

## Another Cup of Coffee

By Dr. Greg Bahnsen

According to Van Til, apologetics aims to defend the Christian faith by answering the variety of challenges leveled against it by unbelievers, thereby vindicating the Christian philosophy of life (worldview) over against all non-Christian philosophies of life (worldviews).

There is a large number of ways in which Christian truth-claims come under attack. They are challenged as to their meaningfulness. The possibility of miracles, revelation, and incarnation are questioned. Doubt is cast upon the deity of Christ or the existence of God. The historical or scientific accuracy of the Bible is attacked. Scriptural teaching is rejected for not being logically coherent. Conscious life following physical death, everlasting damnation, and a future resurrection are not readily accepted. The way of salvation is found disgusting or unnecessary. The nature of God and the way of salvation are falsified by heretical schools of thought. Competing religious systems are set over against Christianity. The ethics of Scripture is criticized. The psychological or political adequacy of Christianity is looked down upon.

These and many, many other lines of attack are directed against Biblical Christianity. It is the job of apologetics to refute them and demonstrate the truth of the Christian proclamation and worldview - to "*cast down reasonings and every high thing that is exalted against the knowledge of God*" (2 Corinthians 10:5).

Therefore, apologetics involves intellectual reasoning and argumentation. The loathing of such things in many quarters of the modern Christian community is unhealthy. Reasoning is not an unspiritual activity, and argument does not mean personal contentiousness.

There is a use of the mind and scholarly procedures which is indeed proud and ungodly - "*walking in the vanity of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardening of their heart*" (Ephesians 4:17-18). Nevertheless, Paul just as clearly affirms "*you did not so learn Jesus*" (vs. 20). Christians have been renewed in the spirit of their minds (vs. 23; cf. Colossians 3:10) and granted repentance "*unto the knowledge of the truth*" (1 Corinthians 2:25). "We have the mind of Christ" (1 Corinthians 2:16), in light of which we seek to develop a philosophy that is not patterned after worldly thinking and human traditions, but rather after Christ, "*in whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are deposited*" (Colossians 2:3, 8).

Reasoning in this manner is an expression of true spirituality and godliness, and obedient response to God's requirement that in "*whatsoever you do, do all to the glory of God*" (1 Corinthians 10:31)

and that we "*love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind*" (Matthew 22:37). God does not want our minds eradicated, but transformed (Romans 12:2).

When we begin to use our intellects in the service of our Creator and Savior, we will naturally wish to do so with the best efforts and quality available. It is obvious in the pages of the New Testament that this was the case for the disciples, whether they were fishermen, tax-collectors, or studious teachers of the law. They put their minds to work - searching God's word for better understanding and reasoning with people to persuade them of its truth.

Yet they knew the difference between intellectual argument - the presentation of premises or reasons in support of an inference or conclusion, the offering of evidence to substantiate claims - and the interpersonal spirit of hostility or contention. Thus Peter, aware of different ways and argument can be conducted, specifically reminded his readers to offer their reasoned defense "*with gentleness and respect*" (1 Peter 3:15). Paul wrote: "the Lord's bondservant must not quarrel, but gentle toward all, apt to teach, forbearing, in meekness correcting those who oppose themselves" (2 Timothy 2:24).

This does not mean giving even an inch on the issues of truth over which we disagree with the unbeliever. But it does mean, as Dr. Van Til would always say, that we keep buying the next cup of coffee for our "opponent."