underlying philosophy of reality, knowledge, and living. That worldview influences the way he thinks about anything - what he will accept as fact, how he assesses claims to truth, what he believes historically or scientifically, his view of man's nature and his proper conduct, the meaning of life, etc. The Christian believer has a worldview as well. In principle, these two professed worldviews stand in antithetical conflict with each other. These respective worldviews determine the way the atheist and the theist reason about anything - the way in which they argue or assess arguments - and thus play the crucial role in the different conclusions to which they come in their debate.

This does not mean that theism and atheism come down to an arbitrary, subjective choice. One is objectively true and provable, while the other is not. As the late professor of apologetics at Westminster Theological Seminary, Dr. Cornelius Van Til, put it: "We cannot choose epistemologies [theories of knowledge] as we choose hats... [as if] a matter of taste."

Dr. Bahnsen sets forth a rational, objective case for the existence of the Christian God, a case which fully takes into account the crucial function of one's worldview in his reasoning. He is quoted in the tabloid for the Tabash debate as saying: "Pursued to their consistent end, the presuppositions of unbelief render man's reasoning vacuous and his experience unintelligible; in short,

they lead to the destruction of knowledge, the dead end of epistemological futility, and to utter foolishness."

This was the perspective of the Apostle Paul as well. Paul's challenge, which is found in 1 Corinthians 1:20, was this: "where is the debater of this world? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?" According to Romans 1:21, atheists are both self-deceived (since they really do know God in their heart of hearts) and are led by their rebellious philosophies into intellectual folly. Paul wrote of unbelievers: "because knowing [the] God, they glorified Him not as God, neither gave thanks, but became futile in their reasonings and their senseless heart was darkened." Well did the Psalmist of old express it when he wrote that it is "the fool" who "has said in his heart, there is no God" (14:1).

Please pray that God will continue to use the power and persuasiveness of this challenge, voiced so often by Dr. Bahnsen, to bring men to Himself - a cogent "reason for the hope within us."