



GARY R. HABERMAS

THE HISTORY  
OF APOLOGETIC  
METHODOLOGY

OUTLINES AND NOTES



# **History of Apologetic Methodology:**

## **Outlines and Notes**

by Gary R. Habermas

**Copyright 2019**

## Text Abbreviations

Much of this text is an outline of three volumes on the subject of apologetic methodology. These three books are listed below, indicated by the author's last name.

“Dulles,” Avery Dulles, *A History of Apologetics*, Series: *Theological Resources* (New York: Corpus, 1971).

“Lewis,” Gordon R. Lewis, *Testing Christianity's Truth Claims* (Chicago: Moody, 1976; Reprint, Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1990).

“Ramm,” Bernard Ramm, *Varieties of Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1979).

NOTE: This E-book is a reworking of an old set of manually typed class notes. Numerous set-up, spacing, and other sorts of issues may be present.

# HISTORY OF APOLOGETIC METHODOLOGY

## Table of Contents

### **Section I. Three Major Types of Apologetic Systems (Ramm, 11-17) pages 6-10**

1. Systems Stressing Christian Experience: General Characteristics (Ramm, 15-16)
2. Systems Stressing Natural Theology: General Characteristics (Ramm, 16)
3. Systems Stressing Revelation: General Characteristics (Rmm, 16-17)

### **Major Problems in Apologetics (Ramm, 17-27)**

1. Relationship Between Philosophy and Christianity
2. Theistic "Proofs"
3. Apologetics and Epistemology
4. Importance and Extent of Sin
5. Importance of Revelation
6. How Much Certainty Does Christianity Produce?
7. Common Ground?
8. What Is Faith?
9. Place of Christian Evidences
10. Faith and Reason

### **Section II. The Biblical Basis for Apologetics: Scriptural Methodologies pages 11-13**

- A. Old Testament Approach
- B. Jesus' Approach
- C. Paul's Approach

D. Peter's Approach

E. Other New Testament Approaches

F. Summary from A Through E Immediately Above

G. Conclusion

**Section III. Apologetic Methodology in the Early Church (Dulles, 22-45, 70-71) pages 14-24**

A. Patristic Apologetics: Causes and Types (22-24)

B. Second Century Apologetic Works (24-31)

C. Major Third Century Apologists (31-45)

D. Conclusion and Observations (70-71)

**Section IV. Systems Stressing Subjective Immediacy (Ramm, 29-65) pages 25-32**

A. Blaise Pascal (1623-1662) (Ramm 31-47)

B. Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) (Ramm 49-65)

**Section V. Systems Stressing Natural Theology (Ramm, 87-124) pages 33-40**

A. Thomas Aquinas (1225?-1274) (Ramm 89-105)

B. Joseph Butler (1629-1752) (Ramm 107-124)

**Section VI. Systems Stressing Revelation (Ramm, 145-178) pages 41-47**

A. Augustine (354-430) (Ramm, 147-162)

B. John Calvin (1509-1564) (Ramm, 163-178)

**Section VII. Contemporary Protestant Apologetics (Lewis 45 – 339) pages 48-93**

A. Pure Empiricism: J. Oliver Buswell, Jr, (45-75)

B. Rational Empiricism: Stuart Hackett and Floyd Hamilton (76-99)

C. Rationalism: Gordon H. Clark (100-124)

D. Biblical Authoritarianism: Cornelius Van Til (125-150)

E. Mysticism: Earl Barrett (151-175)

F. Verificationism: Edward J. Carnell (176-209)

G. Conclusions (285-295)

**Chart: Summary of Apologetic Systems**.....

H. Other Recent Methodological Approaches (296-339)

## Section I. Classic Issues in Apologetics (Ramm, 11-27)

### I. Three Major Types of Apologetic Systems (11-17)

#### 1. Systems Stressing Christian Experience: General Characteristics (15-16)

- a. Emphasis on inward and subjective experience of gospel
- b. Holds to transcendence and hiddenness of God.
- c. Often a strong doctrine of sin
- d. Stresses paradoxes of Christianity
- e. Hostility toward traditional philosophy
- f. Rejects natural theology
- g. Often philosophically and apologetically naive
- h. Examples: Pascal, Kierkegaard, Brunner

#### 2. Systems Stressing Natural Theology: General Characteristics (16)

- a. Faith in man's reason
- b. Emphasizes empirical method
- c. Believes man is fallen, but reason still functions
- d. Religious propositions can be verified the same way as scientific assertions

#### 3. Systems Stressing Revelation: General Characteristics (16-17)

- a. Faith precedes understanding
- b. After faith, knowledge is to be sought
- c. Faith grounded in existence of God, work of Christ and inspired Word of God
- d. The Holy Spirit is indispensable for enlightenment.
- e. Depravity militates against use of reason
- f. Never compromise or dilute faith

## II. Major Problems in Apologetics (17-27)

### 1. Relationship Between Philosophy and Christianity

- a. Tertullian - Jerusalem and Athens
- b. Origen, Clement - Law led Jews to Christ
  - Logos led Greeks to Christ
  - Major Greek philosophers are believers
- c. Augustine - philosophy is handmaiden to theology
- d. Thomas - philosophy has independent status
- e. Ritschl - Kant
  - Bowne, Brightman - personalism

### 2. Theistic "Proofs"

- a. Thomas - most theistic arguments are valid
- b. C. Hodge - arguments not proof, but valuable
- c. Calvin — proofs are inconsequential
- d. Flew - Proofs invalid
- e. Kierkegaard, Pascal, Barth - Proofs are irreligion



### 3. Apologetics and Epistemology

- a. Some accept philosophical principles
  - 1) Butler - probability
  - 2) Rightman, Carnell - twofold test of consistency and conformity to fact
  - 3) Clark - consistency only
- b. Others scorn philosophical tests
  - 1) Kierkegaard - paradox
  - 2) Calvin, Barth - Revelation

### 4. Importance and Extent of Sin

- a. Pelagius - no depravity
- b. Roman Catholic Theology - man depraved, but can still reason
- c. Reformers - radical depravity
- d. Some Calvinists - common grace allows natural man to understand reason

### 5. Importance of Revelation

- a. Roman Catholic Theology - general revelation reveals God and His attributes
- b. Reformers - only special revelation can relate God
- c. Neo - Orthodoxy - Revelation is Christ; the Bible is only a witness to Him.

### 6. How Much Certainty Does Christianity Produce?

- a. Roman Catholic Theology - Papal infallibility and tradition
- b. Butler, Tennant - probability, just as in science
- c. Van Til - real certainty, not just probability
- d. Most apologists make a distinction:

- 1) Certainty - never proof for Christianity, but high probability, which is convincing.  
Even if Christianity is absolute, fallen man could only know if according to probability.
- 2) Certitude - inward attitude of complete assurance.

#### 7. Common Ground?

- a. Van Til, Barth - very little common ground
- b. Carnell and many others - common ground-in facts observable by all persons.

#### 8. What Is Faith?

- a. Augustine - response to credible claims which we do not direct witness to ourselves
- b. Thomas - cannot know and believe same truth at same time
- c. Kierkegaard, Pascal - faith anchored in heart - commitment

#### 9. Place of Christian Evidences

- a. Some (Geisler) are world-view oriented and subordinate evidences to the determination of the proper framework for them.
- b. Evidentialists (Montgomery) declare that evidences reveal God's truth to all who will objectively search.
- c. Others (Calvin) assert that evidences may be appealed to only after the Holy Spirit has acted.

## 10. Faith and Reason

- a.** Some - reason and revelation conflict
- b.** Others - reason leads to revelation, but stops there and reason cannot pursue
- c.** Each remain in own categories - reason with facts and faith with salvation and revelation.
- d.** Both entirely compatible

## Section II. The Use of Evidences in Canonical Scripture: Toward a Methodology

(apart from authorship or textual provenance discussions)

### A. Old Testament Approach: The Mighty Acts of God

1. 1 Kings 18:19-40, especially v. 24
2. Ps. 19:1-6
3. Ps. 77:11-20; 105:23-39 (cf. 99:6-7)
4. Ps. 114 (esp. vv. 3-5,7; cf. 106:7-12)
5. Isa. 41:21-23
6. Isa. 45:21

### B. Jesus' Approach: From Miracles

1. Matt. 21:23-27; 22:15-46
2. Lk. 7:19-23
3. Matt. 12:38-40; 16:1-4
4. Jn. 20:26-29
5. Difference between 2,3
6. Jn. 5:36; 10:38
7. Jn. 3:3

### C. Pauline Approach: Varied

1. Acts 14:6-7; 16:10, 14-15, 29-33; 18:5
2. Acts 17:1-4; 28:23
3. Acts 13:30-37; 1.7:30-31; 26:8,23
4. Acts 17:2-4, 17, 31; 18:4, 19; 26:22b-23
5. Acts 17:28-29
6. Rom. 1:3,4
7. Rom 1:19,20; 2:14-15
8. 2 Cor. 10:5
9. Cf. Col. 4:6
10. Cf. Titus 1:9

### D. Petrine Approach: From Miracles

1. Acts 2:22-32
2. Acts 10:38
3. 1 Pet. 1:3
4. 1 Pet. 3:15
5. 2 Pet. 1:16-21

### E. Other New Testament Approaches: Miracles and Testimony

1. Jn. 20:30-31
2. Heb. 2:3-4



3. Heb. 7:23-25

4. Jude 3

F. Summary from A Through E Immediately Above:

1. Reciting Natural Revelation (O.T. A-2; Paul C-7)

2. Simple presentation of the Gospel (Jesus, B-7; Paul, C-1)

3. Debate, rhetoric, disproving opponent (Jesus, B-1; Paul, C-4, 8, 9, 10; Peter, D-4; Jude, E-4)

4. Reciting O.T. Prophecy (O.T., A-5, 6; Paul C-2, 4; Peter D-5)

5. Reciting Miracles (O.T. A-1, 3, 4; Jesus B-2, 6; Peter D-2, 5; John E-1; Heb. E-2)

6. Reciting Resurrection (Jesus B-3; Paul C-3, 6; Peter D-1, 3; Heb. E-3)

7. Common Ground (Paul C-5)

G. Conclusion Regarding Canonical Scripture: Various Apologetic Procedures, Depending on Audience and Leading of Holy Spirit

### **Section III. Apologetic Methodology in the Early Church (Dulles, 21-45, 70-71)**

#### **A. Patristic Apologetics: Causes and Types (Dulles, 21-73)**

##### **1. Reasons for Early Apologetic Writings**

- a.** Converts from scientific or philosophical backgrounds desired to defend their conversions against their former views.
- b.** Philosophers attacked Christianity, blaming believers with incorrect teachings.
- c.** Emperors were sometimes indirectly involved with persecution (Trajan, Hadrian), marking them as candidates to receive reasoned defenses of Christianity.
- d.** Jews sometimes pointed Christians out for persecution.

##### **2. Types of Apologetics**

- a. Political apologies to win religious tolerance.
- b. Philosophical apologies to defend the faith and win converts.
- c. The style of these works often followed patterns present in  
Green philosophy.

3. How should wisdom of Greeks be accounted for? options

- a. Greeks were inspired by Moses, who predated them (Philo).
- b. Hebrew wisdom is more ancient than that of the Greeks (Josephus).
- c. Philosophy is God's gift to the Greeks, leading them to  
the same truths that the Jews get by revelation (Clement  
of Alex., Origen).

B. Second Century Apologetic Works (24-31)

1. Quadratus - apology to Hadrian (ca. 125 A.D.) - lost except for  
sentence in Eusebius mentioning Jesus' miracles and that some  
persons healed were still alive.

2. Aristides - Apology also to Hadrian (ca. 125 A.D.) stresses moral lives of Christians (instead of miracles) as surpassing that of the other groups of mankind: Barbarians, Greeks, Egyptians, and Jews.
3. Justin Martyr's First Apology (ca. 150 A.D.) Roman Emperors Antonius Pius and Lucias Commodus should make the effort to check and ascertain if Christians are not good citizens. They are unworthy of death penalty.
4. Justin Martyr's Second Apology (ca. 155-160 A.D.) Pagan philosophers arrived at truth through the use of reason.

Note: In both Apologies, Justin taught that the Logos enlightened the philosophers and that they were Christians (in some sense) without knowing it.

5. Justin Martyr's Dialogue with Trypho (150's A.D.) Justin's testimony of his conversion from fulfilled prophecy, and his argument from prophecy to deity of Christ and answers to objections from Jews concerning Christianity.

6. Pseudo-Justinian works such as Exhortation to the Greeks (prob. 3rd. cent.)
7. Tatian ca. 170 A.D. Polemic vs. Greeks, foreshadowing Tertullian; Moses predates Greek writers.
8. Athenagoras' Supplication for the Christians (ca. 180 A.D.) A plea for toleration, answering charges of atheism and immorality, Christianity has most exalted view of God and opposed sin.
9. Theophilus (ca. 180 A.D.) Converted from philosophy; similar to Tertullian; stresses religion of the heart.
10. Diognetus (120-210 A.D.) Answers three questions concerning the Christian rejection of the gods, Christian love and why Christianity is so "late" as a religion; more preaching than apologetic.
11. Themes of Second Century apologists:
  - a. Religious tolerance
    - 1) Christians believe in God, not atheism
    - 2) Christians are ethical; no immorality taught
    - 3) Christians not anti-state



- b. Conversion, including weaknesses of paganism and moving testimonies of conversion.
- c. Revelation in Scripture - ancient; unity of testimony; fulfilled prophecy.
- d. Classical heritage borrowed from (or is one antiquated by) Christianity; reason or Logos enlightens philosophers. Note: Justin an important influence here on Clement and Origen to Tillich and Rahner.
- e. Vs. Jews, based on fulfilled Messianic prophecy and fulfillment of law.

12. Critique of Second Century apologists: Not enough stress on:

- a. Character and Person of Jesus
- b. Jesus' miracles, esp. resurrection
- c. Answers to major apologetic questions such as faith/reason, other religions, etc.

## C. Major Third Century Apologists (31-45)

### 1. Tertullian (40-43)

- a. From Carthage, center of Latin-speaking world.
- b. Apology - application of principles of law (Tertullian was a lawyer) to Christianity.
  - 1) Absurdity of charges such as infanticide, immorality and atheism.
  - 2) Christians obey law and are moral.
  - 3) Little stress on philosophy; work built on eloquence and rhetoric.
- c. Against the Jews - Christ fulfills Old Testament prophecy and supersedes the law.
- d. Prescription of Heretics - argues that Christ gave authority to the Church and through the Scriptures; Heretics have neither, so are without any basis for their beliefs.

- e. Tertullian had little respect for Greek philosophy. "What has Jerusalem to do with Athens?... I have no use for a Stoic or a Platonic or a dialectic Christianity. After Christ, we have no need of speculation...."
- f. Tertullian minimized philosophy and preferred paradox. Christianity is to be believed because it is absurd. He was the forerunner of Kierkegaard and others (neo-orthodox) who wanted Christianity apart from philosophical dialogue. He taught Christianity as an affront to reason.

## 2. Clement of Alexandria (ca. 200 A.D.)

### a. Protrepticus

- 1) Polished literary form, resembling Greek writers.
- 2) Goes through Old Testament and New Testament to show that the Word was revealed to all men.
- 3) Greeks did receive some truth attributable to inspiration.

b. Clement was a "Christian humanist" with a convincing style who brought Christian apologetics to new heights.

### 3. Origen

#### a. Celsus' work vs. Christianity - written in two major sections

- 1) Celsus' objections to Christianity are voiced through an imaginary Jew -- no virgin birth, Jesus knew magic, his resurrection either fraud or delusion.
- 2) Celsus objects in his own person - Christians are irrational, Bible is full of legends, Christians should worship local deities.

#### b. Origen's Against Celsus - also two major sections

##### 1) Part 1

- a) Jesus and disciples died for their beliefs - no fraudulent character.
- b) Celsus picks and chooses Bible portions and should not ask for proof, because Trojan War cannot be proven, either.
- c) Jesus is Messiah -- messianic prophecies, miracles, "trances" of miracles still among believers.

- d) Disciples died for their beliefs - vs. fraud theory. No hallucination because they do not occur in daytime to sane persons. The resurrection was predicted.

2) Part 2

- a) True Christian does not despise true wisdom.
- b) Biblical history more reliable than Greek history.
- c) Bible does not tell immoral and incredible tales about God, as Greeks do about their gods.
- d) To worship gods is offensive to true God.
- e) Christians are good citizens.

c. Contra Celsum a classic in Christian apologetics - a point-by-point refutation of a critic which took Origen into many areas of thought.



- d.** Origen and Clement mark a new period in apologetics - of counter offensive against critics.

#### D. Conclusion and Observations (70-71)

1. Personal salvation testimony was stressed.
2. While prophecy was emphasized, especially with Jews, early apologists made little use of Jesus' miracles or resurrection.
3. From 3rd century onward apologetics was significantly changed. Almost all of the leading apologists opted for synthesizing Christianity with culture, especially with Plato and Plotinus.
4. Critique of synthesis, as in 3:
  - a. Obscures gospel message (works, philosophy, etc.)
  - b. Syncretism (and esp. universalism) compromises uniqueness of Christian message and allows for other philosophies.
  - c. Too mystical and other-worldly.

5. In 3rd and 5th centuries, Christian writers were successful in communicating to Roman Empire. Complacency and dilution occurred from this, as well.
6. The historical apologetic of the early church was almost replaced by the mystical and metaphysical tendencies in the Middle Ages.
7. Historical apologetic was very important, however, and was revived especially in 20th century (although also in Butler, Paley, etc.).

## **Section IV. Systems Stressing Subjective Immediacy (Ramm, 29-65)**

### **A. Blaise Pascal (1623-1662) (Ramm 31-47)**

#### **1. Historical Setting**

**a.** 17th century France - deism, materialism are prominent belief systems.

**b.** Pascal's diagnosis:

- 1) God is hidden, due to sinfulness of man.
- 2) Men refused God's revelation because of false trust in reason (=Descartes).

#### **2. His Polemic**

**a.** Existential shock and appeal - an attempt to shake a skeptic from his smugness.

- 1) Challenge concerning death - how can men be so caught up with small details of life without contemplating that death will end it all?

- 2) New astronomy - the vastness of the universe and man's minute place.
- 3) The wager - all must play game of life; the Christian wins no matter what the end result is. Why gamble so poorly when eternal life hangs in the balances?

**b. Attack on Reason**

- 1) Reason defined as mathematical philosophy of Descartes or Spinoza.
- 2) Original sin obscures man's reason.
- 3) Imagination stronger than reason (walking on plank over crevice).
- 4) No man lives by Descartes' mathematical philosophy.
- 5) Love, the highest experience, is not derived from reason.
- 6) Since heart knows intuitively and directly, reason is dependent on it for the first principles of philosophy.

**c. Skepticism**

- 1) We cannot attain either certain knowledge or absolute uncertainty; reason and sense experience fail us at this point.
- 2) Natural theology is not an option for the unbeliever (#242).

**d.** Reason's place

- 1) Most knowledge outside of religion is known by reason.
- 2) Even in Christianity, reason can distinguish the true from the false; otherwise faith would be "absurd and ridiculous" (#253, 273).

3. The Real Nature of Christianity - Heart and Reason

**a.** Heart (Subjective)

- 1) Human cognition divided into heart and Geometric mind.
- 2) The heart is "the center of his religious epistemology"(p. 42).
- 3) The heart feels God intuitively (#278, 282).
- 4) Religious knowledge (subjectivity) hereby separated from scientific and most philosophical knowledge (objectivity). Is this a leap of faith?  
(p. 43)

- 5) Faith is "a gift of God", "felt by the heart" (p. 43).
- 6) Faith is above reason, but not contrary to it (#265)

**b. Reason, Proofs (Objective)**

- 1) Cannot offend reason (#273).
- 2) Fulfilled prophecy (esp. messianic) and miracles are good evidences for Christianity but are not absolutely convincing. Paley states "...there is sufficient evidence to condemn, and insufficient to convince." (#564; cf. #843).

**B. Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) (Ramm 49-65)**

**1. Historical setting--Kierkegaard's "enemies"**

- a.** Hegelianism, introduced in Denmark by Heiberg and Martensen.
- b.** Romanticism--represents initial stage of existence:
  - 1) aesthetic - unrevealed life; no inwardness or suffering.
  - 2) ethical - faces prob. of guilt; leads to despair.
  - 3) religious - subjective belief, passion, suffering.

- c. Danish Christendom - automatically "Christian", no commitment or suffering.

## 2. God

- a. God is transcendent - not spatially, but existentially -- a qualitative chasm.
- b. God is hidden and works secretly.
- c. God is subject, never object - He is approached by passion, not by philosophical or historical evidences.

## 3. Man

- a. Man is spirit, a creature of time and eternity. Christ gives man his goal of eternal happiness.
- b. Man is sinful, although sin is more psychological than exegetical or historical. The fall is "mythical" or "existential."
- c. Man cannot be a "detached observer" of reality, as philosophers insist, but is an "existent", the "individual" of existentialism.

## 4. Truth

- a. Objective facts (history, science, math) have their place, but cannot yield Truth.
- b. Truth is existential, personal and religious.
- c. Truth is paradoxical. Instead of Hegel's threefold dialectic, Kierkegaard substitutes a twofold dialectic of paradox.
- d. Reason sets up paradox; only the passion of faith can mediate it.
- e. Truth is tested by its subjectivity ("Truth is Subjectivity") and inwardness. Certainty comes from passionate embracing of existential truth Which is objectively uncertain.
- f. Vs. other religions such as Islam, Kierkegaard holds that the Christian experience is so unique that it cannot be doubted or imitated. A true believer finds any other method of salvation simply unthinkable.

#### 5. False Approaches to Truth

- a. Kierkegaard opposes all non-passionate, non-existential approaches to truth.



- b. Philosophy tries to see reality from detached, eternal point of view. But one cannot escape being an individual existent.
- c. Natural theology and theistic "proofs" fail to get even a step closer to God; they are irreligion, paganistic.
- d. Historical approximation is not appropriate for faith and even rules it out.

6. Faith

- a. Faith is the highest of the passions.
- b. Faith is prompted by paradox; the supreme paradox is Jesus' incarnation.
- c. Faith is a solitary act, as illustrated by Abraham offering Isaac. God suspended the ethical for the religious.
- d. Faith is always a risk; a leap from historical, objective uncertainty to subjectivity (Postscet, p. 89). Without such a risk there is no faith. The bigger the risk or uncertainty, the greater the faith.
- e. Faith opposes knowledge; they are opposites.

- f. Faith is not placed in doctrine, but in the Person of the God-man, Jesus Christ. If faith was in doctrine, it would be partially objective. However, doctrine is not ruled out.
- g. Faith cannot be grounded in the objective or its existential character would be violated.

7. What is a Christian?

- a. Kierkegaard's greatest task is to define a Christian.
- b. A Christian passes along the stages of life until he is transformed by faith.
- c. A test of Christianity is suffering.
- d. Christians lead lonely, solitary lives such as Abraham (ex: Kierkegaard).
- e. True Christianity is identified by subjectivity.
- f. Christians are contemporaries of Christ; faith causes one to enter eternity, which is Christ's "time belt." Centuries of separation do not affect this conclusion (vs. Lessing).
- g. Christ is a historical Person, but faith in him is unhistorical. The event occurred in history, but is also out of history - in eternity - where Christ is confronted by faith (influence on Barth, neo-orthodoxy).

## Section V. Systems Stressing Natural Theology (Ramm, 87-124)

### A. Thomas Aquinas (1225?-1274) (Ramm 86-106)

#### 1. Introduction

##### a. His Sources

- (1) Scripture
- (2) Writings of Roman Catholic Church. In Summa Theologica Thomas quotes:
  - 56 Greek fathers
  - 22 Latin fathers
  - 41 popes
  - 46 philosophers
- (3) Augustine, the greatest theological influence on Thomas
- (4) Aristotle, the greatest philosophical influence on Thomas (“the Philosopher”), which is a marked shift from earlier scholastic thought (Platonic).

##### b. His basic philosophy

###### (1) Matter and form

- a. Objects are composed of matter (potential to become something-potency) and form (act).
- b. Example: a tree is a combination of matter and pattern (oakness).
- c. Thomas set forth a continuum from pure matter (pure potency) which doesn't really exist, to pure actuality (God). The entire universe exists between these two points.

###### (2) Knowledge

- a. All knowledge starts with sense experience, breaking the Platonic, rationalistic tradition of the past.
- b. The mind does have a potential structure and is not a simple "blank."
- c. Knowledge penetrates to reality by abstracting essences (form) from sensory material instead of degenerating to skepticism as with most empiricisms.
- d. Therefore, knowledge is indirect or inferential (contrary to Augustine's belief in direct knowledge of both God and self).
- e. Thomas thus believed that we know the actual object itself, not just ideas about it.

**(3) Being**

- a. The mind first grasps being, then essence.
- b. Result is theistic proofs, where God's being is seen as more foundational than His essence.

**2. Nature and Function of Human Reason**

- a. Philosophy has a function independent of theology (vs. Augustine)-reason can attain truth.
- b. Truths revealed by natural reason:
  - (1) God, His attributes
  - (2) angels
  - (3) natural law
  - (4) immortal soul
  - (5) Roman Catholic Church

- c. Greatest achievement of reason: proving God
  - 1. ontological argument is rejected--no innate knowledge of God (vs. Plato, Augustine, Anselm) and mental possibility is not actual existence (1,2,1).
  - 2. God is inferred from nature (Rom. 1:20) "Five ways:"
    - (a) motion to Prime Mover
    - (b) causation to First Cause
    - (c) contingency
    - (d) gradation
    - (e) design to Designer
  - 3. Structure of "five ways"--sense data to cause-effect to failure of infinite regress to God.
  - 4. God also spoken of by negation (Maimonides)--He is not in time, not movable, not created, etc.
  - 5. God is spoken of analogically (partly same, partly different) instead of univocally (the same) or equivocally (differently).
- d. Not all truths are attainable by reason.

### 3. Revelation and Faith

- a. Revelation is needed, since some truths are above reason and must be revealed by God.
- b. Revelation includes both Scripture and Roman Catholic tradition
  - a. Truths known by special revelation:
    - 1. Trinity
    - 2. creation (vs. Aristotle, Averroes)
    - 3. incarnation

- 4. redemption
- b. Evidences for special revelation are provided by miracles, fulfilled prophecy, beneficial effects of Christianity, etc.
- c. Faith is defined, "to believe . . . with assent" (II, II, 2, 1), a definition taken from Augustine. However, faith believes what cannot be proven, or it wouldn't be faith. Yet, faith is never irrational but always made on credible grounds.
- d. Some things that can be proven by reason are also revealed in theology, since not all persons can reason so as to demonstrate these truths like the philosophers can (like Averroes, Maimonides).
- e. Concerning the certainty of revelation:
  - 1. Faith in naturally revealed truths is superior with regards to evidence.
  - 2. Faith in special revelation is superior in connecting the person with the supernatural.

#### 4. Relationship Between Natural Reason (Philosophy) and Special Revelation (Theology, Faith)

- a. Thomas's epistemology is "double-layered"(p. 100), with both natural and special revelation, which cannot contradict.
- b. I Pet. 3:15--faith is not lessened when supported by reason, or Peter would not have issued this command. (Ques.: Was Peter referring to Thomas' full-blown apologetic?).
- c. Reason cannot prove objects of faith, or faith could not be itself.
- d. Philosophy serves revelation:
  - 1. prepares men to receive revelation.
  - 2. develops and categorizes truth
  - 3. provides a defense of revelation.

#### B. Joseph Butler (1629-1752) (Ramm 107-124)

##### 1. Butler and His Times

- a. Many consider Butler's The Analogy of Religion to be the greatest apologetic work ever written. Hume thought it was the best he had ever read.
- b. Butler practiced personal piety, such as giving substantially to charities and by living simply.
- c. Butler had a famous meeting with Wesley in 1739 and ordered Wesley out of his diocese, judging Wesley's revivalism to be too emotional.
- d. Butler wrote during the apex of English Deism, a movement which had started with a more rationalistic epistemology, later moving towards Locke and empiricism.
- e. Another influence was Newton's physics, which held that one system of law governed the universe.
- f. The Analogy took 20 years to write and it was condensed to a maximum level of logical concentration. Thus, it is quite difficult to read grammatically.
- g. No formal answer was ever given to Butler's attack on deism.
- h. Butler's ethical sermons are still viewed as masterpieces:

## 2. Butler's Apologetic Foundation

### a. Lockian empiricism

- (1) For Locke, the mind is a blank slate on which sense experience produces impressions. These impressions are organized by "an innate power of reflection" (p. 111). God, infinite space, endless time and substance also follow.
- (2) Butler adds some common sense and a rejection of speculative metaphysics such as those of Plato, Augustine and Thomas.
- (3) Religious truth must be validated the same way scientific truth is, based on probabilities. Absolute proof doesn't exist.

### b. Appeal to reason

- (1) Prudential persons grant assent on the grounds of the best evidence.
- (2) Reason can even judge God's revelation and reject it if found incorrect.

### 3. Butler's Theological Foundation

- a. Arminian theology
- b. The laws of nature, religion and revelation are the same; these stand or fall as one.
- c. Religion is essentially morality, although Christ and redemption have place, all in agreement with his Arminianism.

### 4. Probability and Analogy

- a. Probability is the grounds for apologetics; analogy provides the direction.
- b. We can only appeal to revelation which has been tested.
- c. Broad empiricism provides the basis for such testing.
- d. "Probability is the very guide of life" (Butler). While there is room for error, reasonable people will choose the best knowledge and probability is the best we can gain.
- e. The same steps by which experience is gained and decisions are made in everyday life are also the grounds of our religious decisions.
- f. Reasonable people are morally obligated to accept Christianity on probable grounds.
- g. Analogy transfers probable knowledge from one realm to another, since God governs all of His creation by the same general laws.
- h. Butler thereby moves from nature to natural theology to revealed theology by observing facts and then progressing to similar ones in other fields.

### 5. Example of Butler's Methodology: Immortality



- a. Concerning immortality, Butler argues from a number of comparisons from nature to the soul. Nature demonstrates change from caterpillars to butterflies, physical changes in humans, the human capacity to do non-physical things such as loving or suffering, and the fact that the body is only, the channel for actions such as perception. All of these are taken to be indications of the soul.
- b. While the soul may appear to partially depend on the body, certain of its functions such as reason and memory do not require the body.
- c. Answers to objections (pp. 121-122).

## 6. Revealed Religion

- a. The Analogy is divided into two parts: natural and revealed religion.
- b. Two reasons for the need of natural religion:
  - (1) To reinforce moral religion (like Tindal), which is the most important aspect of religion.
  - (2) To teach mankind truths not established by reason. While natural religion teaches about God the Father, revealed religion teaches about the Son and the Spirit.
- c. Scripture is proven by rather traditional presentations of miracles and fulfilled prophecy, which are said to be the greatest practical proofs for belief.
- d. Butler holds that Scripture is reasonably tested by moral standards, miracles and prophecy.
- e. Concerning biblical criticism, Butler points out that critics ought not require more from Scripture than it promises.
- f. Concerning biblical interpretation, Butler states that our exegesis should allow Scripture to speak for itself. It should be approached inductively, not dogmatically.
- g. Butler anticipated some of the debates of 20th century analytic thought in his adherence to the strict deducing of information from 'propositions, instead of what is presumed to be deducible from them.

## 7. Problems in Butler

- a. A weakness in Butler's approach is that it assumes God's existence and the general course of nature, largely due to his audience.
- b. Analogy can also be applied in reverse. Example: death in nature may point to death ending human experience, as well.
- c. Analogy seems to avoid key issues such as the actual existence of the soul, instead of presumed effects of it.

## Section VI. Systems Stressing Revelation (Ramm, 147-178)

### A. Augustine (354-430) (Ramm, 147-162)

#### 1. Introduction

##### a. Influences of Augustine

- (1) City of God-inspired philosophy of history
- (2) Confessions-introspective religious writing
- (3) Inspired Medieval mysticism, scholasticism and monasticism
- (4) Dominated theology throughout Middle Ages
- (5) Chief inspiration on reformers, especially Calvin

##### b. Criticisms of Augustine

- (1) Inspired thought of Middle Ages
- (2) Morbid interpretation of sex due to his own problems
- (3) Radical view of depravity of man
- (4) opposed empiricism and delayed modern science
- (5) Too dogmatic vs. heretics
- (6) Furthered Roman Catholic Church - "Mariology," authority of church, sacraments.

##### c. Influences on Augustine

- (1) Plato-who was held to be the prince of the philosophers and apparently a worshipper of the true God
- (2) Christian mother, very devout
- (3) Ambrose of Milan

#### 2. From doubt to God

- a. Two factors which disturbed Augustine:
  - (1) Sinfulness of man and how to overcome it
  - (2) The radical skepticism and universal doubt advocated by the New Academy.
- b. Like Descartes, Augustine concluded that doubting and questioning overcame radical skepticism, revealing that he did exist.
- c. Agreeing with the New Academy, the senses are unreliable sources for knowledge, since doubt implies truth and that truth is not empirical.
- d. Truth is gained by rational means through principles of innate knowledge such as law of contradiction.
- e. The innate ideas of the mind are classified as logic, predication, numbers, morals and beauty - which correspond to Plato's good, true and beautiful.
- f. Augustine proceeds to God as the True, the Beautiful and the Good, revealed to the heart through an inner proof.
- g. God is not known inferentially (vs. Thomas) but is innate within the soul. Since knowledge is possible, God is its Author, as noted above.
- h. In such ideas, Augustine was influenced by Plato--God as highest Form, an implicit ontological argument, God's creation of the world from forms or ideas in His mind, etc.
- i. Augustine also influenced by neo-Platonism--sin as lack of privation (Ramm says unbiblical), ineffability of God through negative affirmation, doctrine of existence, with God as Author of all Being and Truth, etc.

### 3. Illumination and Revelation

- a. God constantly impresses presuppositions on our minds.
- b. All truth of all men is derived from illumination of the human mind by God.  
Augustine interprets Jn. 1:9 to mean that the Logos enlightens all men.
- c. Depravity takes this light away, but it is restored by saving grace.
- d. Truth is always perceived by illumination. Thus, there are no "neutral truths" or "brute facts."
- e. Natural theology apart from special revelation is also disallowed.
- f. Illumination is the inward revelation in the heart revealing the truth of Scripture.

### 4. Faith and Reason

- a. Faith defined: to think with assent.
- b. Reason accepts proof; faith believes reliable and trustworthy testimony - chiefly Scripture and Church.
- c. Scripture and Church are established as trustworthy testimony. They are thus authoritative and to be accepted by faith.
- d. Canonical books are "free from error" and should be accepted without questioning their authority (p. 157).

- e. Augustine's view of Church authority is debated. Yet he did believe that through the Church the unbroken testimony of Christ and the apostles is received.
- f. Faith precedes reason because unregenerate man cannot be trusted (p. 158):
  - "Faith precedes, the intellect follows."
  - "We believed that we might know . . . ."
  - ". . . believe that thou mayest understand."
- g. However, faith is never a leap but is based on solid reasons. Genuine faith demands adequate basis and would be unreasonable if not believed.
- h. The will is most important human faculty - even faith is a "species" of the will.

## 5. Miracles and Prophecy

- a. Augustine claimed only to accept miracles which he observed, or which could be verified.
- b. The universe itself is God's greatest miracle.
- c. We do not believe in Jesus "without any proofs," such as fulfilled prophecy (p. 161).

## B. John Calvin (1509-1564) (Ramm, 163-178)

### 1. Introduction

- a. Calvin was plagued by many physical problems throughout his life.
- b. His literary works include his Institutes, Commentaries, Letters, etc.
- c. Calvin's strong points included logic, Bible exegesis, wide training in the liberal arts (classic humanism), knowledge of patristics and much versatility such as languages, law and education.
- d. Concerning apologetics, Calvin agreed with Luther:
  - (1) The scholastic synthesis between theology and philosophy failed
  - (2) Faith needs no assistance from philosophy.
- e. Yet, there are differences in interpretation concerning Calvin's apologetics (Hodge, Warfield vs. Kuyper, Van Til).

## 2. General Revelation to All Men

- a. There is a general revelation of God in human nature which is present in every person at birth and is continually impressed on the individual throughout his life.
- b. God's general revelation is revealed in such aspects of man's nature as his moral sense, intelligence, talents, his own heart condition (his need for God) and in man's sense of his own depravity.
- c. This revelation cannot be effaced.
- d. God's general revelation is also revealed in nature, where there are "unmistakable marks of his glory ..." (p. 167).

- e. God's general revelation is also revealed in His providential care of men, such as seen in the natural order and in history.
- f. None, even the uneducated, can claim ignorance of this double revelation which occurs both in man's inner nature and in creation.

### 3. God's General Revelation is Rendered Helpless by Man's Depravity.

- a. This revelation does not have the effect on man which it should, due to depravity, which blocks proper knowledge of God.
- b. As a result, people turn to false religions.
- c. Three teachings follow for Calvin:
  - (1) Man is still without excuse, for God's witness is in us and cannot be erased. Even people who deny it turn to God in their difficult times. "There are no atheists in foxholes" (Ram, p. 170). Sin does not change this basic witness.
  - (2) Philosophical study cannot change the problem caused by depravity and is no match for it. However, Calvin does make use of various philosophical elements in his writings.
  - (3) False religion will always be with us because "man is incurably religious" (Ramm, 171) and must worship something.



**d.** Conclusion: For Calvin there is an objective natural revelation but there can be no natural theology due to man's depravity.

4. Special Revelation Alone Overcomes Man's Depravity.

- a.** Calvin does not formally speak of his philosophical or apologetic basis. There is no prior proof of God or Scripture.
- b.** His emphasis is on special revelation and the redemption which is the only answer to man's depravity. (Calvin places strong stress on special revelation's redemptive character.)

5. Special Revelation Needs the Witness of the Spirit.

- a.** Scripture never becomes the Word of God, but is that Word (vs. Barth, Brunner).
- b.** Neither is the Church necessary for proper validation of Scripture (vs. Roman Catholic Church).
- c.** The witness of the Holy Spirit (illumination and persuasion) gives divine certainty to special revelation.
- d.** This divine witness of the Holy Spirit can end all doubt, which is present when one does not receive Scripture as God's words. Reason cannot remove this doubt, but certainty does come from the witness of the Spirit. The certainty provided by the spirit is higher than any human witness can provide, evicting all doubt.

## **Section VII. Contemporary Protestant Apologetics (Lewis 45 – 339)**

From Gordon R. Lewis' Testing Christianity's Truth Claims

### **A. Pure Empiricism: J. Oliver Buswell, Jr, (45-75)**

#### **1. Objective Evidence, Empirically Ascertained**

- a.** Vs. rationalism – no true innate ideas in mind; the mind is a blank slate (like Locke)
- b.** Knowledge is empirical, in tradition of such thinkers as Aristotle and Thomas.
- c.** Even presuppositions are not exempted from empirical testing, since they are not self-attesting
- d.** All knowledge begins with sensory experience; reasoning is inductive
- e.** Buswell espouses a “wide empiricism” which views all of the facts of experience
- f.** We do not know things directly, but only by inference. We infer things-in-themselves and minds-in-themselves from their effects. We have no direct intuition even of other minds.
- g.** 3 steps of inductive reasoning
  - (1)** Observe facts
  - (2)** Reason from facts to cause of facts

(3) Conclusions proceed from probable causes

- h.** No argument can reach more than a highly probable conclusion
- i.** The Holy Spirit can use highly probable conclusions for regenerations

## 2. Law of Logic

- a.** Buswell makes room for deductive truth by logical inferences.
- b.** However, these laws (like all knowledge) are inferred from experience
- c.** Enumeration of 3 traditional laws:
  - (1) identity – a proposition in a single context has a single meaning
  - (2) opposites – meaning is either true or false
  - (3) contradiction – two propositions cannot both be true if they affirm and deny the same thing at the same time and respect
- d.** Evidence for these laws comes from the facts that all discourse must utilize the, without them life could not continue as we know it, and from Christians, Scripture confirms them.
- e.** Conclusions: These laws are highly probable.

## 3. God and Reason

- a.** Apologetics can begin anywhere. So, the question is where is it practical to begin?

- b.** Buswell's succinct cosmological argument (p. 50):
  - (1)** If something exists
  - (2)** somethings must be eternal, unless
  - (3)** something comes from nothing
- c.** All data supports (1), the existence of some things
- d.** Data strongly opposes (3), that something can come from nothing
- e.** Universe probably not eternal, as indicated by disintegration of radioactive materials, consumption of hydrogen in sun and second law of thermodynamics.
- f.** The only other "causal agency" which we know is "will." Blind will is far less likely to have caused personal intelligence.
- g.** Daily experience reveals that a personal cause is the best explanation for a personal universe.
- h.** A broad teleological argument like Tennant's reveals the likelihood that God is the "Purposer" of the universe.
- i.** Both natural and moral evil is explained by man's voluntary sin.
- j.** Man's personal qualities, morality and idea of God (the cosmological, not the ontological idea) are much more in favor of a God who is conscious, intelligent, purposeful and personal.

- k.** The combination of the nature and order of the cosmos plus point "j" make the case for God as strong as any inductive argument can be (for Buswell).
- l.** Buswell is Thomistic in many respects, but rejects Thomas' "exclusive" use of analogical language in favor of some univocal language, as well. He agrees that equivocal language is faulty.
- m.** Combining the historical Jesus with "cosmic teleology," Buswell asserts a high degree of probability for Christian theism, (the God of the Bible).

#### 4. Truth and Faith

- a.** Buswell distinguishes between the objective and subjective aspects of faith.
- b.** Faith is accepting conclusions which are based on good evidence.
- c.** The text of truth is the "integration" of "consistent, verified ideas with life" (Lewis p.59).  
Integration involves consistent, coherent and verified propositions which fit together in a system.
- d.** Accepting religious truth claims is no different from accepting scientific truth claims.

#### 5. Scriptures and Deity of Christ as empirically verified by John Gerstner (since much of Buswell's work on these subjects is out of print).

- a.** Gerstner begins by showing that the Scripture is trustworthy (not inspired at this point).

(1) Archaeologists (especially Albright) have shown Scripture to be reliable history.

(2) Critical studies have vindicated the gospels as good sources for the life of Jesus.

b. Deity of Christ

(1) Jesus made unique claims in history of religions including His own Deity.

(2) Miracles and fulfilled prophecy authenticate Jesus' message (Hume is wrong).

c. Scripture is inspired

(1) Jesus' testimony is established, and He argued for inspiration of Scripture.

(2) Old Testament based on prophets and approved by Jesus.

(3) N.T. based on apostles, who were appointed by Jesus and who did miracles.

(4) Fulfilled prophecy verifies this conclusion, with infinitesimal odds vs. chance.

6. Evaluation of Pure Empiricism

a. No one can be completely objective. Buswell agrees and supports probability.

- b.** Buswell's entire system is based on truth of cause and effect-but it is valid in metaphysics and even if so, it cannot be applied beyond the physical world if one is utilizing only empirical methodology alone.
- (1) Buswell tries to support causality based on experience alone, but Lewis' critique appears valid here.
  - (2) One option is Hackett's combination of empiricism with rationalism.
  - (3) Another option is Gerstner's argument from the historicity of Christ to Christian theism, since it substitutes visible, historical facts for causal arguments (p.68). Such an approach would follow the arguments of some scholars from Augustine to Carnell and to others more recently.
- c.** Pure empiricism alone cannot get to faith and trust in Person and claims of Christ. Buswell might respond that history can lead to this via broad empiricism, but a possible limitation on pure empiricism perhaps still stands. As Lewis asserts, "To the extent that it rests on a person's authority, it is no longer strict empiricism" (p.70).
- d.** Pure empiricism does not establish the truth of the whole Bible. At best, it could only show that it is valid in all tested items, since pure empiricism cannot extend beyond the strict evidence. What about ethics, atonement, etc.?

- e. Is probability a sufficient basis for faith? Buswell would say "yes" because it is the basis of all of life.
- f. In summary, strict empiricism rests too heavily, on causal arguments and often extends beyond itself in order to establish crucial conclusions such as inspiration or salvation, which are based on Jesus' authority. It would be better to admit the limitations of strict empiricism instead of trying to defend inferences from data as being itself empirical.



## B. Rational Empiricism: Stuart Hackett and Floyd Hamilton (76-99)

### 1. The Thought-Forms of the Mind

- a. We can know universal and necessary principles because they are imprinted on the human mind.
- b. In the mind are found the laws of contradiction and causality.
- c. Additionally, our experience is organized according to quantity (unity or plurality), quality (reality or negation), relation (existence, causation, reciprocity), modality (possibility or necessity).
- d. These principles are self-evidently true because they are implanted in all persons. They are logically certain, not just probable.
- e. Like jello, which requires the jello itself and a mold, knowledge requires experience plus the mind's thought forms.
- f. Hackett generally follows Kant, but disagrees in that knowledge cannot be limited to sense data, for this conclusion itself is not based on such data.
- g. Hackett defends these categories in that they are needed for knowledge and that to deny them is either self-contradictory or meaningless. Empiricism, pragmatism, etc. all must assume these principles.
- h. All knowledge presupposes the mind's ability to judge experiential data and thus presupposes thought-forms, for such judgments are not derived from experience itself.
- i. Coherence is the major test for truth because correspondence can only be checked by coherence. The truth or falsity of a statement is checked by:
  - 1) whether it is self-consistent with the application of the mind's structure to experiential data.

2) whether it is able to be correlated with already established data.

## 2. God

- a. Since unbelievers and believers share the same thought-forms and publicly-observable experience, a natural theology can be constructed.
- b. Arguments for the existence of God are thereby more conclusive than they could ever be in a pure empiricism.
- c. Hackett pursues two major arguments for God's existence:
  - 1) God as the Author of the mind's actually-existing thought-forms, which Hackett is willing to call a version of the ontological argument. He criticizes the traditional ontological arguments for jumping from thought to existence.
  - 2) 'An infinite cause of finite existence is needed since infinite regress is untenable (like Craig and similar to Geisler).
- d. Man's dependence, intelligence, the character of the mind (which transcends space and time) and human morality all point to God's character as the Cause.
- e. Like Buswell, Hackett defends the usage of some univocal language about God.

### 3. Special Revelation

- a. Floyd Hamilton applies Hackett's type of apologetic to Scripture.
- b. Hamilton argues for a natural origin for world religions outside of Christianity.
- c. He also argues from the literary phenomena, ethics, unity, historical, geographical and political accuracy of Scripture. Wherever the Scriptures are tested by external criteria they are shown to be correct.
- d. Textual (lower) criticism has vindicated the texts of Scripture.
- e. Higher criticism is not only unwarranted, but can be turned back on itself.
- f. Apparent discrepancies can be answered.
- g. Three major evidences for Christianity: His
  - (1) resurrection of Jesus
  - (2) fulfilled prophecy
  - (3) Christian experience

### 4. Rational Empiricism and the Invisible Gardener

- a. The garden and those in it are finite, demanding an infinite Creator.
- b. God has personally communicated with His creatures, according to the evidence, such as prophecy and miracles.
- c. "There is an invisible Gardener and the Bible is His Revelation (Lewis, p.94).

### 5. Evaluation

- a. Is there really a difference between rational empiricism and pure empiricism and the issue of certainty? It would seem from their methodology plus certain statements (Hamilton, p.95) that the rational empiricists also espouse probable certainty instead of logical certainty.

- b. Some have blamed the rational empiricists with overstatements of their claims, i.e., being too dogmatic. Example: Hamilton claims proof for God's existence, as if he had mathematical demonstration (p.95).
- c. A major concern is that we cannot demonstrate which thought-forms are really present in the mind and which ones are not. Lewis concludes that, while he would agree that the law of non-contradiction is a valid thought-form, (because to deny it presupposes its validity), causality is on much shakier grounds (p.96). And what about the organizing principles of experience listed in Blc above? How do we dogmatically base a system on the presence of particular thought-forms?
- d. Hamilton's case for Scripture is not as strong as Gerstner's. We should argue from Christ's validated testimony to Scripture, as Gerstner does, not from independent evidences to Scripture, as is the major part of Hamilton's apologetic.
- e. How do rationalistic empiricists respond to current positions on the subjective nature of history? Can they answer such issues based on the rational structure of the mind, or must more work be done with the historical apologetic itself?
- f. Lewis concludes that some feel the evidence of rational empiricism is inadequate to support its difficult thesis.

## C. Rationalism: Gordon H. Clark (100-124)

### 1. The Failure of Empirical Approaches

- a. Like Kant and Hackett, the human mind contains innate categories of thought.
- b. The best example of "a" is the law of non-contradiction, which holds universally and necessarily.
- c. Inductive, empirical observations are probable at best, but not necessary. Therefore, since the laws of logic are necessary, they cannot be derived from experience (like Burwell.).
- d. If all we have is empiricism, we must always be skeptical concerning truth-claims. Like Hume, we can only know our impressions.
- e. While agreeing with Hackett that the mind does contain the causal principle, Clark does not think that we can specify any particular cause, such as God.
- f. Clark's reaction is at least partially an attack on the modern scientific method, which he believes is not capable of ascertaining truth.
- g. Clark holds to operationalism, whereby science is only conceived of as a set of operations, not as a system of discovering truth.
- h. Natural theology of any sort is not able to answer the problem of evil and thus we must turn to special revelation to learn of man's sin.

### 2. Fallacies in the Cosmological Argument

- a. Clark finds cosmological arguments to be both invalid and irrelevant.
- b. Such arguments are invalid because:
  - (1) They depend on Aristotle's circular argument concerning motion.
  - (2) Thomas' arguments against infinite regress assume an unmoved Mover and are thus circular, as well.

(3) It cannot be shown that the world is an effect (composition).

(4) The term "exist" is utilized in two different senses  
(equivocation).

c. Cosmological arguments are also irrelevant to Christian theology:

(1) They cannot answer the problem of evil.

(2) Even if valid, they would prove a physical cause and deity.

(3) They only require a finite deity.

### 3. Problems with Christian Evidences

a. We cannot argue from archaeology to inerrancy because to verify several instances is not the same as verifying all of Scripture.

b. Evidences such as prophecy, miracles or even the resurrection cannot occupy the place of "first principles" in one's apologetic: Rather, they are only valuable later, in our own testimony or in answering critic's questions.

c. The resurrection "purely as an isolated historical event" does not prove Christian theology (Clark, p. 107).

d. One's world view determines the interpretation of events.

### 4. Starting Point: Christian Presuppositions

a. All world views begin with presuppositions, whether these are recognized or not.

b. Since they are starting points, presuppositions cannot be demonstrated. If one attempts to prove them, one will be guilty of either circular reasoning or an infinite regress.

- c. Once these presuppositions are determined, an entire system will follow in deductive, syllogistic style. In this, Clark finds his major analogies in geometry, as did Descartes.
- d. We must begin with God and Scripture or we will never get God or facts. Apologetics comes from Scripture, not vice versa.
- e. One answer to the charge of circular reasoning is that all systems are also guilty ("You--Too" Fallacy?).

#### 5. Test of Truth

- a. Clark proposes that conflicting claims be tested by the law of contradiction and by consistency.
- b. The laws of logic, and non-contradiction in particular, are both consistent with Scripture and are required for meaningful communication.
- c. Consistency involves constructing the best system with the fewest difficulties.

#### 6. Apologist's Negative Task

- a. If non-Christian systems are contradictory, their systems should not be accepted as true. Clark endeavors to reveal contradictions in all non-Christian systems (termed "apohohic"). This is the first task of apologetics.
- b. Example 1: Logical positivism's verification principle violates its own rule and cannot be verified.
- c. Example 2: Dewey's behaviorism denies consciousness but smuggles in all its advantages.

- d. Example 3: Communism denies objective standards, but then asserts that its values are true.
- e. Example 4: Kierkegaard opts for subjectivity and hence cannot distinguish truth from fancy.
- f. Clark attempts to show that we have a choice between skepticism and the Scriptures, for if there is any real meaning then there must be eternal truths and an Eternal Mind Who reveals them.

#### 7. Apologist's Positive Task

- a. Clark's defense of Christian truth is to show that it is consistent. He likens this process, which he terms "axiomatization," to the task of a geometrician.
- b. Clark shows the consistency of Christianity in such areas as history, politics, ethics, epistemology and language.
- c. When the Christian system is shown to be consistent and the nonbeliever's system to be inconsistent, one should test the latter and embrace the former. However, only the Holy Spirit can clearly lead someone to do this.
- d. Questions: Does not "c" require that we check other philosophies almost ad-infinitum? What about those we have not checked? What about possible philosophies which are not popularly held (if at all)? See Evaluation below.

#### 8. Common Ground

- a. It is psychologically possible for unbelievers and believers to agree on certain propositions.
- b. All humans also have "a common capacity for faith" and are able to reason.



- c. As a result, the message of the gospel, plus certain aspects of morality and theology are a point of contact.
- d. Clark thereby allows some common moral and theological ground.
- e. Apart for the Holy Spirit, none of these areas can result in saving faith.

#### 9. Clark and the Invisible Gardener

- a. The believer does not appeal to facts but to inconsistencies in the unbeliever's position.
- b. The believer also refers to the logical consistency of the Christian position.
- c. The unbeliever is then called upon to repent.

#### 10. Evaluation

- a. As mentioned under 7d, a major weakness in Clark's thesis is that he cannot investigate every other option and can only speak of those he has specifically treated. His conclusions can only be "to the best of his knowledge" (*italics--Lewis, p.119*), and are thus limited just like the empirical systems of which he is so critical. Does his system regress to skepticism like the empirical systems which he critiques this way, since his approach is also based on probability and not complete certainty?
- b. How does Clark know that there could not be two or more consistent systems? It would appear that there could be many, each consistent with its own rules.
- c. Additionally, while contradiction can reveal error, consistency does not guarantee truth. A system could conceivably be consistent, but untrue. Example: Christian Science could

be self-consistent, but untrue since it does not mesh with experience. But since Clark does not allow the test of experience, he cannot disprove it if consistent.

- d. Clark is probably wrong in his assertion that science cannot arrive at any truth. While science cannot establish a complete world view by itself, this is not to say that it cannot discover some truth. Lewis notes that some of the same reasons which Clark disallows science would disallow his own method, since it does not provide proof.
- e. Syllogistic reasoning alone is too narrow of a basis for judging world views. Besides, syllogisms are largely confirmed based on experience, which Clark apparently rejects as a test.
- f. In spite of Clark's critique, experience can be used to establish or disprove epistemological claims. Reason is not the sole method of discovering facts, especially when it cannot proceed beyond probability in establishing its claims.
- g. Positively, Clark's methodology provides significant critiques of non-Christian philosophies.

## D. Biblical Authoritarianism: Cornelius Van Til (125-150)

### 1. Against Evidentialism

- a. Agreeing with Clark and others, Van Til opposes any evidential approach to Christianity.
- b. Also, like Clark, Van Til believes that Hume successfully argued against pure empiricism, showing that its end result is skepticism.
- c. It is also incorrect to begin one's system with rational categories such as causality or contradiction (vs. Clark and others).
- d. One cannot meet the unbeliever on any sort of epistemological common ground, including theistic arguments.

### 2. Systems Provide the Meaning for Facts

- a. All facts must be interpreted in light of other facts and, ultimately, as God interprets them.
- b. In fact, if God is not presupposed, Van Til asserts that no facts at all could be known. Thus, we do not deal with probabilities, but absolute necessity, for only on the fact that God exists are facts knowable at all.
- c. Therefore, "bare facts" get us nowhere. Hume comes out the victor. Facts are interpreted by systems or world views.

### 3. Basic Presuppositions - Scripture and God

- a. Scripture
  - (1) The Word of God is presupposed as the epistemological basis which provides the ultimate interpretation of reality.

- (2) Van Til refuses to compromise the authority of Scripture, which he believes is done by Catholics, Arminians, and other systems of apologetics outside of consistent presuppositionalism.
- (3) Van Til does not oppose the gathering of facts, scientific or otherwise, as long as they are biblically interpreted.
- (4) Thus, all facts must correspond to the teaching of Scripture.

**b. The Christian, triune God**

- (1) Again, no knowledge is possible if the Christian God does not exist.
- (2) Against Buswell, Hackett and Clark, Van Til believes that it is idolatry to consider non-contradiction to be an expression of God's very nature and being. Such is to Confuse God with man's rationality.
- (3) Van Til even holds that the Bible violates the law of non-contraction, such as the antinomy between prayer and God's unchanging nature. This makes Scripture, not logic, the rule of possibility and impossibility.
- (4) Van Til opts for analogical theological language in that we are unlike God. Equivocation leads to skepticism, but univocal language leads to an identification of God and man

**c. Without the Christian presuppositions of Scripture and God, knowledge is impossible.**

#### 4. Common Ground

- a. Van Til admits no ultimate epistemological common ground. However, unbelievers can inconsistently know true facts through modern science, philosophy, etc.
- b. Since believers uphold God's revelation and unbelievers reject it, they will interpret these facts differently.
- c. The unbeliever is in sin and is only regenerated and able to understand truth by the Holy Spirit.
- d. Some Calvinists disagree with Van Til, holding that general revelation and common grace can provide common epistemological ground.
- e. Van Til does admit common metaphysical ground between believers and unbelievers:
  - (1) the metaphysical dependence of all persons on God for existence.
  - (2) the psychological suppression of God's truth.
  - (3) the moral and spiritual rebellion against God.

#### 5. Apologetic Methodology

- a. The chief apologetic task is to reveal the sinner's rebellion against God.
- b. The unbeliever is encouraged to accept Christian presuppositions, upon which all other facts will be revealed as intelligible.
- c. Van Til admits the circular nature of his apologetics, but so is all reasoning said to be circular (including scientific thought). ("You-Too Fallacy"?)
- d. We don't verify Scripture by facts, since the facts themselves can only be seen in light of Scripture. Evidences thus do

not verify Scripture, since the resurrection, for instance,

can only be interpreted as a part of Christian theism as a whole.

- e. Even witnessing by one's personal testimony is invalid unless it is seen in the complete context of Christianity.
- f. Van Til's stress is thus on Christianity as an entire unit.
- g. Negatively, to reject Christianity is to reject the only ground for truth.
- h. Positively, to accept Christianity is to give life ultimate meaning.

## 6. The Invisible Gardener

If the Scriptures and the Christian God are presupposed, the facts in the garden (and the universe) have meaning; if not, there can be no facts concerning the garden or the universe.

## 7. Evaluation

Van Til's apologetic demands comment, for if he is correct, virtually all other apologists who are not consistently Reformed are compromisers of Christianity.

- a. Van Til's system appears more theological than apologetic, for he often states beliefs rather than defending them.
- b. In light of many contemporary conflicting truth-claims, the Scriptural admonition to test such claims (Isa. 41:21f.; 45:21f.; Deut. 13:1-3; I Jn. 4:1-3) appears to conflict with Van Til's system.
- c. Paul's methodology in Acts in arguing with unbelievers from

prophecy and/or the resurrection to salvation (Acts 17:19; etc.) is a serious roadblock for presuppositional apologetics.

- d. Van Til fails in his attempt to point out logical contradictions in Scripture.
  - (1) His examples of such cannot be sustained.
  - (2) Van Til utilizes non-contradiction repeatedly in arguing against Thomists, Arminians and fellow Reformed scholars.
  - (3) To employ Van Til's methodology would be to question both Scripture and the Westminster Confession.
  - (4) Logic is not above God but is an actual expression of His nature
- e. Van Til denies the ability of the natural man to discern truth, yet he appeals to unbelievers to perceive that Christianity makes facts intelligible. Van Til himself asserts that "The Christian-theistic position must be shown - ... to be the position which alone does not annihilate intelligent human experience" (Defense of the Faith)." As James Daane asserts, Van Til does not extract himself from the "autonomous man" which he vehemently rejects, since he even appeals to something in the natural man which recognizes that Christianity is the only explanation for the facts (see 56). If he responds that they recognize such through salvation, what is the difference between this and evidentialism?

## E. Mysticism: Earl Barrett (151-175)

### 1. Weaknesses of Traditional Apologetics and Philosophy

- a. Drug and mystical experiences have some common features:
  - losing oneself in Deity or nature, the minimizing of time,
  - ineffability and bliss. Rational evidences are of little

or no value. Truth is direct, personal and self-authenticating.

- b.** Barrett and, to a lesser extent, Warren Young are two evangelicals who stress self-authenticating Christianity, but which also differ from "a."
- c.** For Barrett, rationalistic apologetics fail both to take sin seriously and to give the proper place to faith (Heb. 11:6).
- d.** Theistic arguments do not produce belief. Like Anselm, they can only come from a believing heart.
- e.** Nonetheless, rationalism provides some positive insights in realizing that truth ultimately comes from God, that we can be certain of truth and that skepticism, agnosticism and relativism are incorrect options.
- f.** Empiricism also fails to establish ultimate truth, especially in the radical stance that the self cannot be known. If we do not start with the self, no knowledge is gained.
- g.** As with Augustine, Descartes, Pascal and others, we can move from ourselves to God.
- h.** Empiricism also fails in that it works with too narrow of a concept of experience, often ignoring morals, religion, etc.
- i.** Empiricism is at least partially dependent on rational principles. Empiricism demands a connection between knowledge and experience, which is a natural principle.
- j.** Empiricism is a valid means of gaining knowledge, though is not the only source of truth.
- k.** Revelational apologetics exhibit the weakness of credulity in not providing valid answers concerning other non-Christian revelational claims.

## 2. Christian Mysticism

- a.** The strongest evidence for Christianity is Christian experience. Barrett calls this "final" evidence religious empiricism or Christian mysticism.



**b.** Christian mysticism is intuitive and obtains knowledge immediately and directly.

**c.** Characteristics of Christian mysticism:

(1) A psychological (not logical) certitude which is self-validating.

(2) Mystical experience is cognitive in the sense of being

a sudden, penetrating insight concerning God. He is not known logically, but by

"the immediacy of feeling." This "objective presence" of reality in "human

consciousness" shows that something is there (Barrett, p. 162).

**d.** This experience need not be irrational.

**e.** Differences in theology among mystics are "inconsequential" in comparison to the importance

of the "awareness of union with spiritual realities, and the practice of the presence of God"

(Barrett, p. 163).

- f. Barrett rejects any pantheistic absorption or metaphysical union with God. Thus, one does not necessarily lose one's identity, but rather one often experiences a heightening of self-consciousness while feeling "complete harmony with God" (Barrett, p. 165).
- g. Such experiences cannot be proven but only experienced, for it is nontransferable and ineffable.
- h. Such experiences often cause one to recognize more, fully that God is love, leading to ethical results such as commitment and holiness.
- i. What occasions cause mystical experiences? Barret suggests a religious environment, Scripture, imagination, feelings such as love or humility and faith.

### 3. Christian Mysticism and Scripture

- a. Unlike many other mystics, Barrett upholds the Scriptures "as the primary base of religious knowledge" (Barrett, p. 163).
- b. The authors of Scripture personally experienced God (Job 42:5; Isa. 6:1-8; Paul in Acts 9:1-20). The Bible is a manual of Christian experience.
- c. God speaks both in Scripture and in the human heart.

### 4. Test for Truth

Barrett suggests three tests for Christianity:

- a. Pragmatic test - mystical intuition is valid because it works. One such mystical contact with God "is sufficient for permanent certitude concerning His existence" (Barrett, p. 168).
- b. Coherence - viewing the facts as a whole adds some logical certainty to our psychological certainty.
- c. Logical and moral necessity - God must exist or there is no rationality.

### 5. Warren Young's Self-Authenticating Christianity

- a. Young holds that "Christian realism" is "self-authenticating." It cannot be proven, but only experienced.
- b. Such an experience produces more than probability, for it leads to the "deepest possible conviction . . ." (Young, p. 153).
- c. Young holds that the believer can have immediate and convincing knowledge without being absorbed into the transcendent God.
- d. In common with presuppositionalism, Young holds that we must begin with the Christian God and Scripture and that evidences are helpful only after salvation.
- e. In common with fideism, Young holds that we can only state the truthfulness of Christianity and not argue for its validity. Since converts are rarely made by apologetic argumentation, he disregards this avenue, holding that the best we can do is show that Christianity is no more irrational than its alternatives.

#### 6. Barrett, Young and the Invisible Gardener

- a. One's mystical experience is the best certainty of the Gardener's existence.
- b. After this realization, evidences may confirm the initial conviction of truth.

#### 7. Evaluation

- a. Barrett's approach minimizes the importance of systematic theology.
- b. The world religions are supported on a similar basis of religious experience. If self-authenticating, are all religions ways to God? If not, on what basis do we dispute non-Christian experiential claims?

- c. Barrett seems to claim both that experience is self-validating and that it is subject to Scripture.  
Which standard is ultimate? We can't have two ultimate standards such as these.
- d. Even if religious experience is valid (. or partially so) it does not follow that the various interpretations of them are also valid.
- e. The evidence for religious experience is not objective enough. It is not at all obvious how they can be self-authenticating.
- f. Positively, Barrett reminds us that Christianity cannot deteriorate to a "dead orthodoxy" but needs to stress Christian experience along with evidences.

#### F. Verificationism: Edward J. Carnell (176-209)

##### 1. Starting Point

- a. Carnell rejects sense data, rationalism and personal testimony as starting points for apologetics, for they cannot confirm or disconfirm Christian theism.
  - (1) Pure empiricism can only yield disjointed impressions.
  - (2) Rationalistic approaches fail in that there are no valid inductive or deductive arguments for God's existence.
  - (3) Personal experience is not self-evaluative.

- b.** Carnell begins with the hypothesis of the triune God of Scripture as a thesis to be confirmed or disconfirmed. It is not a self-evident presupposition, but subject to testing by non-contradiction and experience.
- c.** Hypothesis-testing is the normal means of evaluating a thesis in everyday life, science and philosophy. One defines the problem, gathers information, forms a hypothesis, tests it and makes a decision.
- d.** Any hypotheses, including non-Christian ones, can be formulated for testing.
- e.** Making a final decision must proceed beyond the facts, for knowledge involves both the facts themselves and the proper interpretation of them. Without the latter, we can never know anything, since "Knowledge is the meaning of data, not the data itself" (Lewis, p. 180).

## 2. Common Ground

- a.** Carnell distinguishes three levels of meaning:
  - (1)** Personal taste - no common ground exists.
  - (2)** Scientific facts - common ground exists - facts are the same for believers and unbelievers.
  - (3)** Ultimate meaning - no common ground exists.

- b.** Not all common ground is derived from the senses, for it includes not only scientific facts, but also one's finite existence, innate principles of truth, goodness, beauty, morality and the principle of non-contradiction.
- c.** Thus, any valid world view must account for sense data, one's existence, as well as principles of logic, ethics and aesthetics.
- d.** These areas comprise Carnell's synoptic starting point.

### 3. The Test for Truth

- a.** Carnell rejects sense experience, pragmatism, feelings, correspondence and logical consistency as means of discovering truth in themselves.
- b.** Carnell utilizes a threefold test of truth:
  - (1) Non-contradiction.
  - (2) Empirical fit (coherence).
  - (3) Relevance to personal experience.
- c.** We must utilize non-contradiction as a rational axiom, for to deny it is to utilize it.  
It is an expression of the nature of God.
- d.** Carnell's use of coherence involves "systematic consistency," which is to account for the greatest amount of relevant facts of experience with the fewest difficulties.

- e. The relevant facts also include values, psychology and ethics.
- f. Beyond consistency, Carnell also shows the facticity of his hypotheses. They must be factual as well as consistent.
- g. Consistency and facticity are also tests employed in Scripture. Not only are prophets and apostles judged by the factual occurrence of their signs (Deut. 18:21-22; II Cor. 12:12) but whether the message was consistent with former messages (Deut. 13:1-5; Gal. 1:8,9).

#### 4. Bernard Ramm and the Verification of Christianity

- a. Ramm was influenced by Carnell and supports a similar position.
- b. For Ramm, "Truth is correspondence with the mind of God" (Ramm, p. 185).
- c. Morality, memory and psychological freedom cannot be explained by reductive naturalism but are better accounted for by a conscious Mind.
- d. The Christian hypothesis is specifically verified by:
  - (1) Fulfilled prophecy, which is detailed, given far in advance, clear and cannot be late-dated in many instances.
  - (2) Miracles, which were done before unbelievers, testified to by eyewitnesses and even admitted by opponents of Christianity. To allow eyewitness testimony is to allow miracles, which were numerous and reliable.
  - (3) Scripture, which is a great influence on culture, contains aesthetic balance, is unified, realistic and presents the character of Jesus.

- (4) Christianity is also verified by the many evidences for Jesus' resurrection.
- (5) Christianity also accounts for religious experience and stresses the conviction of the Holy Spirit, Who "enlightens the eyes of the mind" (Ramm, p. 198).

e. For Ramm (like Carnell), Christianity not only explains the physical facts, but also the miraculous and experiential facts.

#### 5. Carnell and the Verification of Christianity

- a. Christianity is the only adequate explanation for the laws of logic and ethics, the existence of science, the failure of evolution, the confirmation of archaeology and the failure of higher criticism. The latter presents the assumptions of a priori late-dating, denial of all miracles and ignoring the date to fit naturalistic hypotheses.
- b. Theoretically, an argument cannot rise beyond probability, and this includes Christianity and the resurrection, for instance. Our case is not a deductively necessary system.
- c. Absolute certainty is not necessary to achieve subjective assurance of the truth of Christianity, leading to full commitment.
- d. The Holy Spirit produces the certainty that Christianity is more probable than any alternatives.
- e. Faith is placed in what we know to be true. Here Carnell suggests both an external text of conformity to fact and an internal test of the Holy Spirit's witness.



- f. Faith involves the commitment of all of oneself to the truth.
- g. Concerning religious language, Carnell rejects equivocal and analogous language in that some univocal meaning is needed, or we cannot speak of God.

#### 6. Carnell and the Invisible Gardener

- a. Two hypotheses for testing: there is not an invisible Gardener who cares for His creation or there is such a Gardener.
- b. The former thesis is seemingly supported by a strict empiricism and the veil in the garden.
- c. But the former thesis cannot explain much data in support of the latter thesis, such as the Bible's confirmation by archaeology, manuscript discoveries and the failure of higher criticism or why the laws of nature are regular, the universal laws of logic and ethics, "gaps" between species, the rebellion of man, Christ's claims, miracles such as the resurrection, fulfilled prophecy, religious (and especially Christian) experience, as well as other data.
- d. No one argument proves the Christian's case, but the accumulation of converging data leaves no room for reasonable doubt. Additional evidences not only add probability, but multiply it. Example: Bulliver could have broken one or a few threads, but the combination of all of them defeated him.
- e. The highly probable conclusion is that the Invisible Gardener of the Bible exists and requires a commitment of our lives.

## 7. Evaluation

- a. A major critique by Van Til and others is that Carnell allows the autonomous man to judge God by human reason.
- b. Carnell objects that we do not place ourselves above a physician when we desire to check his ability and his credentials. Similarly, we do not place ourselves above God when we make sure it is really Him.
- c. Carnell further objects that while Van Til's thesis holds true in theology, it is not apologetics, for he cannot verify Scriptures over the Koran or the Book of Mormon.
- d. Carnell admits that he would give up Christianity if there was a more probable system and finds the same attitude in Paul in I Cor. 15. But he says such is highly unlikely.
- e. As finite beings, we must act on probabilities in all areas of life. But such is compatible with assurance and certainty. The evidence for Christianity is highly probable. The Holy Spirit brings internal certitude and commitment to us with regards to this evidence.

## G. Conclusions (285-295)

### 1. Logical Starting Point

- a. Pure empiricists like Buswell cannot come to facts with a totally blank mind. The mind is responsible for contributing some general principles.
- b. It is questionable whether Hackett can get from data plus the mind's principles to Christian theism.
- c. Clark's unchallengeable axioms and Van Til's presuppositions short-circuit apologetics. Van Til in particular, assumes his position, which is therefore not a true apologetic.
- d. Barrett either assumes or fails to provide sufficient evidence for the interpretation of one's personal experience.
- e. Carnell does the best job of testing the various possibilities, while choosing the best one.

### 2. Common Ground

- a. Buswell's common ground stresses publicly observable data.
- b. Hackett accepts both empirical data and the mind's thought-forms as common ground.
- c. Clark believes that the laws of logic are common to all and can be used as such.
- d. Van Til only accepts metaphysical, but not epistemological, common ground.
- e. Barrett denies common ground until a person has had direct experience of God.
- f. Carnell adopts a synoptic position and sees truth in all of the above (except Barrett's complete lack of common ground) since these positions are not mutually exclusive.

### 3. The Test for Truth

- a. For Buswell, all truth is derived from experience and must be integrated with and correspond to the facts themselves. Yet, it seems that non-contradiction cannot be ascertained by this method.

- b. Hackett holds that all truth must cohere with both the empirical data and the rational categories of the mind, thus proceeding a step beyond Buswell.
- c. Clark applies the twofold test for truth based on non-contradiction and consistency.
- d. Van Til claims that truth is ascertained by the self-authenticating Scriptures, but by this approach he cannot judge between Scripture and contradictory religious writings.
- e. Barrett accepts Christian experience as self-authenticating, but this is also an insufficient guide in that it cannot rule out other mystical religious claims.
- f. Carnell proposes a coherent and systematic system which is superior in that it provides the most checks and balances and is thus the best effort to avoid error.

#### 4. The Role of Reason

- a. For Buswell, reason's chief role is to induce the most probable causes of observable effects.
- b. Hackett holds that reason constructs demonstrative conclusions from the empirical effects.
- c. Clark utilizes reason to determine which world views are contradictory and which one is consistent. Syllogistic deductions are made from unproved axioms with geometry as a model.
- d. For Van Til, reason cannot be used to test God's revelation. We must all begin with some presuppositions. Rather, reason's role is to interpret Scripture as correctly as possible.
- e. Barrett and Young utilize reason to show that Christianity is a consistent and adequate world view, but after one has already experienced God.
- f. For Carnell, reason both proposes possible hypotheses and determines which ones are verifiable, utilizing the totality of human experience.

#### 5. The Basis of Faith

- a. In all of these apologists, Christian claims are considered truth and one's life is therefore totally committed in answer to the leading of the Holy Spirit.
- b. Buswell holds that one believes the truths of Christianity the same way one would in science. Reason precedes faith, which is justified according to probability. Faith is not different from or greater than that exercised in science.
- c. For Hackett, conclusions are established with logical necessity. But while reason precedes faith, the latter trusts sound reasoning.
- d. Clark holds that faith and reason are inseparable and do not precede each other. You believe the things you know and know what you believe, with life-commitment following.
- e. Van Til asks us to believe what God has said because He has said it. This is the proper response of the creature to the Creator. A person repents and exercises faith, which precedes valid uses of reason.
- f. For Barrett, faith-commitment follows the certainty arising from mystic encounter with God. Faith leads to reason, which confirms the experience afterwards.
- g. Carnell proceeds from inquiry to reason to faith. Intellectual confirmation through highly probable systematic consistency precedes total commitment of one's life.
- h. Each of the apologists above believe that the Christian God, the Scriptures and the deity of Christ follow from these systems.

**Table – Summarizing Recent Apologetic Approaches**  
 (Edited from Gordon Lewis' *Testing Christianity's Truth Claims*—page 286)

<b>Summarizing Recent Apologetic Approaches</b>						
<b>Specific Issue in Apologetic Approach</b>	<b>Buswell</b>	<b>Hackett</b>	<b>Clark</b>	<b>Van Til</b>	<b>Barrett</b>	<b>Carnell</b>
<b>System Name</b>	<b>Pure Empiricism</b>	<b>Rational Empiricism</b>	Rationalism	<b>Biblical Authoritarianism</b>	Mysticism	Verificationism
<b>Logical Starting Point</b>	Empirical Data	Empirical Data & Rational principles	Axioms of Logic, God, & Bible	Presuppositions of Autonomous Scripture & the Triune God	Testimony to Christian experience	Hypothesis of the Triune God of the Bible
<b>Common Ground</b>	All Facts	Facts and the mind's thought-forms	The mind's thought-forms	No epistemic common ground; dependence on God, suppressing God-awareness & guilt	No significant common ground prior to conversion	Facts, Law of non-contradiction, the quest for values, morality, & love
<b>Test for Truth</b>	Correspondence	Coherence	Consistency	Self-authenticating biblical claims	Self-authenticated experience	Systematic Consistency (Coherence)
<b>Basis for Reason</b>	Pure Induction	Rational Induction	Pure Deduction	Interpretation of Scripture & confessions	Interpreted experience	Hypothesis Verification by all experiences
<b>Basis for Faith in God, Jesus Christ, and Scripture</b>	Intellectual Probability	Rational Demonstration	Syllogistic Certainty	Scripture Authority	Psychological Certitude	Intellectual Probability & Moral Certainty

## H. Other Recent Approaches (296-339)

### 1. Introduction

- a. The number of apologists writing recently is noteworthy in light of the more options to Christianity today than ever before.
- b. Each of a number of recent apologists will be viewed regarding logical starting point, common ground, test for truth, role of reason and the basis of faith.
- c. However, not all of these recent apologists have explicit systems or answer all of these questions.

### 2. Francis Schaeffer

- a. Schaeffer's major concern is communicating Christianity to unbelievers in an age of fragmented meaning and retreat from logic, epistemology and meaning.
- b. Schaeffer's starting point often sounds like Van Til in the initial use of God and Scripture.
- c. Since unbelievers frequently borrow Christian suppositions, they must be shown their "point of tension" ... then pressed to logical result of their own systems and then given the gospel.
- d. Only on the basis of Christian presuppositions is there any basis for science or meaningful communication in life.
- e. Schaeffer tests his presuppositions according to their non-contradictory nature, facticity and ability to live with them (The God Who Is There)
- f. Schaeffer's stress on presuppositions sounds like Van Til, they are subject to testing, as in Carnell.
- g. Schaeffer's common ground appears to be man's capacity to judge his own presuppositions.

- h.** Schaeffer utilizes reason to defend faith and to communicate it meaningfully with regard to God's existence, morals and knowledge.
- i.** Schaeffer, knowledge precedes faith, which is not a leap but about a choice based on fact. Faith extends to total commitment.
- j.** Lewis judges that Schaeffer is closer to Carnell than Van Til in his testing of presuppositions.

### 3. Os Guinness

- a.** In Dust of Death, Guinness critiques the counterculture, the establishment and offers biblical Christianity as a third alternative.
- b.** Christianity is subject to either verification or falsification. But not only has it not been falsified it is the best answer to the issues.
- c.** God's revelation includes both natural and special revelation. Systems have failed in stressing one or the are given by God and are testable.
- d.** Non-Christian options do not explain the data, whereas Christianity both explains the facts and provides a meaningful basis for life.
- e.** Jesus' life, fulfillment of prophecies and His resurrection were open to observation.
- f.** Since Guinness subjects his presuppositions to verification and falsification, he is closer to Carnell than he is to Van Til.

### 4. Clark Pinnock

- a.** Pinnock's starting point is a hypothesis which is open to empirical testing.
- b.** Common ground is found in the empirical method and the data obtained from it.
- c.** The test for truth is therefore, empirical verifiability. which can be applied in historical terms to Scripture. From this method, we gain such facts as Jesus' resurrection.



- d. Reason plays an important role in pre-evangelism. Man's sin does not nullify the verification of hypotheses, for an evaluation can be made.
- e. Faith is trusting reliable testimony which is true according to probability.
- f. Lewis judges that Pinnock's position is quite similar to that of Carnell's hypothesis-verification.

#### 5. John Warwick Montgomery

- a. Montgomery's starting point is heuristic methodological pre—suppositions rather than presuppositions of content.
- b. Common ground is found in empirical data which is observable to all. Historical facts, for instance, are said to carry meanings and interpretations which are more likely than others. These facts thus "speak for themselves."
- c. Montgomery's test for truth is empirical in nature. He even holds that causality is experientially demonstrable (like Buswell), while rejecting both innate ideas and religious experience as being too subjective (i.e. like heartburn!).
- d. The role of reason is demonstrated by Montgomery's verification (or falsification) of Christianity. He employs six steps, which proceed from the trustworthy gospels (1) to 'Jesus' claims to be deity (2) to 'Jesus' resurrection (3-4) to the truthfulness of Jesus' words (5-6).
- e. While the gospels are ultimately self-attesting, we need grounds to know of their truth.
- f. Faith is based on high probability, as with all of life; history can produce no better basis. Commitment is based on probability in both religious and nonreligious situations.
- g. Montgomery's approach is close to the empiricism of Buswell and Gerstner, with some similarities to Carnell, such as testing hypotheses.

#### 6. Norman L. Geisler

- a. Geisler's starting point is religious experience in general ("What men really need exists"), and rational considerations for God's existence.
- b. Common ground is found in natural theology and its data concerning theism.
- c. Geisler's test of truth is undeniability ("finite beings exist") and non-contradiction.
- d. Reason provides compelling considerations against other options (theistic and non-theistic) and in favor of Christian theism.
- e. Faith is not placed in arguments for God, which is unworthy of an infinite Being, but in God for what He is in actuality. Ultimate commitment is the result.
- f. Geisler's approach is close to the pure empiricists such as Buswell and Gerstner, but he places more stress on arguing in a context of world views.

#### 7. George I. Mavrodes

- a. Mavrodes' Belief in God is a preliminary approach to Christian epistemology.
- b. Mavrodes is quite concerned not only with evidence, but with attitudes toward evidence. There is a difference between having objective evidence and convincing someone that it is truth.
- c. One way to learn about God's existence is through a competent authority, since much (or most) of our knowledge comes this way.
- d. Another way to learn of God is through objects, events, etc. in the natural world which "wake" us to His existence.
- e. Like viewing an elusive creature such as a wolf (p.316), some must wait patiently for God.
- f. Mavrodes prefers the answer to the data which makes the best sense of all of man's experience.
- g. How do we judge the experience of others? Three steps:

- (1) What is the risk involved? More risk involves more caution and critical assessment.
  - (2) How credible is the witness? The sources, their independence, agreement, trustworthiness, etc., must be considered.
  - (3) Initially, how possible is the report? This is usually judged to be high or low, depending on one's belief or non-belief in God.
- h.** Mavrodes encourages the person interested in God's existence to attempt to experience Him, rather than to attempt to ascertain His existence in theoretical terms.
  - i.** Three suggestions for Christians attempting to share their experience of God:
    - (1) Point out circumstances similar to our own.
    - (2) Tell the person what to look for.
    - (3) Provide a theistic framework involving (ideally) all of experience.
  - j.** One way to determine if the experience is real is if it continues to be integrated with the rest of our experience. Remember that not everyone's experience is the same.
  - k.** Mavrodes thereby seeks to avoid strictly epistemological approaches to God in favor of experience and language analysis.
  - l.** It is hard to determine, but his attempt appears to suggest a fitting of our beliefs to all of experience.

## 8. Arthur F. Holmes

- a.** Holmes has been chiefly concerned not with analytic philosophy, but with assessing strengths and weaknesses in major philosophies from a Christian perspective.
- b.** Holmes' position mediates between scientific dogmatism and relativistic skepticism. He states, "I find it impossible to be either extremely pessimistic or extremely optimistic about the outcome of philosophical investigation" (Holmes, 320).

- c. Holmes' starting point is "the Christian's belief that men need God" (Holmes, 320).
- d. He finds common ground in man's "logical, ethical, religious, and emotional needs" (Lewis, 321-322).
- e. Three means to judge between (or test) the world views:
  - (1) A personal perspective helps judge the practicality of the philosophy for life, although this is not sufficient as an objective test.
  - (2) The philosophy should have "empirical fit" with regard to all of the facts.
  - (3) The philosophy should be logically coherent and self-consistent (non-contradiction).
- f. Reason is not limited to deductive or inductive thinking alone. Neither does it start with Thomistic arguments for God. Rather, reason insures a "holistic" attitude to data. Holmes encourages a "Renaissance spirit" whereby man is confronted with and responds to all of experience.
- g. Faith "is an existential response of the whole person to God through the Christ of Scripture" (Lewis, 324).
- h. Faith is not a leap, but involves facts. Holmes argues from Jesus' resurrection to Christian theology in a theistic context.
- i. However, only the Holy Spirit elicits faith.
- j. Holmes' criteria of truth are similar to Carnell and Schaeffer.

## 9. Josh McDowell

- a. McDowell endeavors to show how Christianity fits the facts (empirical fit).
- b. He argues from many evidences such as archaeology, fulfilled prophecies, the resurrection and testimonies of conversion to Jesus.
- c. McDowell generally avoids philosophical apologetics in favor of a pure historical empiricism like that of Gerstner or Montgomery. However, sometimes he attempts to verify hypotheses, like Carnell.

## 10. Bernard Ramm

- a. In addition to the above information about Ramm (under Carnell), has Ramm taken a new approach to apologetics in The God Who Makes A Difference?
- b. His starting point, similar to Carnell's is to "choose a proposed hypothesis" (Lewis, 327.)
- c. Ramm asserts that the best approach to Christianity is Reformed thought in a biblical context.
- d. Ramm presents three concentric circles of verification, representing stages in the process:
  - (1) The first state is the hearing of the gospel, followed by the illumination and persuasion of the Holy Spirit. "It is not subjectivism, but subjectivity" (Lewis, 328).
  - (2) The second stage consists of God's objective acts in history, such as fulfilled prophecy, miracles and especially the resurrection.
  - (3) The third stage is Christianity's synoptic account of the whole of life. Most "defections" from Christianity by young people are because Christians often fail to present a synoptic vision.
- e. Some persons need one of these stages to come to faith, some need two or three.
- f. Ramm's test of truth therefore involves factual support from all data, like Carnell.
- g. Concerning probability or proof as the grounds for belief, Ramm distinguishes between certitude and certainty.
  - (1) In view of Scripture and the witness of the Spirit, the believer may have full certainty.
  - (2) On the historical side, Christianity can only be known according to high probability
  - (3) Ramm concludes that Christianity may be known certainly in its inward dimension, but only probably in its outward, factual dimension
- h. In conclusion, Ramm still appears to be close to Carnell's position

## 11. C.S. Lewis

- a. Lewis' starting point is various hypotheses concerning God, Christ, and Scripture. Many of these options he had personally pursued before his conversion (such as Hinduism, other Eastern religions, spiritualism, theosophy, and pantheism).
- b. Lewis notes at least five points of common ground
  - (1) The facts which are found in the world around us (Miracles, Mere Christianity)
  - (2) The laws of nature, which teach us about a series of connections.
  - (3) The laws of thought, without which no rational thinking would be valid.
  - (4) The common laws of morality, which present us with right and wrong options.
  - (5) The intense longing in man for God and for life after death, which is never satisfied in this life. Man experiences a longing for the transcendent which translate into awe concerning mountains, streams, waterfalls, fantasy, faraway places, etc. These bring glimpses of joy, a technical work for Lewis.
- c. Lewis' criterion of truth is finding a true philosophy which consistently and systematically accounts for all of the facts. He found such a system in Christianity.
- d. Concerning mysticism, Lewis likens such an approach to a sea voyage. All who leave the port experience the same thing at first. But what they experience is not as important as where the trip ends.
- e. The role of reason is first to show that if it is valid, then there must be a rational Mind in the universe. Reason is also used to check and validate Christianity.
- f. Faith in one sense is holding on to the teachings of Christianity which reason has already established in spite of our changing moods and the constant "blitz" of our

emotions. Faith produces psychological certainty in matters where facts can only point to high probability.

- g.** Faith in a second sense is devoting every portion of one's life realizing that even this commitment is not of ourselves but comes from God
- h.** Lewis attempted to translate all of his apologetics on a popular level. Herein lies much of his popularity.
- i.** Lewis views a verification with a position very similar to Carnell's.