

THE TRINITY REVIEW

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

November, December 1980

Copyright 2003 John W. Robbins Post Office Box 68, Unicoi, Tennessee 37692

Email: jrob1517@aol.com

Website: www.trinityfoundation.org

Telephone: 423.743.0199

Fax: 423.743.2005

God and Logic

Gordon H. Clark

In thinking about God, Calvinists almost immediately repeat the *Shorter Catechism* and say, "God is a spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable." Perhaps we do not pause to clarify our ideas of spirit, but hurry on to the attributes of "wisdom, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth." But pause: Spirit, Wisdom, Truth. *Psalms* 31:5 addresses God as "O Lord God of truth." *John* 17:3 says, "This is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God...." *1 John* 5:6 says, "the Spirit is truth." Such verses as these indicate that God is a rational, thinking being whose thought exhibits the structure of Aristotelian logic.

If anyone objects to Aristotelian logic in this connection—and presumably he does not want to replace it with the Boolean-Russellian symbolic logic—let him ask and answer whether it is true for God that if all dogs have teeth, some dogs—spaniels—have teeth? Do those who contrast this "merely human logic" with a divine logic mean that for God all dogs may have teeth while spaniels do not? Similarly, with "merely human" arithmetic: two plus two is four for man, but is it eleven for God? Ever since Bernard distrusted Abelard, it has been a mark of piety in some quarters to disparage "mere human reason"; and at the present time existentialistic, neo-orthodox authors object to "straight-line" inference and insist that faith must "curb" logic. Thus they not only refuse to make logic an axiom, but reserve the right to repudiate it. In opposition to the latter view, the following

argument will continue to insist on the necessity of logic; and with respect to the contention that Scripture cannot be axiomatic because logic must be, it will be necessary to spell out in greater detail the meaning of Scriptural revelation.

Now, since in this context verbal revelation is a revelation from God, the discussion will begin with the relation between God and logic. Afterward will come the relation between logic and the Scripture. And finally the discussion will turn to logic in man.

Logic and God

It will be best to begin by calling attention to some of the characteristics the Scriptures attribute to God. Nothing startling is involved in remarking that God is omniscient. This is a commonplace of Christian theology. But, further, God is eternally omniscient. He has not learned his knowledge. And since God exists of himself, independent of everything else, indeed the Creator of everything else, he must himself be the source of his own knowledge. This important point has had a history.

At the beginning of the Christian era, Philo, the Jewish scholar of Alexandria, made an adjustment in Platonic philosophy to bring it into accord with the theology of the Old Testament. Plato had based his system on three original, independent principles: the World of Ideas, the Demiurge, and chaotic space. Although the three were equally eternal and independent of each other, the Demiurge fashioned

chaotic space into this visible world by using the Ideas as his model. Hence in Plato the World of Ideas is not only independent of but also even in a sense superior to the maker of heaven and earth. He is morally obligated, and in fact willingly submits, to the Ideas of justice, man, equality, and number.

Philo, however, says, "God has been ranked according to the one and the unit; or rather even the unit has been ranked according to the one God, for all number, like time, is younger than the cosmos, while God is older than the cosmos and its creator." This means that God is the source and determiner of all truth. Christians generally, even uneducated Christians, understand that water, milk, alcohol, and gasoline freeze at different temperatures because God created them that way. God could have made an intoxicating fluid freeze at zero Fahrenheit and he could have made the cow's product freeze at forty. But he decided otherwise. Therefore behind the act of creation there is an eternal decree. It was God's eternal purpose to have such liquids, and therefore we can say that the particularities of nature were determined before there was any nature.

Similarly in all other varieties of truth, God must be accounted sovereign. It is his decree that makes one proposition true and another false. Whether the proposition be physical, psychological, moral, or theological, it is God who made it that way. A proposition is true because God thinks it so.

Perhaps for a certain formal completeness, a sample of Scriptural documentation might be appropriate. *Psalms* 147: 5 says, "God is our Lord, and of great power; his understanding is infinite." If we cannot strictly conclude from this verse that God's power is the origin of his understanding, at least there is no doubt that omniscience is asserted. *1 Samuel* 2:3 says, "the Lord is a God of knowledge." *Ephesians* 1:8 speaks of God's wisdom and prudence. In *Romans* 16: 27 we have the phrase, "God only wise," and in *1 Timothy* 1:17 the similar phrase, "the only wise God." Further references and an excellent exposition of them may be found in Stephen Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God*, chapters VIII and IX. From this distinguished author a few lines must be included here.

God knows himself because his knowledge with his will is the cause of all other things; ... he is the first truth, and therefore is the first object of his understanding.... As he is all knowledge, so he hath in himself the most excellent object of knowledge.... No object is so intelligible to God as God is to himself ... for his understanding is his essence, himself. God knows his own decree and will, and therefore must know all things.... God must know what he hath decreed to come to pass.... God must know because he willed them ... he therefore knows them because he knows what he willed. The knowledge of God cannot arise from the things themselves, for then the knowledge of God would have a cause without him.... As God sees things possible in the glass of his own power, so he sees things future in the glass of his own will.

A great deal of Charnock's material has as its purpose the listing of the objects of God's knowledge. Here, however, the quotations were made to point out that God's knowledge depends on his will and on nothing external to him. Thus we may repeat with Philo that God is not to be ranked under the idea of unity, or of goodness, or of truth; but rather unity, goodness, and truth are to be ranked under the decree of God.

Logic Is God

It is to be hoped that these remarks on the relation between God and truth will be seen as pertinent to the discussion of logic. In any case, the subject of logic can be more clearly introduced by one more Scriptural reference. The well-known prologue to John's Gospel may be paraphrased, "In the beginning was Logic, and Logic was with God, and Logic was God.... In logic was life and the life was the light of men."

This paraphrase—in fact, this translation—may not only sound strange to devout ears, it may even sound obnoxious and offensive. But the shock only measures the devout person's distance from the language and thought of the Greek New Testament.

Why it is offensive to call Christ Logic, when it does not offend to call him a word, is hard to explain. But such is often the case. Even Augustine, because he insisted that God is truth, has been subjected to the anti-intellectualistic accusation of "reducing" God to a proposition. At any rate, the strong intellectualism of the word *Logos* is seen in its several possible translations: to wit, computation, (financial) accounts, esteem, proportion and (mathematical) ratio, explanation, theory or argument, principle or law, reason, formula, debate, narrative, speech, deliberation, discussion, oracle, sentence, and wisdom.

Any translation of *John* 1:1 that obscures this emphasis on mind or reason is a bad translation. And if anyone complains that the idea of *ratio* or debate obscures the personality of the second person of the Trinity, he should alter his concept of personality. In the beginning, then, was Logic.

That Logic is the light of men is a proposition that could well introduce the section after next on the relation of logic to man. But the thought that Logic is God will bring us to the conclusion of the present section. Not only do the followers of Bernard entertain suspicions about logic, but also even more systematic theologians are wary of any proposal that would make an abstract principle superior to God. The present argument, in consonance with both Philo and Charnock, does not do so. The law of contradiction is not to be taken as an axiom prior to or independent of God. The law is God thinking.

For this reason also the law of contradiction is not subsequent to God. If one should say that logic is dependent on God's thinking, it is dependent only in the sense that it is the characteristic of God's thinking. It is not subsequent temporally, for God is eternal and there was never a time when God existed without thinking logically. One must not suppose that God's will existed as an inert substance before he willed to think.

As there is no temporal priority, so also there is no logical or analytical priority. Not only was Logic the beginning, but Logic was God. If this unusual translation of John's Prologue still disturbs someone, he might yet allow that God is his

thinking. God is not a passive or potential substratum; he is actuality or activity. This is the philosophical terminology to express the Biblical idea that God is a living God. Hence logic is to be considered as the activity of God's willing.

Although Aristotle's theology is no better (and perhaps worse) than his epistemology, he used a phrase to describe God, which, with a slight change, may prove helpful. He defined God as "thought-thinking-thought." Aristotle developed the meaning of this phrase so as to deny divine omniscience. But if we are clear that the thought which thought thinks includes thought about a world to be created—in Aristotle God has no knowledge of things inferior to him—the Aristotelian definition of God as "thought-thinking-thought" may help us to understand that logic, the law of contradiction, is neither prior to nor subsequent to God's activity.

This conclusion may disturb some analytical thinkers. They may wish to separate logic and God. Doing so, they would complain that the present construction merges two axioms into one. And if two, one of them must be prior; in which case we would have to accept God without logic, or logic without God; and the other one afterward. But this is not the presupposition here proposed. God and logic are one and the same first principle, for John wrote that Logic was God. At the moment this much must suffice to indicate the relation of God to logic. We now pass to what at the beginning seemed to be the more pertinent question of logic and Scripture.

Logic and Scripture

There is a minor misunderstanding that can easily be disposed of before discussing the relation of logic to the Scriptures. Someone with a lively historical sense might wonder why Scripture and revelation are equated, when God's direct speech to Moses, Samuel, and the prophets is even more clearly revelation. This observation became possible simply because of previous brevity. Of course God's speech to Moses was revelation, in fact, revelation *par excellence*, if you wish. But we are not Moses. Therefore, if the problem is to explain how we know in this age, one cannot use the

personal experience of Moses. Today we have the Scripture. As the *Westminster Confession* says, "It pleased the Lord ... to reveal himself... and afterwards ... to commit the same wholly unto writing, which maketh the holy Scripture to be most necessary, those former ways of God's revealing his will unto his people being now ceased." What God said to Moses is written in the Bible; the words are identical; the revelation is the same.

In this may be anticipated the relation of logic to the Scripture. First of all, Scripture, the written words of the Bible, is the mind of God. What is said in Scripture is God's thought. In contemporary religious polemics, the Biblical view of the Bible, the historic position of the Reformation, or—what is the same thing—the doctrine of plenary and verbal inspiration is castigated as Bibliolatry. The liberals accuse the Lutherans and Calvinists of worshipping a book instead of worshipping God. Apparently they think that we genuflect to the Bible on the pulpit, and they deride us for kissing the ring of a paper pope.

This caricature stems from their materialistic turn of mind—a materialism that may not be apparent in other discussions—but which comes to the surface when they direct their fire against fundamentalism. They think of the Bible as a material book with paper contents and a leather binding. That the contents are the thoughts of God, expressed in God's own words, is a position to which they are so invincibly antagonistic that they cannot even admit it to be the position of a fundamentalist.

Nevertheless we maintain that the Bible expresses the mind of God. Conceptually it is the mind of God, or, more accurately, a part of God's mind. For this reason the Apostle Paul, referring to the revelation given him, and in fact given to the Corinthians through him, is able to say, "We have the mind of Christ." Also in *Philippians* 2:5 he exhorts them, "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus." To the same purpose is his modest claim in *1 Corinthians* 7:40, "I think also that I have the Spirit of God." The Bible, then, is the mind or thought of God. It is not a physical fetish, like a crucifix. And I doubt that there has ever been even one hillbilly fundamentalist ignorant enough to

pray to a black book with red edges. Similarly, the charge that the Bible is a paper pope misses the mark for the same reason. The Bible consists of thoughts, not paper; and the thoughts are the thoughts of the omniscient, infallible God, not those of Innocent III.

On this basis—that is, on the basis that Scripture is the mind of God—the relation to logic can easily be made clear. As might be expected, if God has spoken, he has spoken logically. The Scripture therefore should and does exhibit logical organization. For example, *Romans* 4:2 is an enthymematic hypothetical destructive syllogism. *Romans* 5:13 is a hypothetical constructive syllogism. *1 Corinthians* 15:15-18 is a sorites. Obviously, examples of standard logical forms such as these could be listed at great length.

There is, of course, much in Scripture that is not syllogistic. The historical sections are largely narrative; yet every declarative sentence is a logical unit. These sentences are truths; as such they are objects of knowledge. Each of them has, or perhaps we should say, each of them is a predicate attached to a subject. Only so can they convey meaning.

Even in the single words themselves, as is most clearly seen in the cases of nouns and verbs, logic is embedded. If Scripture says, David was King of Israel, it does not mean that David was President of Babylon; and surely it does not mean that Churchill was Prime Minister of China. That is to say, the words *David*, *King*, and *Israel* have definite meanings. The old libel that Scripture is a wax nose and that interpretation is infinitely elastic is clearly wrong. If there were no limits to interpretation, we might interpret the libel itself as an acceptance of verbal and plenary inspiration. But since the libel cannot be so interpreted, neither can the Virgin Birth be interpreted as a myth nor the Resurrection as a symbol of spring. No doubt there are some things hard to be understood which the unlearned wrest to their own destruction, but the difficulties are no greater than those found in Aristotle or Plotinus, and against these philosophers no such libel is ever directed. Furthermore, only some things are hard. For the rest, Protestants have insisted on the perspicuity of Scripture.

Nor need we waste time repeating Aristotle's explanation of ambiguous words. The fact that a word must mean one thing and not its contradictory is the evidence of the law of contradiction in all rational language. This exhibition of the logic embedded in Scripture explains why Scripture rather than the law of contradiction is selected as the axiom. Should we assume merely the law of contradiction, we would be no better off than Kant was. His notion that knowledge requires *a priori* categories deserves great respect. Once for all, in a positive way—the complement of Hume's negative and unintentional way—Kant demonstrated the necessity of axioms, presuppositions, or *a priori* equipment. But this *sine qua non* is not sufficient to produce knowledge. Therefore the law of contradiction as such and by itself is not made the axiom of this argument.

For a similar reason, God as distinct from Scripture is not made the axiom of this argument. Undoubtedly this twist will seem strange to many theologians. It will seem particularly strange after the previous emphasis on the mind of God as the origin of all truth. Must not God be the axiom? For example, the first article of the *Augsburg Confession* gives the doctrine of God, and the doctrine of the Scripture hardly appears anywhere in the whole document. In the *French Confession* of 1559, the first article is on God; the Scripture is discussed in the next five. The *Belgic Confession* has the same order. The *Scotch Confession* of 1560 begins with God and gets to the Scripture only in article nineteen. The *Thirty-Nine Articles* begin with the Trinity, and Scripture comes in articles six and following. If God is sovereign, it seems very reasonable to put him first in the system.

But several other creeds, and especially the *Westminster Confession*, state the doctrine of Scripture at the very start. The explanation is quite simple: our knowledge of God comes from the Bible. We may assert that every proposition is true because God thinks it so, and we may follow Charnock in all his great detail, but the whole is based on Scripture. Suppose this were not so. Then "God" as an axiom, apart from Scripture, is just a name. We must specify which God. The best known system in which "God" was made the axiom is

Spinoza's. For him all theorems are deduced from *Deus sive Natura*. But it is the *Natura* that identifies Spinoza's God. Different gods might be made axioms of other systems. Hence the important thing is not to presuppose God, but to define the mind of the God presupposed. Therefore the Scripture is offered here as the axiom. This gives definiteness and content, without which axioms are useless.

Thus it is that God, Scripture, and logic are tied together. The Pietists should not complain that emphasis on logic is a deification of an abstraction, or of human reason divorced from God. Emphasis on logic is strictly in accord with John's Prologue and is nothing other than a recognition of the nature of God. Does it not seem peculiar, in this connection, that a theologian can be so greatly attached to the doctrine of the Atonement, or a Pietist to the idea of sanctification, which nonetheless is explained only in some parts of Scripture, and yet be hostile to or suspicious of rationality and logic which every verse of Scripture exhibits?

Logic in Man

With this understanding of God's mind, the next step is the creation of man in God's image. The non-rational animals were not created in his image; but God breathed his spirit into the earthly form, and Adam became a type of soul superior to the animals.

To be precise, one should not speak of the image of God in man. Man is not something in which somewhere God's image can be found along with other things. Man is the image. This, of course, does not refer to man's body. The body is an instrument or tool man uses. He himself is God's breath, the spirit God breathed into the clay, the mind, the thinking ego. Therefore, man is rational in the likeness of God's rationality. His mind is structured as Aristotelian logic described it. That is why we believe that spaniels have teeth. In addition to the well-known verses in chapter one, *Genesis* 5:1 and 9:6 both repeat the idea. *1 Corinthians* 11:7 says, "man ... is the image and glory of God." See also *Colossians* 3:10 and *James* 3:9. Other verses, not so explicit, nonetheless add to our information.

Compare *Hebrews* 1:3, *Hebrews* 2:6-8, and *Psalms* 8. But the conclusive consideration is that throughout the Bible as a whole the rational God gives man an intelligible message.

It is strange that anyone who thinks he is a Christian should deprecate logic. Such a person does not of course intend to deprecate the mind of God; but he thinks that logic in man is sinful, even more sinful than other parts of man's fallen nature. This, however, makes no sense. The law of contradiction cannot be sinful. Quite the contrary, it is our violations of the law of contradiction that are sinful. Yet the strictures which some devotional writers place on "merely human" logic are amazing. Can such pious stupidity really mean that a syllogism that is valid for us is invalid for God? If two plus two is four in our arithmetic, does God have a different arithmetic in which two and two makes three or perhaps five? The fact that the Son of God is God's reason—for Christ is the wisdom of God as well as the power of God—plus the fact that the image in man is so-called "human reason," suffices to show that this so-called "human reason" is not so much human as divine.

Of course, the Scripture says that God's thoughts are not our thoughts and his ways are not our ways. But is it good exegesis to say that this means his logic, his arithmetic, his truth are not ours? If this were so, what would the consequences be? It would mean not only that our additions and subtractions are all wrong, but also that all our thoughts—in history as well as in arithmetic—are all wrong. If for example, we think that David was King of Israel, and God's thoughts are not ours, then it follows that God does not think David was King of Israel. David in God's mind was perchance prime minister of Babylon.

To avoid this irrationalism, which of course is a denial of the divine image, we must insist that truth is the same for God and man. Naturally, we may not know the truth about some matters. But if we know anything at all, what we must know must be identical with what God knows. God knows all truth, and unless we know something God knows, our ideas are untrue. It is absolutely essential

therefore to insist that there is an area of coincidence between God's mind and our mind.

Logic and Language

This point brings us to the central issue of language. Language did not develop from, nor was its purpose restricted to, the physical needs of earthly life. God gave Adam a mind to understand the divine law, and he gave him language to enable him to speak to God. From the beginning, language was intended for worship. In the *Te Deum*, by means of language, and in spite of the fact that it is sung to music, we pay "metaphysical compliments" to God. The debate about the adequacy of language to express the truth of God is a false issue. Words are mere symbols or signs. Any sign would be adequate. The real issue is: Does a man have the idea to symbolize? If he can think of God, then he can use the sound *God, Deus, Theos, or Elohim*. The word makes no difference, and the sign is *ipso facto* literal and adequate.

The Christian view is that God created Adam as a rational mind. The structure of Adam's mind was the same as God's. God thinks that asserting the consequent is a fallacy; and Adam's mind was formed on the principles of identity and contradiction. This Christian view of God, man, and language does not fit into any empirical philosophy. It is rather a type of *a priori* rationalism. Man's mind is not initially a blank. It is structured. In fact, an unstructured blank is no mind at all. Nor could any such sheet of white paper extract any universal law of logic from finite experience. No universal and necessary proposition can be deduced from sensory observation. Universality and necessity can only be *a priori*.

This is not to say that all truth can be deduced from logic alone. The seventeenth-century rationalists gave themselves an impossible task. Even if the ontological argument be valid, it is impossible to deduce *Cur Deus Homo*, the Trinity, or the final resurrection. The axioms to which the *apriori* forms of logic must be applied are the propositions God revealed to Adam and the later prophets.

Conclusion

Logic is irreplaceable. It is not an arbitrary tautology, a useful framework among others. Various systems of cataloging books in libraries are possible, and several are equally convenient. They are all arbitrary. History can be designated by 800 as easily as by 400. But there is no substitute for the law of contradiction. If dog is the equivalent of not-dog, and if $2 = 3 = 4$, not only do zoology and mathematics disappear, Victor Hugo and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe also disappear. These two men are particularly appropriate examples, for they are both, especially Goethe, romanticists. Even so, without logic, Goethe could not have attacked the logic of John's Gospel (I, 1224-1237).

Geschrieben steht: "Im anfang war das Wort!"

Hier stockich schon! Wer hilft mir weiter fort?

Mir hilft der Geist! Auf einmal seh' ich

Rath und schreib' getrost: "Im Anfang war die
That!"

But Goethe can express his rejection of the divine *Logos* of *John* 1:1, and express his acceptance of romantic experience, only by using the logic he despises.

To repeat, even if it seems wearisome: Logic is fixed, universal, necessary, and irreplaceable. Irrationality contradicts the Biblical teaching from beginning to end. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is not insane. God is a rational being, the architecture of whose mind is logic.