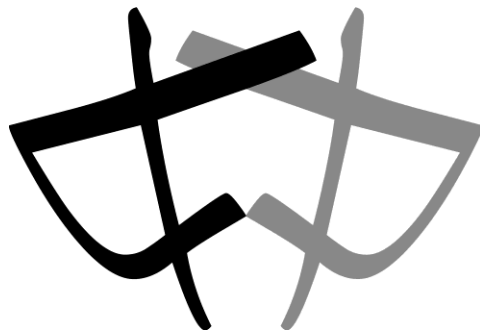


I N A N T I T H E S I S

A Reformed Apologetics Journal



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INTRODUCTION

C.L. Bolt

A Note About “Presuppositionalism”

The label “presuppositionalism” is most often associated with the method of apologetics discussed in this journal. However, the close ties the term “presuppositionalism” shares with postmodernism, the fact that other methods of apologetics often recognize and reject the failure of a naïve evidentialist approach (a “naïve evidentialist approach” does not take presuppositions into account in the evaluation of evidence), and the unhelpfulness of the term in capturing the essence of the method in question have been cited as reasons to replace the label with another. One suggestion is to replace the label “presuppositional” with “covenantal,” emphasizing that God the Creator “condescends” to the creature by way of covenant (see K. Scott Oliphint’s article, “Presuppositionalism” in addition to his other works). The remainder of this introduction will use the term “covenantal” to label the apologetic method in question for the sake of clarity, brevity, and in order to promote this somewhat recent change in terminology.

Purpose of Choosing Hats and *In Antithesis*

The purpose of *Choosing Hats* is the explanation and demonstration of the Van Tilian covenantal method of apologetics in defense of the Christian faith to the glory of God. The purpose of *In Antithesis* is to develop the theoretical aspects of the Van Tilian covenantal apologetic method with the goal of strengthening the method in terms of its effectiveness in biblical fidelity, clear expression, and pragmatic application.

Explanation and Demonstration

An “explanation” of virtually any topic involves a great deal of theory, but some believe the theoretical nature of explaining apologetic methodology is problematic in that it weakens an apologetic, separates it from the layperson, and simply wastes time. There are many other similar objections to discussing apologetic method. There may be some wisdom in the aforementioned concerns, but an outright dismissal of apologetic methodological discourse is unwise and even dangerous. An anti-intellectual and pragmatic approach to apologetic methodology can weaken an apologetic and lead to even more time being wasted than what might have been saved through a more thorough examination of one’s overall approach. Anti-intellectualism has no place in a primarily intellectual discipline and pragmatism is merely a lesser idealism.

At the same time, the “demonstration” of a particular apologetic method is a crucial part of learning about that method’s strengths and weaknesses. The contributors to *Choosing Hats* have been blessed with opportunities to place great emphasis not only upon apologetic *theory* but

also upon apologetic *practice* through their many encounters with a variety of unbelievers and with Christians struggling with particular questions and objections concerning their faith.

Both *explanation* and *demonstration* are necessary elements of learning, teaching, and engaging in apologetics. One cannot be separated from the other without disastrous results. Hence while this journal will focus primarily upon the theoretical aspects of covenantal apologetic methodology, it will not and cannot focus upon it to the exclusion of application, and no apology will be made for the journal being abstract, academic, theoretical, or methodological in nature.

A Brief History of Covenantal Apologetics

The *covenantal apologetic method* is that method of defending the faith *prescribed* and *described* in Scripture. In order to avoid an obvious anachronism one might more properly speak of Scripture setting forth the *foundation* for the method which would later become known as “covenantal apologetics.” Some of the texts of Scripture traditionally used to support this contention include Proverbs and other wisdom literature, Acts 17, Romans 1, 1 Corinthians 1, Colossians 1, and Ephesians 2, though many other texts appear in the relevant literature. Rudimentary versions of covenantal apologetics are found in Augustine, Tertullian, John Calvin, Abraham Kuyper, and Herman Bavinck. The method was most notably popularized in the 20th century by Cornelius Van Til. Covenantal apologetics have been given their place in a number of schools including, most notably, Westminster Theological Seminary where Van Til taught. They were further developed, popularized, and utilized by Greg L. Bahnsen, John M. Frame, and K. Scott Oliphint, each of whom studied under Van Til. While these men have taken slightly different approaches to their interpretations and applications of Van Til’s thought, there is clear agreement concerning the central tenets and overall thrust of the method. Michael Butler, Bahnsen’s assistant, has taught the method and used it in debate as has Douglas Wilson, who recently engaged atheist Christopher Hitchens in a series of debates which became a part of his “Collision” movie. Another major influence upon Van Tilian apologetics was the Van Til List started by James N. Anderson. This email list consisted of a group of philosophers, theologians, and laypersons associated with the Van Tilian method of apologetics. While its most prominent contributors including David Byron, Sean Choi, Greg Welty, Michael Sudduth, and Aaron Bradford were familiar with Van Til’s work, they were also more explicitly critical of it than were the aforementioned students of Van Til. Discussions on the Van Til List were often marked by a concern to sync the *argumentative* force of Van Tilian methodology with its *rhetorical* force. Later, apologist Paul Manata quickly learned and used covenantal apologetics to great effect in the online community prior to becoming more critical of the method. More recently, the Reformed Forum (organized by Camden Bucey from the WTS community) has taken up the torch. Finally, James R. White is a strong advocate of the covenantal method of apologetics and continues to lead the way in putting his apologetic into practice through engaging in debates with

a variety of non-Christian positions and critiquing unbiblical apologetics often used by other believers in lieu of an apologetic which glorifies God.

Apologetics to the Glory of God

God is glorified in an apologetic which keeps the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ as central and rests firmly upon the Word of God. People are called to repent from their sins and believe the Scriptural truth of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ for our sins. Our apologetic must likewise call others to repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ who is Lord over *all*. Few men have emphasized this point as much as Cornelius Van Til.

Van Til was not infallible. He was, however, brilliant. Frankly, he was also *right*. However, much has changed since Van Til passed. Indeed, much has changed even since Bahnsen passed. As Christians we know that there is nothing new under the sun, but the history of heresies and the folly of philosophies past does not grant us an excuse to ignore the popular antithetical systems of our day. The best - and perhaps the only - way to address these systems is through applying Van Til's insights insofar as they properly express a biblical, Christ-centered, God-honoring apologetic to the backward opinions of the fallen world. The task of interpreting, critiquing, bolstering, and presenting the apologetic popularized by Van Til will, however, require an enormous amount of work on the part of those who are willing to sympathize with the Van Tilian method in general. It is of utmost importance to use the categories derived from Van Til for responding to developments within the method itself as well as in unbelieving models, and *In Antithesis* is one more tool created for moving toward this goal.

In Antithesis

Those of us at Choosing Hats have attempted to be both fair and faithful to the elements of covenantal apologetics presented above. To this end, we offer a journal titled *In Antithesis*. The purpose of *In Antithesis* is to develop the theoretical aspects of the Van Tilian covenantal apologetic method with the goal of strengthening the method in terms of its effectiveness in biblical fidelity, clear expression, and pragmatic application.

The idea for the creation of *In Antithesis* came about as a result of desiring to make the material at www.choosinghats.com more palatable for beginners studying covenantal apologetics. While abstract, theoretical, and technical discussions have their place, the original intent of Choosing Hats was to present covenantal apologetics on a basic level. Further inspiration for the journal came from the Van Til List.

The readers will find that the contributors to this inaugural issue of *In Antithesis* strive to remain faithful to Van Til's vision for apologetics while deepening what might be said about the topics he addressed and interacting with some of the newest material available concerning those topics. While this issue consists exclusively of articles written by contributors to the Choosing

Hats website, future issues will incorporate articles from others outside of that group. In time, and if it is successful, the journal will begin to take on a more academic feel and constitute an outlet for discussion between those who wish to challenge and defend covenantal apologetics from within the context of Christianity and in particular from within the camp of those devoted to improving upon, while remaining consistent with, the apologetic wisdom and insight of Cornelius Van Til.

Thank you for your support, and we hope you enjoy this inaugural issue of *In Antithesis*.

Grace,

C.L. Bolt
Louisville, Kentucky
September 20, 2011

THE DOCTRINE OF GOD IN REFORMED APOLOGETICS

Joshua Whipps

“The pride of man will be humbled and the loftiness of men will be abased; and the LORD alone will be exalted in that day, but the idols will completely vanish. [Men] will go into caves of the rocks and into holes of the ground before the terror of the LORD and the splendor of His majesty, When He arises to make the earth tremble. In that day men will cast away to the moles and the bats Their idols of silver and their idols of gold, Which they made for themselves to worship, in order to go into the caverns of the rocks and the clefts of the cliffs before the terror of the LORD and the splendor of His majesty, when He arises to make the earth tremble. Stop regarding man, whose breath [of life] is in his nostrils; for why should he be esteemed?” (*Isaiah 2:17-22* NASB¹)

The Reformed Apologist

As Christians, but especially as distinctly Reformed Christians, the center of our system of doctrine is the great truths God has revealed concerning Himself in His Word. As Calvin puts it, “it is evident that man never attains to a true self-knowledge until he have previously contemplated the face of God, and come down after such contemplation to look into himself.”² Scripture repeatedly enjoins us to the knowledge of God as the foundation for the understanding of all things – for, as we know, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge.”³ However, we are not satisfied with mere intellectual assent to particular propositional truths. Our goal is that our “hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love, and **attaining** to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding, **resulting** in a true knowledge of God's mystery, **that is**, Christ **Himself**, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”⁴ Do we strive to attain this sort of spiritual wealth? Do we seek to be “knit together in love” of this “true knowledge of God's mystery”? This, as believers, as adoptive sons, fellow heirs⁵ with Christ, is the goal, and the purpose toward which we strive.

1 All Scripture quotations taken from the New American Standard Bible®, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation Used by permission. (www.lockman.org)

2 Calvin, John, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book I, Chapter 1.

3 Prov. 1:7.

4 Col. 2:2-3.

5 Rom. 8:17.

Our desire is to know “Him just as He is”,⁶ to seek and to strive after “the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.”⁷ We are not content to merely get by as we are – “but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen!”⁸ We all know that these things are our focus, the central aspect of our daily life, our sanctification as believers, and as glorified saints; but is this the immovable anchor point of our apologetic? Are we ever-mindful of the nature and testimony of our great and majestic God in every thought, in every argument, and in every word that we present to the unbeliever in our apologetic? If like Calvin we seek to enjoin the unbeliever to contemplate the face of God; we must know that very face as if it was our own in the mirror. We are given ample testimony to what He is like in the pages of our Scripture; the Scripture we claim to hold as the only and infallible foundation for truth. Do we live as our principle demands? Do we, in every encounter with the unbeliever, or in our daily lives, act as if we really do presuppose this is true? The God we serve, my friends, is a jealous God. He will not share His glory with another. Let us not imagine that He will be satisfied with His servants if we do not seek to give Him glory, and to exalt Him as He truly is in all that we claim to do for His glory! We proclaim that we are thinking God's thoughts after Him; yet we then immediately, and rightly, assure ourselves that this is only in principle, and our failures are only to be expected. While this is true, let us not forget that we are to “run in such a way that [we] may win.”⁹

When we are comparing worldviews “as a unit”, it is not only helpful, but absolutely crucial to realize what, precisely, is the linchpin of that worldview. It is not only crucial, but absolutely necessary for us to understand that who and what God is, as He has revealed it to us, is that exact linchpin in Reformed Theology. What we critique about “perverted type of theism”¹⁰ in Romanism and Arminianism is found precisely at this point. They do not have a sufficiently robust, or sufficiently Biblical, doctrine of God. This is of utmost importance in the following discussion, so please follow me here. When we, as Reformed believers, set forth the Christian system as a unit, from Scripture Alone, it all revolves around our robust, fleshed out, and full-orbed doctrine of God. The doctrine of God is what we appeal to as the foundation for all else. “Christianity offers the triune God, the absolute personality, containing all of the attributes enumerated, as the God in whom we believe. This conception of God is the foundation of everything we hold dear. Unless we can believe in this sort of God, it does us no good to be told that we may believe in some other sort of God, or in anything else. For us everything depends for its meaning upon this sort of God. Accordingly, we are not interested to have anyone prove to us the existence of any other sort of God but this God. Any other sort of God is no God

6 1 John 3:2.

7 Eph. 4:13.

8 2 Pet. 3:18.

9 1 Cor. 9:24.

10 Van Til, Cornelius, *The Defense of the Faith: Fourth Edition*. ed. K. Scott Oliphint. Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 2008, 308.

at all, and to prove that some other sort of God exists is, in effect, to prove that no God exists.”¹¹ With Van Til, we say it is so, because this is who is set forth in the pages of Scripture, in the entirety of God's counsel, who we are to believe in. What we **must** believe.

What this means, as apologists, is that we must first be theologians.¹² We must not only know the Scriptures¹³, but we must know who it is we serve¹⁴, and know Him as He truly is¹⁵. We must exert our utmost effort at this point¹⁶, because it is the central focus of our apologetic, that we present God as He truly is, through the means He has provided – His Word. We are concerned, primarily, with the God we serve, and His glory¹⁷; with presenting Him faithfully, scripturally; and above all, with all of who we are, in love, adoration, and exaltation; for the God we serve demands no less from His servants¹⁸. Recall; “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.”¹⁹ This commandment applies to us, as it does to every believer; and it applies to us with special force, as we present the demands of this God we **love** to those who are rebels against His authority. What is your motivation, apologist? Is your motivation an abiding love for the Majesty on High²⁰, who has called you, redeemed you, and now has graciously chosen you to represent Him to the men created in His image²¹, and you are calling to bend the knee to Him in love and adoration along with you? Are you still awash in awe for His great works on your behalf, struck to your knees in worship for His mercy and love toward you? Are you still wondering, amazed by the eternal glory that He has joined you to²², and eagerly willing to exalt His name among the nations²³, knowing that there truly is none like Him²⁴, and zealous for His glory? If this is your motivation, apologist, then I'm writing to you. If this is not your motivation, then truly examine your reasons for engaging in this great and glorious work for His name's sake. Make no mistake; this is what our calling is. We are to present the God who has revealed Himself, as He has revealed Himself; because we love Him, adore Him, worship Him, and praise Him. As Scripture says; “I know whom I have believed”²⁵. Let us be able to say that truly.

The Self-Contained God

11 Van Til, *Defense of the Faith*, 34.

12 1 Cor. 2:13.

13 2 Tim. 3:16.

14 2 Pet. 1:3.

15 1 John 5:20.

16 1 Tim. 4:10.

17 1 Cor. 10:31.

18 Gal 1:10.

19 Deu. 6:5.

20 Heb. 1:3.

21 Gen. 1:27.

22 John 17:22.

23 Psalm 46:10.

24 Deu. 33:26.

25 2 Tim. 1:12.

Do you love God? This sounds like a simple question; but it is not as simple as it appears. Which God do you love? Do you love the God revealed in the Scriptures? All of who He is? That presupposes that you **know** this God, does it not? How else will you know Him as He is, apart from what he has given us? “The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us...”²⁶ Some things we just cannot know exhaustively about God.²⁷ Yet, we must recall that God has given us to know, and know truly, that which He has revealed.²⁸ Since this is so, we must dedicate ourselves to know, and know truly, this God whom we serve. Only then in our apologetic can we present Him truly, and as He has presented Himself. This begins to take shape in a specifically Reformed apologetic when we take a specifically Reformed theology as our foundation. A specifically Reformed theology is a fundamentally Scriptural theology; and hand in hand with that Scriptural foundation, the same emphasis and centrality given to the doctrine of God that Scripture devotes to it. I will get into methodology briefly, later in this paper, but I would simply call to the reader's attention that along with Cornelius Van Til, the “father” of presuppositional apologetics, we consider “argument by presupposition” the specifically reformed method. I would note to the aspiring apologist the comments of Van Til: “I have never been called upon to work out any form of systematic theology. My business is to teach apologetics. I therefore presuppose the Reformed system of doctrine.”²⁹ Here is what I'd like the apologist to note: What isn't presented is what that system is; it is assumed, throughout his apologetic. This is indescribably important, because what he is in essence saying, is that it is your job to know what that is.³⁰ Note this well; *it is your job to know what that is!*

With Van Til, it is my intent to encourage you in your apologetic endeavors; but like Van Til, our apologetic endeavors must, and I will repeat this, **must** presuppose the Reformed system of theology in order to be recognizable as a Reformed apologetic. What this means is that you, as an apologist, **must** have a systematic knowledge **of** theology. Not just any theological system, but the Reformed system, and the **historic** Reformed system; consistently, and as a unit, as he frequently points out. It will not do to consider Karl Barth's theology “Reformed”, as it is nothing of the sort. It will not do to mix and match, pick and choose from various and sundry positions as if this is a common market. I do, however, since I hold certain differences with the esteemed professor, have to make a distinction on a certain level. I am a confessional, covenantal, and thoroughgoing Reformed Baptist. There will be certain differences between myself and my Presbyterian brothers on this score. Namely, the extent of the covenant, baptism, and church governance. This, however, is not what is meant when speaking of “mixing and matching;” although there are brothers on each side who would consider it to be so. On the doctrines of God, which are our chief topic of concern, I am of course in complete agreement with the esteemed professor. With Barth, we can have no agreement on these fundamental

26 Deu. 29:29.

27 Job 11:7.

28 John 17:3.

29 Van Til, *Defense of the Faith*, 27.

30 Psa. 119:125.

issues. Between Hodge, Warfield, Gill, Boyce and Calvin, there is fundamental agreement on practically every point. This is what we mean on that score. What is required is that we delve deeply into a systematic study of the doctrines laid out for us in the Word, and do so in an explicitly Reformed system. Only within that system can we truly be arguing Scripturally. Why? As Warfield puts it, “In it, objectively speaking, theism comes to its rights; subjectively speaking, the religious relation attains its purity; soteriologically speaking, evangelical religion finds at length its full expression and its secure stability.”³¹

What does this mean to us, as apologists? It means, simply, that as Van Til states, “[b]asic to all the doctrines of Christian theism is that of the self-contained God, or, if we wish, that of the ontological Trinity. It is this notion of the ontological Trinity that ultimately controls a truly Christian methodology. Based upon this notion of the ontological Trinity and consistent with it, is the concept of the counsel of God according to which all things in the created world are regulated.”³² Why is this important to us? *First*, it points us to the truth that all facts are as they are, because God has determined that they are so.³³ *Second*, it reminds us that God is unique; without equal, parallel, or peer.³⁴ *Third*, it demonstrates our presuppositional standard as solely capable of providing the preconditions of intelligibility for any predication³⁵. *Lastly*, it reminds us that we are talking about who and what God is; which means we are talking about **all** of who and what God is. Let's unpack these points a bit.

The Meaning of Facts

“All facts are God's facts”³⁶ J.I. Packer tells us; yet, this is not all there is to it. They aren't simply “owned”, yet have no other relationship to God save this. We hear this saying quite a bit, but it is not the entirety of the case. At least, we need to make sure it is understood what we mean by it as Reformed believers. What we are saying is that “God is the sovereign determiner of possibility and impossibility.”³⁷ God, by the counsel of His Will, has decreed from eternity the meaning of each fact, and its relationship to every other fact.³⁸ “The question is rather as to what the final reference-point is that is required to make the “facts” and “laws” intelligible. The question is as to what the 'facts' and 'laws' really are.”³⁹ Even more fundamentally, however, “[I]t may be said that for the human mind to know any fact truly, it must presuppose the existence of God and his plan for the universe. If we wish to know the facts

31 Warfield, B.B., *Calvin as Theologian and Calvinism Today*, London, England: Evangelical Press, 1969, 23.

32 Van Til, Cornelius, *Christian Apologetics*. ed. William Edgar. (2nd Ed), Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P & R Publishing; 2003, 128.

33 Isa 41:22.

34 2 Sam. 7:22.

35 Logical affirmation of something, declaration.

36 Packer, J.I., *Fundamentalism and the Word of God: some Evangelical Principles*, Inter-Varsity Press; New Ed edition, 1996, 34.

37 Bahnsen, Greg, *Always Ready: Directions for Defending the Faith*, ed. Booth, Robert. Covenant Media Press, 1996, 79.

38 Isa. 46:10.

39 Van Til, *Christian Apologetics*, 129.

of this world, we must relate these facts to laws. That is, in every knowledge transaction, we must bring the particulars of our experience into relation with universals... But the most comprehensive interpretation that we can give of the facts by connecting the particulars and the universals that together constitute the universe leaves our knowledge at loose ends, unless we may presuppose God back of this world... As Christians, we hold that in this universe we deal with a derivative one and many, which can be brought into fruitful relation with one another because, back of both, we have in God the original One and Many. If we are to have coherence in our experience, there must be a correspondence of our experience to the eternally coherent experience of God. Human knowledge ultimately rests upon the internal coherence within the Godhead; our knowledge rests upon the ontological Trinity as its presupposition."⁴⁰ This foundational doctrine is the source of the Christian worldview's coherence; its very foundation, its central focus, and what, precisely, provides the preconditions of intelligibility that we speak of, in our transcendental argument. We presuppose Christianity as a unit; but that which provides cohesion and explanatory power for that unit can be found at precisely this point.

The Case from the Doctrine of God

Let's lay out our case, from the Doctrine of God. While keeping in mind that we argue all of Scriptural revelation, as a unit, let us examine what it is that this self-revelation of God tells us about Him. First, He is Spirit.⁴¹ As Spirit, He is Simple; not composed of parts in a physical, metaphysical, or logical sense. As such, He is singular, immutable, eternal, immortal, living, active, infinite, perfect, and good. Second, God is Absolute. He is self-existent, self-sufficient, omnipotent, sovereign, holy, and ever-present. Third, He is Personal. He is tripersonal (in His singularity of Being), knowing, wise, true, and revelatory.. This list is not exhaustive, but it serves as a summation of what it is we are repeating from Scripture when we speak of our "self-contained" God. (I'm not going to cite the Scripture for this, because Gill does an admirable job in doing so in the referenced work.) Now, to start with Gill, I'm going to give a short example of why I opened with God's self-description as "spirit".

"God being a Spirit, we learn that he is a simple and uncompounded Being, and does not consist of parts, as a body does; his spirituality involves his simplicity: some indeed consider this as an attribute of God; and his spirituality also: and, indeed, every attribute of God, is God himself, is his nature, and are only so many ways of considering it, or are so many displays of it."⁴²

40 Van Til, Cornelius, *Introduction to Systematic Theology: Prolegomena and the Doctrines of Revelation, Scripture, and God*. ed. William Edgar. (2nd Ed), Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P & R Publishing; 2007, 22-23.

41 John 4:24.

42 Gill, John. *A Body of Doctrinal Divinity, Or, A System of Evangelical Truths, Deduced from the Sacred*

Now, let us follow his argument.

“However, it is certain God is not composed of parts, in any sense; not in a physical sense, of essential parts, as matter and form, of which bodies consist: nor of integral parts, as soul and body, of which men consist: nor in a "metaphysical" sense, as of essence and existence, of act and power: nor in a "logical" sense, as of kind and difference, substance and accident; all which would argue imperfection, weakness, and mutability.”⁴³

Do you see what He's doing? He is showing, by the nature of the case, that who God is in one respect, necessarily relates to who God is in every other respect. Let's move on, and see what else he does with this.

“If God was composed of parts he would not be "eternal", and absolutely the first Being, since the composing parts would, at least, co-exist with him; besides, the composing parts, in our conception of them, would be prior to the compositum; as the body and soul of man, of which he is composed, are prior to his being a man: and, beside, there must be a composer, who puts the parts together, and therefore must be before what is composed of them: all which is inconsistent with the eternity of God.”⁴⁴

Next, he goes through the relationship of spirit to eternity! This is what is meant by “self-contained”; God's nature is self-definitional. Consider just a bit more to fully demonstrate the case with a larger quote.

“...nor would he be "infinite" and "immense"; for either these parts are finite, or infinite; if finite, they can never compose an infinite Being; and if infinite, there must be more infinities than one, which implies a contradiction: nor would he be "independent"; for what is composed of parts, depends upon those parts, and the union of them, by which it is preserved: nor would he be "immutable",

Scriptures. Paris, AR: Baptist Standard Bearer, 2000, Bk1, Ch.4.

43 Ibid.

44 Ibid.

unalterable, and immortal; since what consists of parts, and depends upon the union of them, is liable to alteration, and to be resolved into those parts again, and so be dissolved and come to destruction. In short, he would not be the most perfect of Beings; for as the more spiritual a being is, the more perfect it is; and so it is, the more simple and uncompounded it is: as even all things in nature are more noble, and more pure, the more free they are from composition and mixture.”⁴⁵

Thus, as we see, the Doctrine of God is truly that of the self-contained God; the spirit, self-existence, and self-sufficiency of God are seamlessly expressed in a proper depiction of God's attributes as long we present them as they are in Scripture. Who and what God expresses Himself to be gives us the foundation for everything else.

What implications does this have for us, as apologists? The primary implication is that we are defending something very particular, and our opponent must, in order to actually address us, object to something very particular. Recall how Van Til explains it; "Unless we can believe in this sort of God, it does us no good to be told that we may believe in some other sort of God, or in anything else. For us everything depends for its meaning upon this sort of God. "⁴⁶ In essence, in order to be actually objecting meaningfully, they must object to God, as He reveals Himself in Scripture. This can be demonstrated by divine simplicity. Since God is indivisible, to truly address God as He is requires that the objection take all of who God is into account.

Two Worldviews

Secondly, it means that, at bottom, there are only two worldviews. That which acknowledges that “in Him we live, move, and have our being” - and that which claims man's autonomy from God. There is the wisdom of the world, and the wisdom of God. Only the triune God of the Scriptures can truly be the transcendental precondition for the intelligibility of and the determiner of meaning for all the facts in and of creation. The autonomous man, be he idol-worshiper or self-worshiper, is claiming autonomy for himself. The Christian claims autonomy only for God. “When man fell it was therefore his attempt to do without God in every respect. Man sought his ideals of truth, goodness, and beauty somewhere beyond God, either directly within himself or in the universe about him.... The result for man was that he made for himself *a false ideal of knowledge*. Man made for himself the ideal of absolute comprehension in knowledge.... In conjunction with man's false ideal of knowledge, we may mention here the fact that when man saw he could not attain his own false ideal of knowledge, he blamed this on his

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Van Til, *Defense of the Faith*, 34.

finite character. *Man confused finitude with sin.*⁴⁷ Thus, like our first parents, unbelievers continue to confuse their false ideal, no matter what shape it may take, with reality; they also confuse finitude with a Biblical conception of sin, and not willing to take the blame for their sin, they excuse it. They are unwilling to look at God as He truly is; and substitute for God a figment of their own imagination. Similarly, they do not object to God as He truly is; they are not able to do so. Their objection is from their common autonomous, idealistic foundation. They build their house with crumbling bricks made mostly of detritus, hold them together by a mortar of mud, on a foundation of gravel, and that foundation atop sand. Are we to step in their house to admire its grand construction? We ourselves live in a house formed by the seamless doctrines of God, solidly anchored to the foundation of the Scripture, secured to and by the bedrock doctrine of God.

The Knowledge of God

Thirdly, this means that we, as apologists, must truly know the doctrine of God. We cannot escape the clarion call to the knowledge of God throughout the pages of Scripture. Shall we have “a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge”?⁴⁸ Or shall we plumb “the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God”?⁴⁹ The “treasures of wisdom and knowledge” are hidden in Christ Jesus! “Shall we be “...sober-minded as [we] ought” or “have no knowledge of God” to our shame?⁵⁰ Is the knowledge of God a “sweet aroma”⁵¹ to us? How can we destroy speculations, and all lofty things raised up against the knowledge of Christ⁵², if we do not have that knowledge ourselves? Recall, we “attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.”⁵³ Recall that walking “in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects” means that we must be “bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God”.⁵⁴ We are being “renewed to a true knowledge”⁵⁵ of our Creator. We are countering the arguments of “what is falsely called 'knowledge'”,⁵⁶ “if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth”.⁵⁷ We must remember, brothers, that “His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence.”⁵⁸ These are our marching

47 Van Til, *Defense of the Faith*, 36.

48 Rom 10:2.

49 Rom 11:33.

50 1 Cor. 15:34.

51 2 Cor. 2:14.

52 2 Cor. 10:5.

53 Eph. 4:13.

54 Col. 1:10.

55 Col. 3:10.

56 1 Tim. 6:20.

57 2 Tim. 2:25.

58 2 Pet. 1:3.

orders: to strive for the knowledge of our God. We must not consider that we have “arrived”, but always strive to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”⁵⁹

Sola Scriptura

Fourthly, we cannot fail to keep these great doctrines always before us, every step of our way. As Reformed believers, we hold to the “full-orbed doctrine of Sola Scriptura”⁶⁰; this means that in every facet of life and knowledge, Scripture rules our thought and practice. I often say that presuppositional apologetics is simply Sola Scriptura in an apologetic context. As Reformed apologists, we must always presuppose the Scriptures with every argument we make, and “take every thought captive”⁶¹ to the Word of God. How do we accomplish this mighty task? As fallible, failure-prone men, subject to error, and every defect, how shall we do as we are commanded? “Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.”⁶² We are not only to love the one true God with all we are, and submit to His Lordship; but we are to *teach* these great truths constantly. It is well said that teaching is the surest way to learn; and Scripture teaches us that diligence here. They are to be spoken of with dedication and frequency. They are to be meditated on “day and night”⁶³. They are to be as bound to us as if they are fastened to our hands and foreheads. All that we own or encounter should be thought of as related to God, and bring to mind these great truths. They are to be as close to us, and as dear to us, as our lives, our limbs, and be the desire of our heart. Only by this dedication and purposeful diligence to the practice of spiritual disciplines can we be faithful proclaimers of God's truth to the unbelieving world. We must not be satisfied with our current state or at ease with our knowledge of God. Only when we run, as if to win, are we fulfilling our calling as faithful servants.

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61 2 Cor. 10:5.

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PROBLEMS WITH CLASSIC PROOFS FOR THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

C.L. Bolt

Introduction

Answering the question of whether or not the classic proofs for the existence of God actually demonstrate God's existence requires that terms be defined. Typically, the ontological, cosmological and teleological arguments would be labeled 'classic proofs,' while the Old and New Testaments describe what is meant by "God." The classic proofs for the existence of God in view purport to be deductively sound arguments, as opposed to inductive, transcendental, or pragmatic arguments. Sound deductive arguments must be valid and their premises true. In asking about demonstration, one should not confuse proof with persuasion, as the persuasive or subjective sense of demonstration is not in view; but rather the sound or objective sense of demonstration. The contention of this paper is that the classic proofs for the existence of God do not actually demonstrate God's existence.

Methodology for Objections

Dogmatic Function of Natural Theology β

Objections to the classic arguments for the existence of God are nothing new even within Christian and especially Christian Reformed circles. Michael Sudduth has recently evaluated Reformed objections to the natural theology that classic proofs are a part of, and has attempted to provide responses to these objections. Sudduth draws a distinction between "natural knowledge of God," which he labels "natural theology α ," and "theistic argument," which he labels "natural theology β ".¹ Sudduth makes further distinctions within these two categories before describing the "*dogmatic function* of natural theology β " as "(i) confirming and explicating the natural knowledge of God as a biblical datum, (ii) assisting the systematic development of a biblically based doctrine of God, and (iii) strengthening and augmenting the Christian's knowledge of God."² Natural theology β thus "presupposes and operates as part of the discourse of dogmatic theology."³ Whether or not Sudduth is successful in his arguments concerning natural theology β as described above will not be considered relevant to the argument of this paper.

Pre-Dogmatic and Apologetic Function of Natural Theology β

1 Michael Sudduth, *The Reformed Objection to Natural Theology*, England: Ashgate, 2009, 50.

2 Ibid. 53.

3 Ibid. 53.

Sudduth describes another use of natural theology β which differs from the aforementioned program.

But we have also seen two other important functions for natural theology β in the Reformed tradition: the pre-dogmatic function and apologetic function. According to the former, theistic arguments are parts of a system of theology that is independent of dogmatic theology and serves as its rational foundation. According to the latter, theistic arguments are used to defend theism against the objections of atheists and agnostics...The pre-dogmatic function of natural theology β , however, entails a more positive use of theistic arguments to establish the faith. Here reason has become a principium of the dogmatic system. Consequently, reason plays a substantive and formative role in the dogmatic system, including the subtle implication that faith, or at least the reasonableness of faith, rests on the prior establishment by reason of Christian doctrine.⁴

The objections of this paper are directed toward the “*pre-dogmatic function* and *apologetic function*.” The former is arguably what most think of when they think in terms of the classic theistic proofs and the latter stems from this understanding. The aforementioned categorization of the classic theistic proofs assists in showing that they do not actually demonstrate God’s existence, because arguments to this end may be directed toward underlying principles shared by the theistic proofs in question, rather than particular versions of the proofs as part of an overarching inductive method. The classic theistic proofs have nevertheless been rejected as unsound, perhaps as many countless times as they have been reformulated. There is an element of persuasiveness in the potential inductive approach of illustrating what a particular refutation or rejection of a classic theistic proof looks like. Thus a version of the cosmological argument will be used for the purpose of such an illustration. While some of the reasons that the proof fails to actually demonstrate God’s existence are no doubt shared by other versions of ‘the’ cosmological argument and even ‘the’ ontological and teleological arguments, the illustration should not be misunderstood as constituting an exhaustive objection to classic theistic proofs in principle or in general. The task of establishing that classic theistic proofs fail in principle has been delegated to the portion of the discussion which follows more closely the categorization presented earlier.

⁴ Ibid. 53.

Problems with Classic Theistic Proofs in Particular: Kalam Cosmological Argument

Statement of the Proof

Currently one of the most popular classical proofs for the existence of God is a version of the Cosmological Argument defended by William Lane Craig known as the Kalam Cosmological Argument.

Everything that begins to exist has a cause of its existence.

The universe began to exist.

Therefore the universe has a cause of its existence.⁵

When Craig uses the word “cause” in the first premise of the argument he is referring to “something that brings about the inception of existence of another thing.”⁶ The proof seeks to establish that the universe has a cause in this sense of the word, in answer to the question of whether or not “the beginning of the universe was caused or uncaused.”⁷

Problems with Proving the First Premise

Unfortunately Craig provides little argumentation for accepting the first premise of the argument, admits such, and attempts to justify his move.

For the first premise is so intuitively obvious, especially when applied to the universe, that probably no one in his right mind really believes it to be false. Even Hume himself confessed that his academic denial of the principle’s demonstrability could not eradicate his belief that it was nonetheless true. Indeed the idea that anything, especially the whole universe, could pop into existence uncaused is so repugnant that most thinkers intuitively recognize that

⁵ William L. Craig, *The Kalam Cosmological Argument*, Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1979, 63.

⁶ Ibid. 141.

⁷ Ibid. 141.

the universe's beginning to exist entirely uncaused out of nothing is incapable of sincere affirmation.⁸

It is important to keep in mind that since Craig provides the argument he must also support its premises. Stating that the first premise of his argument is “intuitively obvious”, that “no one in his right mind *really* believes it to be false,” that the denial of the first premise and conclusion is “repugnant,” and that the denial of the conclusion of the argument through the rejection of its first premise is “incapable of sincere affirmation” may be *rhetorically* useful. However, such statements beg the question in favor of the first premise while not actually providing support for it.

Problems with an Appeal to Intuition. While Christians might claim that the existence of God is “intuitively obvious” and therefore also that the “universe began to exist,” Atheists might make the opposite claims. What one finds to be “intuitively obvious” is not always actually the case. Meditation upon the fact of many people finding many different and contradictory claims “intuitively obvious” should make this point clear. Therefore appealing to intuition is not an argument in support of the premise in question. Perhaps an argument to the effect that one *should* find the first premise of the argument intuitively obvious would be of greater help.

Problems with an Appeal to Hume. The statement about Hume is misleading since Hume's entire contention concerning the claim of the first premise of this argument is that while he could not “eradicate his belief,” it was nevertheless *held in an irrational fashion*. Hume was providing a psychological explanation rather than an epistemic justification for believing that everything which begins to exist has a cause for its coming into being.⁹ Since Craig is presumably seeking to provide a reason to believe in God his appeal to Hume is out of place.

All Hume has really shown is that the principle ‘everything that begins to exist has a cause of its existence’ is not analytic and that its denial, therefore, does not involve a contradiction or a logical absurdity. But just because we can imagine something's beginning to exist without a cause it does not mean this could ever occur in reality. There are other absurdities than logical ones. And

⁸ Ibid. 141.

⁹ Hume, David, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding And Selections From A Treatise of Human Nature*, Chicago, Illinois: Paquin Printers, 1963, 45.

for the universe to spring into being uncaused out of nothing seems intuitively to be really, if not logically, absurd.¹⁰

Hume dismisses through argument and illustration *a priori* justifications of the principle in question contained in the first premise of the argument.¹¹ Craig's understanding that the denial of the first premise of his argument "does not involve a contradiction or a logical absurdity" is consistent with Hume's overall program. It is likewise correct that just because something can begin to exist without a cause, it does not follow that such would ever be the case.

In order to avoid shifting the burden of proof, Craig must provide good reason for accepting the first premise of his argument. Stating that the denial of the premise might be absurd even though it is not logically absurd is hardly a statement which provides the sort of support one might expect. It is, after all, *equally* true that it *might* be absurd even though it is not *logically* absurd to suppose that 'everything that begins to exist has a cause of its existence' or that 'the universe has a cause of its existence.' Further, Craig needs to demonstrate that the suggestion made via Hume is actually impossible "in reality" and not just suggest that it might be such.

Problems with Empirical Generalization. Another way one might attempt to support the first premise of the Kalam argument is to argue from empirical generalizations.

The causal proposition could be defended as an empirical generalization based on the widest sampling of experience. The empirical evidence in support of the proposition is absolutely overwhelming, so much so that Humean empiricists could demand no stronger evidence in support of any synthetic statement. To reject the causal proposition is therefore completely arbitrary. Although this argument from empirical facts is not apt to impress philosophers, it is nevertheless undoubtedly true that the reason we – and they – accept the principle in our everyday lives is precisely for this very reason, because it is repeatedly confirmed in our experience. Constantly verified and never falsified, the causal proposition may be taken as an empirical generalization enjoying the strongest support experience affords.¹²

10 Craig, *Kalam*, 145.

11 Hume, *Enquiry*, 30.

12 Craig, *Kalam*, 145.

Unfortunately this will not do. While Craig states that *rejecting* “the causal proposition is therefore completely arbitrary,” he has not provided reason to think that *accepting* the causal proposition is anything other than arbitrary. More importantly, empirical generalizations do not serve to support the premise in question, because the premise is not a generalization. Instead, the first premise of the argument states that everything “that begins to exist has a cause of its existence.” The use of “everything” designates the premise as an instance of a universal claim. Craig’s proposed leap from alleged empirical generalizations to a universal claim is unjustified. Perhaps it is the case that a great number of empirical facts in some way exhibit the causal proposition in action but it hardly follows that every one of them does. It might even be the case that everything “that begins to exist has a cause of its existence” except for the universe. Craig’s attempt to argue from a generalization is therefore insufficient to prove his premise.

Problems with an Appeal to Kant. Craig mentions one more dubitable method for establishing the first premise of his argument explaining, “Hackett formulates a neo-Kantian epistemology and defends the validity of the causal principle as the expression of the operation of a mental *a priori* category of causality which the mind brings to experience.”¹³ The reason this method should be considered dubitable is because it is so much like Kant’s failed method. While Craig claims that Hackett has altered Kant’s presentation of a categorical approach to knowledge the alterations do not appear to be overly significant.¹⁴ Hackett’s reduction of the number of Kant’s categories has almost nothing to do with the first premise of the argument and that the categories may actually provide knowledge of things in themselves is nothing new to even Kant who surely believed this without admitting it (as Craig agrees).¹⁵ Hackett assumes that the categories go beyond sense data but Craig does not go into this further and in the end admits that Hackett’s approach “is basically Kant’s.”¹⁶

The Unproven Premise and Fallacy of Composition. Persuasion concerning the first premise of the argument has no bearing upon whether or not it is true and the fact that some are persuaded does not serve as rational support for the premise. Craig’s first premise has not been disproven, but it has not been proven either and there is still a second premise to establish. The proof as presented by Craig does not actually demonstrate God’s existence because the first premise of the argument lacks rational support. Furthermore the argument is apparently fallacious as, “An argument commits the fallacy of composition if it improperly concludes that a property true of a part of a whole applies to the whole or that a property true of a member of a class applies to the whole class.”¹⁷ To move from causation in the case of particular parts of the universe to the conclusion that the whole universe shares that feature looks to be a textbook example of the fallacy of composition. Again it must be made clear that what has been discussed here is only one illustration of how the proof in question fails and how other versions of this

13 Ibid. 145-146.

14 Ibid. 146.

15 Ibid. 146-147.

16 Ibid. 147.

17 Irving M. Copi, Carl Cohen, and Daniel E. Flage. *Essentials of Logic: Second Edition*, NJ: Pearson, 2007, 83.

proof and other classic theistic proofs might similarly fail. At this point it is beneficial to move on to more general concerns and address problematic methodological principles, rather than particular problems with the example chosen, to illustrate how objections to classical proofs actually look when applied to the arguments.

Problems with Classic Theistic Proofs in Principle: Philosophical and Theological

Philosophical Problems

Sudduth addresses Reformed objections to natural theology which rely upon the critiques of Hume and Kant, but his replies are again irrelevant to concerns here because he is seeking to defend natural theology used in accordance with Reformed presuppositions, rather than when used in a pre-dogmatic way. Thus when Sudduth writes that the “Humean/Kantian restriction of causation to experience seems incompatible with Christian theism in general and the Reformed tradition in particular” the objector to the pre-dogmatic and respective apologetic function of natural theology will heartily agree.¹⁸ Herein lies one objection to the cosmological argument in particular and traditional proofs in general; causation is restricted to experience. It may likewise be said that other principles similar or analogous to causation which traditional proofs rely upon are restricted to experience and to move from their application in experience to their application to something which is not experienced is unwarranted.

Hume also attacks classic proofs for the existence of God by explaining that, “we must not ascribe to a cause anything beyond what is minimally required to account for the effect.”¹⁹ Sudduth’s response to this attack again does not save the pre-dogmatic or respective apologetic function of classic theistic proofs. He argues that *a posteriori* proofs “do warrant a necessary inference to a being who has *immense* power, knowledge, and goodness.”²⁰ The skeptic would likely reply that there is no way to argue even to this conclusion, given the finite nature of the contingent realm and would further answer that showing this much does not demonstrate the existence of the God of the Bible anyway, since His attributes have not been demonstrated through the use of pre-dogmatic natural theology via classic proofs. Sudduth’s second response by way of appeal to intuition and his third by way of appeal to other theistic arguments and presuppositions are again irrelevant to a defense of the pre-dogmatic function of classic proofs.²¹

Sudduth does present “an inductive, cumulative case approach to robust theism” in an attempt to counter Humean and Kantian objections to classic theistic proofs.²² However, when

18 Sudduth, *Reformed*, 205.

19 Ibid. 207.

20 Ibid. 208.

21 Ibid. 208-209.

22 Ibid. 210-219.

divorced from Reformed theology and taking Hume's objections to inductive reasoning concerning God into account, Sudduth's program adds nothing new to the method of natural theology. Hume's skeptical concerns about why it should be assumed that only one God is at the end of classic theistic proofs rather than many and why God could not have created, designed, or existed at one point and then ceased existing shortly thereafter, as well as his skepticism regarding the attributes and personhood of God, are still firmly in place given the pre-dogmatic function of classic theistic proofs for the existence of God. While they are old and inconsistent with Christianity, the objections to natural theology understood in terms of its pre-dogmatic function remain successful and apply equally as well to other classic theistic proofs. From the skeptic perspective the classic proofs for the existence of God do not actually prove God's existence. The same is true from the Christian perspective though it is not always realized.

Theological Problems

The passage of Romans 1.18-22 has significant apologetic import. The passage teaches that God reveals His wrath from His position of authority against the ungodliness and unrighteousness of humanity. Since all are guilty of ungodliness and unrighteousness everyone responds to the revelation of God by suppressing the truth in their unrighteousness. Ever since the world was created people have clearly perceived what can be known about God including His invisible attributes and divine nature because He has shown it to them in what He has made and people are therefore without an excuse. Even though people know God they hold the truth down in unrighteousness and refuse to honor God or give thanks to God. They become futile in their thinking and their foolish hearts are darkened. They claim to be wise when in truth they have become fools.

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools.

While theological objections to the classic theistic proofs are derived from passages throughout Scripture the passage quoted is perhaps the most significant of these.

Problems with Probability. Even if the Kalam argument is sound it does not follow that its conclusion is certainly true. The conclusion of the deductive proof is only probably true given the inductive and hence uncertain nature of the premises of the argument. Additionally one may be mistaken in evaluating the deductive validity of the argument. The only way to establish the argument as valid in the first place is by way of another valid argument, which leads to an infinite regress, or a circular argument. If the conclusion of the proof is only probably true then there is some probability, however small, that God does not exist at all. Yet the God of the Bible is necessary and is known plainly. God cannot *not* exist and cannot *not* be known. So long as God is thought to probably exist there is room for the skeptic to doubt because it is then always probable no matter how unlikely that God does not exist. In contrast, the passage from Romans speaks of the invisible attributes of God being clearly perceived so that people are without excuse. There is *no* defense for unbelief.

Michael Sudduth responds to this objection by writing, “Probabilistic reasoning has been viewed as in conflict not only with the certainty of faith but also with the clarity of general revelation.”

Cornelius Van Til maintained that if theistic argumentation were restricted to probabilistic reasoning, then this would entail some lack of clarity in general revelation. Since it is a Reformed commonplace to regard general revelation as the basis of human responsibility, the concern here is a sensible one.

As Van Til put it:

It is an insult to the living God to say that his revelation of himself so lacks in clarity that man, himself through and through revelation of God, does justice by it when he says that God probably exists. ... The traditional method [of apologetics] therefore compromises the clarity of God’s revelation to man. ...

²³ Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

All the facts of nature and of man are said to indicate no more than that a god exists.²⁴

Sudduth may be missing what Van Til is after here, as he provides an ellipsis and then the final line of the quote from Van Til. The question of what god classic proofs actually demonstrate if they demonstrate anything at all is a good one and will be dealt with later, but for now it is difficult to see why Sudduth includes this sentence from Van Til in his quote as it is not relevant to the problem of probabilism.

Sudduth considers Van Til's objection from within the paradigm of the *dogmatic function* of natural theology β by appealing to pre-existing knowledge of God from sources other than probabilistic reasoning.²⁵ These considerations are largely irrelevant to the discussion of the *pre-dogmatic function* of classic proofs. However some of what Sudduth writes may be seen as an objection to the argument against the pre-dogmatic use of classic proofs.

It is a mistake to connect, as Van Til does, probabilistic reasoning with a lack of clarity in general revelation and a consequent lack of human accountability. For one, we are accountable or morally responsible, though not exclusively so, on the basis of what we know. Such is the testimony of Romans chapters 1-2. Only by assuming that probabilistic reasoning is incompatible with knowledge do we get a case against probabilistic reasoning in connection with human accountability.²⁶

In terms of what Sudduth has provided, Van Til *may* or *may not* have believed in a "consequent lack of human accountability" and assumed "that probabilistic reasoning is incompatible with knowledge." The quote that Sudduth provides from Van Til does not necessarily assume either of these positions. It is also not necessary to adopt either of these positions for the purposes of advancing the objection from the probabilistic nature of classic proofs already set forth. Even given that there is such a thing as probabilistic knowledge and respective human accountability the objection raised still holds. While people are certainly accountable and may be so according to Sudduth on the basis of probabilistic knowledge the passage nevertheless teaches that people are without an excuse. If God can be known to only probably exist then there is, *rationally speaking*, always the possibility and some probability that

24 Sudduth, *Reformed*, 182.

25 Ibid. 183.

26 Ibid. 183.

He does not exist. The unbelieving skeptic may point to this probability whether it is 49% or 1% and have a rational excuse for not believing in God.

More to the point Sudduth asks, “Similarly, why should a *clear* revelation from God be conflated with *certainty*?”²⁷ Unfortunately there are large epistemological assumptions behind this question which cannot be addressed here. It may be sufficient here to state that when God is “clearly” revealed and He is made “plain” there is no room for uncertainty concerning His existence. God is able to overcome every obstruction and make Himself known in such a manner that people are without excuse. Don Collett summarizes the problem well.

Inasmuch as creation clearly testifies to the necessary character of God’s existence, it follows that a Christian apologist cannot do justice to the objective evidence for Christian theism unless he or she affirms the noncontingent character of God’s existence in apologetic argument.²⁸

Collett also alludes to the problems concerning the primacy of God versus the primacy of the proofs.

Problems with Primacy. Even if the Kalam argument is sound it assumes that the deductive and inductive elements which it is made up of are more certain in an epistemological sense than God Himself. The proof is set forth as though one is to move from deductive logic, the principle of causation, science, math, probability and truth to prove with less certainty that God exists. Thus our own concepts, experiences, and selves are taken to be more certain in an epistemological sense than God. What can be known about God is not obscure, hidden, or difficult to understand. Rather, what can be known about God is plain. The reason that the knowledge of God is plain is because God has shown Himself to people. God has revealed His wrath as being against ungodliness and unrighteousness and God has revealed what can be known about Him. Since the revelation of God is perspicuous people know God plainly. There is no ignorance or confusion as to who He is or what He is like.

Is it really the case that the God of Christian Scripture is less epistemologically certain than deductive and inductive proofs for the existence of God? Don Collett interprets Cornelius Van Til as finding traditional arguments problematic at precisely this point. God is thought to be known derivatively from logic rather than logic being known derivatively from God.

27 Ibid. 183.

28 Collett, Donald. “Van Til and Transcendental Argument Revisited,” in *Speaking the Truth In Love: The Theology of John M. Frame*. ed. John J. Hughes. Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 2009, 465.

The problem with traditional approaches to inductive and deductive argument, argues Van Til, is that they typically begin with the assumption that certain axioms are more ultimate or epistemologically certain than God's existence (e.g., the principle of causality), then proceed by means of "straight line" reasoning to derive or deduce God's existence from such principles. In so doing they unwittingly assign to the concept of God's existence a logically derivative rather than logically primitive status, thereby compromising both his aseity and his transcendence.²⁹

If God were known in this fashion then both His aseity and His transcendence would be "compromised" according to Collett. Van Til frequently argues in this fashion.

Problems with Presuppositions. The alleged certainty with respect to the assumptions which go into (for example) the Kalam argument assumes that people are epistemologically self-sufficient. There is no necessity of divine revelation in this view. Thus everyone is in a position to question God on his or her own terms. God is no longer the judge, but the one being judged. Autonomous people are even able on this view to be able to make sense out of their reasoning and experience apart from God, because their espoused presuppositions about reality and knowledge are in and of themselves sufficient to account for the intelligibility of experience and reasoning. Yet it makes little sense to claim that people can understand any fact properly when they do not understand the fact in its relationship to God. Even though people know God they hold the truth down in unrighteousness and do not honor or give thanks to God. Instead, they become futile in their thinking. Their hearts, which are foolish, are darkened. They claim to be wise when truly they have become fools. Believing something different from what God says about anything is surely not conducive to knowledge!

Problems with Prejudice. The presentation of classic proofs for the existence of God may assume that unregenerate people can be intellectually neutral and fair about the subject of God's existence when Scripture teaches that they are unrighteous and deceive themselves. It is known by all that the ungodliness and unrighteousness of humanity is hated by God. Those who are guilty of ungodliness and unrighteousness thus suppress the truth by their unrighteousness. People are not looking for the truth concerning God's existence because people do not lack the truth concerning God's existence. Rather, people have the truth and hold it down in their unrighteousness. The suppression of truth is known because people continue to sin while having a knowledge of God. Sudduth would agree that the noetic effects of sin constitute an objection to the classic proofs for the existence of God "if the task of apologetics presupposes that rational

²⁹ Collett, *Transcendental*, 463-464.

inference is a *source* of knowledge of God in the unregenerate.”³⁰ The pre-dogmatic model fits Sudduth’s description.

Problems with Particularity. Finally, the classic theistic proofs assume that the ‘god’ that is demonstrated to exist may or may not be God of Christian Scripture. Sudduth does interact with this objection but the extent of his discussion is beyond the scope of this paper. Most of the arguments he presents in his treatment of the objection either presuppose special revelation which places them outside of the pre-dogmatic function of the classic theistic proofs or fail to take into account the objections mentioned above which, while separate, also come to bear on the question of what kind of god the classic theistic proofs allegedly demonstrate. The relevance of the prior objections to the current objection may be seen in a quote from Collett.

[F]or an argument to serve as a witness to God, it cannot bear witness to any other god but the living and true God. Thus it must bear witness to God as he truly is, and this in turn requires that it bear witness to God as “the One who cannot but exist.” In other words, in order to be a truthful witness to the triune God disclosed in Scripture, the logical semantics of apologetics argument must be congruent with the identity of the subject matter it seeks to defend. Christian-theistic argument must therefore bear witness to the necessary character of God’s self-existence, and this precludes it from embracing the contrary premise that God’s existence, although true, could be otherwise. Thus in the context of apologetic argument, the concept of God’s existence must not be allowed to function on the level of logical contingency, for to do so is to effectively grant the possibility that God’s existence is falsifiable.³¹

If the classic theistic proofs worked one could justifiably believe in the false gods of their conclusions. The God who is known by all of humanity according to the passage from Romans is not a ‘general theistic’ or ‘classic theistic’ god consistent with the non-Christian, non-Trinitarian god of contemporary Judaism, Allah of Islam, or the First Mover of Aristotle. The God who is known is rather the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He is the God who exists and reveals Himself. Before attempting to prove the existence of God one should explain what he or she means when speaking of God so as to avoid the philosophical and theological failure and confusion offered by classic theistic proofs for the existence of God. It makes little sense to have proven the existence of something called ‘god’ only to then attempt to explain what was meant by ‘god’ in the first place.

30 Sudduth, *Reformed*, 141.

31 Collett, *Transcendental*, 465-466.

Conclusion

Recall that classic proofs for the existence of God may be understood to fall into the category of the pre-dogmatic and apologetic function of natural theology β . Categorizing the proofs in this manner sidesteps most of the concerns raised by Sudduth in response to traditional Reformed objections to the classic proofs. Particular proofs are wrought with their own difficulties as illustrated in the example of the Kalam argument. Overarching philosophical problems with the program of classical theistic proofs are readily available in the works of David Hume and Immanuel Kant, and more modern unbelieving philosophers have further developed their skeptical program. Finally, the classic proofs are inconsistent with Scripture itself as shown through the application of the passage quoted from Romans to a pre-dogmatic and apologetic understanding of the proofs. It must be concluded that the classic proofs for the existence of God do not actually demonstrate God's existence.

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AUTONOMY IS HARD WORK: HUMAN AUTONOMY AS A REJECTION OF CHRISTIAN THEISM

Ben Woodring

In this paper I seek to show that an affirmation of human autonomy is not only inconsistent with Christianity, but that such an affirmation leads to an abandonment of Christian Theism. I do this first with an examination of the Genesis 3 story of mankind's fall, using it to show that in an attempt to reason autonomously Adam and Eve fell from their sinless state. Secondly I examine common themes in modern evangelical thought to demonstrate how by affirming autonomy they have abandoned the clear teaching of scripture. Finally, I deal directly with arguments from non-believers who attempt to argue for the autonomy of man without any basis at all. I hope through these different examinations to establish that by affirming human autonomy, one rejects Christianity.

It is important to begin any such discussion with a definition of terms. Autonomy comes from the greek word *αὐτόνομος*. This is a compound word literally meaning "self-law" or one who governs himself. The primary definition found in the Merriam-Webster dictionary is: "the quality or state of being self-governing; especially: the right of self-government."¹ So when the term autonomy is used in this paper it refers to the belief that mankind is a self-governing being, or by extension, a law unto himself.

When I refer to Christian Theism, I specifically mean that form of Christianity laid out in the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Westminster Larger and Shorter Catechisms. In fact, in this paper I will seek to show that Christians who do not adhere to the doctrines of Reformed Christianity fail to consistently defend Christianity specifically because of their denial of these doctrines. That is not to say that I do not believe they are Christians, but they are in effect, abandoning Christianity to defend it.

Human Autonomy and The Fall

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?" And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it,

¹ Autonomy - Definition and More from the Free Merriam-Webster Dictionary.(n.d.).Dictionary and Thesaurus - Merriam-Webster Online. Retrieved April 23, 2011, from <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/autonomy>.

lest you die." But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.²

In this passage the fall of our first parents into sin is described for us. In order to see how human autonomy plays a role in their fall we must closely examine the passage. First, we must notice the manner in which the serpent attacks what God has commanded. The serpent questions the revelation of God and asks Eve to make a judgment on what God has *actually* commanded. She answers this temptation in an acceptable way, relaying to the serpent the words of God.³ However, when the serpent directly contradicts God's words and tells Eve that she will not die, (in essence asking her to reason apart from God's revelation), she falls spectacularly into his trap.

Van Til writes, "When Satan tempted Adam and Eve in paradise, he sought to make them believe that man's self-consciousness was ultimate rather than derivative and God dependent. He argued, as it were, that it was of the nature of self-consciousness to make itself the final reference point of all predication."⁴

That is, when Eve examined the fruit and used her sensory experience to inform her decision of whether she ought to eat the fruit, she was in essence denying the authority of God's command and revelation and instead assuming the authority of her own experience in decision making.

Van Til again helps us here:

"When man fell, he denied the natural revelatory nature of every fact, including that of his own consciousness. He assumed that he was autonomous... He assumed himself to be non-created. He assumed that the work of interpretation,

2 Gen. 3:1-7.

3 Whether Eve is adding to God's word by adding the clause about touching the fruit is a matter of debate and is much too intricate to be addressed in this paper.

4 VanTil, Cornelius, *Christian Apologetics*, Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Pub., 2003, 118.

as by the force of his natural powers he was engaged in it, was an original instead of derivative procedure.”⁵

What Adam and Eve did was far more heinous than it might first seem. In eating the fruit they appropriated for themselves everything it meant to be God. They assumed the right to judgments about the world by their own authority instead of relying upon what God revealed, and in doing so they removed any basis they once had for their decision making. In the assumption of human autonomy the necessity, no, even the *possibility* of God’s authoritative command is done away with. By eating the fruit Adam and Eve denied the sovereignty, the omnipotence, and the very creative works of God. They treated as lies all that God revealed to them and in doing so removed the very foundation on which their reasoning stood.

It isn’t as if Eve’s disobedience was an innocent misunderstanding of God’s word or an attempt to gain knowledge while desiring fellowship with him. Scripture reveals just the opposite. The serpent uses the very words of God when tempting Eve. However, when God says *לֹא-תָמוּתָּ* (lest you die), Satan says *לֹא-מוֹת תָּמוּתָּ* (You shall not surely die!). In English it is obvious enough that - Satan is contradicting God. But in the Hebrew text Satan is much more forceful. The word *לֹא* literally means “not”. A more literal translation of Satan’s words is “Not-you will surely die”. It carries force, and it is an objective denial of the word of God.⁶

In denying God’s creative work, Adam and Eve also denied the faculties they used to come to the conclusions they made that led to eating the fruit. As they assumed when they ate the fruit, if God is not who he has said he is, then they have no reason to believe their existence makes sense, or is to be governed in any way, by any rule. Further, by eating the fruit they have no basis for assuming that because the fruit looks a certain way it is good to eat. This is because, with their assumption that God has not told the truth even the very terms good and bad have lost their meaning. Adam and Eve had denied the one who gives all things meaning. By eating the fruit Adam and Eve made all of their reasoning futile. In a sense, they kicked away the very ladder they used to reach their goal. Van Til draws this conclusion in his book *Christian Apologetics*.

“The whole idea of the revelation of the self-sufficient God of Scripture drops to the ground if man himself is autonomous or self-sufficient. If man is not himself revelational in the internal structure of his being, he can receive no revelation that comes to him from without. On the other hand, if man is in any

⁵ VanTil, *Apologetics*, 79-80.

⁶ Brown, Francis, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007, 518.

sense autonomous, he is not in need of revelation. If he is, then, said to possess the truth, he possesses it as the product of the ultimately legislative powers of his intellect.⁷

In we are autonomous then we can receive no revelation. If we can receive no revelation then it is impossible for us to know what God has revealed. If we cannot know what God has revealed we are either unable to know truth at all, or we are the ones who declare what truth is. In either case we deny the truth of Christianity simply by affirming our own autonomy since God has said in the scriptures that *he* is truth. Adam and Eve - by eating the fruit - claimed autonomy for themselves (with all of the consequences that entails). They declared that God is a liar, and that truth is determined not through revelation from the creator, but in foundationless, personal autonomy; in self-government that stands upon nothing. The absurdity in this is that without the God they are denying they have no ability to reason or to trust their own conclusions; not simply because without him they wouldn't exist, but because all of the tools of reasoning which they are living by have their beginning in the God they have used those tools to deny. As scripture says it is Christ "in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."⁸

Human Autonomy in Christianity

I have shown in simple terms - through the example of the fall - how the affirmation of human autonomy denies the very foundation not only of Christian Theism but also the foundation of human reason. Next I will address various themes of Christian thought which seek to provide the unbeliever with a sort of "neutral ground" on which they can discuss Christianity. I show that these methods actually surrender the argument to the unbeliever before the discussion has even begun by affirming the unbeliever's ability to reason and come to conclusions about the world around them *consistently* while still denying the truth of Christianity. In short, they do this by affirming human autonomy.

First I discuss those who, in denying the Reformed understanding of Christianity, have swept the legs of consistency out from beneath their own arguments. Secondly, I examine the arguments of those who claim to hold to consistent, Reformed Christianity, but through their evidentialist proofs for the existence of God give the unbeliever an excuse for their unbelief by affirming their autonomy.

Modern evangelicals have effectively turned to human autonomy as the basis for salvation by rejecting the doctrines of grace - specifically the sovereignty of God in salvation. Their claim is that God loves us so much that he has given us the freedom to choose him - that God wants someone to love him by choice, not by force. However, if we look at the underlying

⁷ VanTil, *Apologetics*, 114.

⁸ Col. 2:3.

presuppositions of these claims what we find is the affirmation that man is the ultimate determiner, and that God must leave it up to man if the decision is to be “valid”. They claim that God has no control over the decisions of man. They claim that it is outside of God’s rights to bring about such a decision. This is the epitome of arrogance. It is as if we (the creature) are offered God (the creator), sitting among all of the other options at the job fair of our lives, and are given the responsibility to examine each option and decide which best fits us. Van Til uses this example, “God has to await the election returns to see whether he is chosen as God or is set aside. God’s knowledge therefore stands over against and depends to some extent upon a temporal reality that he does not wholly control.”⁹

By denying the truth of Reformed Christianity the Christian has given the unbeliever the excuse of autonomy to reject God.

"When the Arminian has thus, as he thinks, established and defended human responsibility against the Calvinist he turns about to defend the Christian position against the natural man. But then he soon finds himself at the mercy of the natural man. The natural man is mercilessly consistent. He simply tells the Arminian that a little autonomy involves absolute autonomy, and a little reality set free from the plan of God involves all reality set free from the plan of God. After that the reduction process is simply a matter of time."¹⁰

Van Til here specifically points out the Arminian as susceptible to this failing. However this is true of any non-Reformed understanding of Christianity which denies the sovereignty of God in all things.

Consider a passage from Paul’s letter to the Romans as an example of the way in which these Christians misunderstand and misinterpret scripture.

For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills. You will say to me then, "Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?" But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will

9 VanTil, *Apologetics*, 145.

10 VanTil, Cornelius, *The Defense of the Faith*, Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Pub., 2008, 134.

what is molded say to its molder, "Why have you made me like this?" Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use?¹¹

I chose this passage in particular as a clear case of God as the one who controls all things, raising up and tearing down kings and kingdoms to accomplish his own will. There are many objections – too many to deal with in this paper. However, if you're looking for a more detailed explanation of these texts there are many other works which you can read for in-depth exegesis of this and other passages important to Reformed Christianity.¹² I would, however, like to answer the objection that Paul is dealing specifically with kingdoms and not individuals in this passage. Please note that the "possible objection" that Paul foresees in verse 19 only makes sense in the context of individual salvation and not the salvation of kingdoms. If the possible objector, upon hearing Paul, asks "Why can God judge me for sins if I am unable to resist his will?", then he has rightly understood Paul in saying that God has a hand in all of history and is bringing about his divine purpose - even in the hearts and minds of individuals.

The Christian attempting to affirm the autonomous choice of the unbeliever must then reject this scripture if they are to be consistent. But by rejecting some of the revelation of God he has rejected it all. Acting in the same manner as Eve, he claims for himself the title of determiner of truth and has chosen to reject God's authority as *the* truth.

There is another erroneous form of autonomous thinking that has crept in - even into Reformed thought. It is thought that in the realm of Apologetics the unbeliever is able to, without giving thought to their underlying presuppositions or hatred for God, when presented with the evidence, come to the conclusion that Christianity is the most probable. However, by assuming neutrality this type of argument fails to address the unbeliever's true problem, namely that they are committed to their own autonomy before anything else. Furthermore, this pre-commitment shapes all of their interpretation of evidence for or against Christianity. Van Til writes:

"The argument between Christians and non-Christians involves every fact in the universe. If it does not involve every fact it does not involve any fact. If one fact can be interpreted correctly on the assumption of human autonomy then all facts can. If the Christian is to be able to show the non-Christian objectively that Christianity is true and that those who reject it do so because they hold to

11 Rom. 9:17-21.

12 For example, "The Potter's Freedom" by Dr. James R. White (<http://www.aomin.org/>).

that which is false, this must be done everywhere or else it is not really done anywhere."¹³

It is important to understand this. To affirm human autonomy is to deny Biblical Christianity. There is no middle ground. If we affirm Christianity, we *must* deny human autonomy.

"In putting the matter in this way the nature of the authority that can be allowed for by the natural man is already indicated. The natural man will gladly allow for the idea of authority if only it be the authority of the expert in the use of reason. Such a conception of authority is quite consistent with the assumption of the sinner's autonomy."¹⁴

Again we see that to surrender to the unbeliever the ability to reason consistently and come to valid conclusions apart from Christianity is to surrender to him the entire argument before it has begun. The unbeliever, when presented with the bare facts as he sees them, is perfectly happy to use his ability to reason to deny the existence of God. However, since he has been granted already his ability to reason he has no reason to accept the Christian's argument that this ability to reason must come from God.

So far I have shown that the fall of man had its origin in the assumption of autonomy. I have also shown that the Christian who attempts to merge human autonomy with their Christian belief, in order to make Christianity more palatable to the unbeliever, has surrendered the argument to the unbeliever before the argument has even begun, and has ultimately abandoned Christianity in order to defend it.

Human Autonomy and the non-Christian

Finally, I want to address objections which unbelievers make so that they may continue in their rejection of Christianity. They do so by claiming autonomy just as Eve did. Van Til writes

"Thus we are back at that arch foe of Christianity, namely, the idea of human ultimacy or autonomy. This idea of autonomy expresses itself in modern times

¹³ VanTil, *Defense*, 171.

¹⁴ Van Til, *Defense*, 145.

by holding that in all that comes to man, he gives as well as takes. Modern philosophy has, particularly since the day of Kant, boldly asserted that only that is real for man which he has, in part at least, constructed for himself.”¹⁵

The allegedly autonomous man has no basis for his rationality or reason. As he has already abandoned the only one who can provide a proper foundation for these things, he has abandoned his ability to use those tools. Just as Eve claimed the authority of God when she concluded that the fruit was good to eat, the unbeliever assumes his own authority when he attempts to reason autonomously. When the unbeliever does reason, he does so inconsistently. By clinging to autonomy he undermines his own rejection of Christianity. He has left himself without a basis for his ability to reason. He is left without a defense and this is evidenced by his incapability of reasoning within his own system of thought..

"Sin will reveal itself in the field of knowledge in the fact that man makes himself the ultimate court of appeal in the matter of all interpretation. He will refuse to recognize God's authority. We have already illustrated the sinful person's attitude by the narrative of Adam and Eve. Man has declared his autonomy over and against God."¹⁶

Again Van Til shows how this rejection of God's revelation and rule shows rejection of Christianity and affirmation of human autonomy. If man is the ultimate interpreter then why would he ever rely on God's revelation? It is impossible for man who affirms his own autonomy to then accept the revelation of God as authoritative. Human autonomy is not only inconsistent with those who affirm Christianity then, but also for those who deny it.

In conclusion, I've shown how Christian Theism has human autonomy as its antithesis. I've shown that *in Christianity* if one attempts to affirm autonomy he has undermined his own defense. And finally, I've shown that the unbeliever, by denying Christianity, undermines his own affirmation of autonomy.

Our basis for reason and our access to truth are only possible by submitting ourselves to the revelation of God which we have in the Christian scriptures. As Van Til puts it: "So we

15 Van Til, *Apologetics*, 184.

16 Van Til, *Defense*, 58.

cannot subject the authoritative pronouncements of Scripture about reality to the scrutiny of reason because it is reason itself that learns its proper function from Scripture.”¹⁷

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¹⁷ Van Til, C. (2003). *Christian apologetics*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Pub.: 140

EXPOSITION OF ROMANS 1:16-2:16 - THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

Joshua Whipps

Introduction

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it [the] righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "but the righteous [man] shall live by faith." For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. or even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures. Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.” (Romans 1:16-1:26 NASB¹)

In the letter to the Romans, Paul begins with his typical salutation, his credentials, and a more or less typical theological riff. When he addresses them, he tells of his thanks for them, tells them of their reputation among the churches, and tells them how often he speaks of them - letting them know that they are in his thoughts. He tells them that he has prayed to be allowed to visit them, and that he has longed to see them, that he may share his gifts with them, and have their gifts shared with him. Such is the fellowship in the body. He hastens to tell them of his plans to visit them, the hindrances to that visit, and his eagerness for preaching the gospel there.

¹ All Scripture quotations taken from the New American Standard Bible®, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation Used by permission. (www.lockman.org).

The Office of Teacher

One thing I wish to point out prior to my treatment of this section comes from verse 14. *I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish.* As Calvin notes, "it ought not to be ascribed to his arrogance, that he thought himself in a manner capable of teaching the Romans, however much they excelled in learning and wisdom and in the knowledge of things, inasmuch as it had pleased the Lord to make him a debtor even to the wise."² Further, Calvin makes a fantastic point concerning the office of a teacher, that I have taken to heart more than once, and I will here reproduce for you.

[T]he gospel is by a heavenly mandate destined and offered to the wise, in order that the Lord may subject to himself all the wisdom of this world, and make all variety of talents, and every kind of science, and the loftiness of all arts, to give way to the simplicity of his doctrine; and what is more, they are to be reduced to the same rank with the unlearned, and to be made so meek, as to be able to bear those to be their fellow-disciples under their master, Christ, whom they would not have deigned before to take as their scholars; and then that the unlearned are by no means to be driven away from this school, nor are they to flee away from it through groundless fear; for if Paul was indebted to them, being a faithful debtor, he had doubtless discharged what he owed; and thus they will find here what they will be capable of enjoying. All teachers have also a rule here which they are to follow, and that is, modestly and kindly to accommodate themselves to the capacities of the ignorant and unlearned.³

I found this superb advice for myself, and any other teacher in the church. Whether our students are wiser than we, or more foolish, we are to submit them to the Word, above all. I don't consider myself wise, so I am comforted by these words. I am struck by the forcefulness of Calvin's insistence on the supremacy of doctrine. The more cynical might say that this is due to his own office - but with the pastor's heart he shows so often in his writing, I don't think this is the case. In the common yoke of Christ, both Tyndale's plowboy and the university professor are matched for common instruction and service. The unlearned should not be afraid to be in the company of the learned; but neither should the wise despise the simple. Further, as teachers, we have a common duty to both the wise and the simple, that both may drink their fill of the living water that we bring to them from the Word.

2 *Commentary on Romans*, Calvin, (tr. Owen) pg 42 - <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom38.v.iv.html>.

3 *Commentary on Romans*, Calvin, (tr. Owen) pg 60-61 - <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom38.v.iv.html>.

An Exposition of the Gospel

Oliphint has this to say about the following passage;

"The apologetic implications of this passage are deep and wide. Among the most important is the fact that every person on the face of the earth is, by virtue of being created in God's image, a God-knower. ... In our defense of Christianity, therefore, we may be confident in the fact that, even before we make our defense, God has been there, dynamically and perpetually making himself known through every single fact of the unbeliever's existence. Our apologetic is, then, in a very real sense, a reminder to the unbeliever of what he already knows to be the case."⁴

For more introductory remarks, and an exposition thereof, I point you to Calvin, or Gill.

From this launching point, Paul begins his exposition of his gospel, to smooth the way for his plan to teach there at a later date. Thus, we have a veritable jewel of apostolic epistles - an exposition of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He begins his presentation with the bold declaration: *For I am not ashamed of the gospel*. Why does he make this point? In the eyes of the world, there is much to be ashamed of in the gospel. The offense the gospel presents to the unbelieving world is immense.⁵ It proclaims the shameful and horrific death of the incarnate Son of God on a Roman cross, in propitiation for the sins of His people; it proclaims the universal sinfulness of man, their universal need for salvation from eternal punishment, and the universal inability of man to atone for their own sin. It proclaims the monergistic *power of God for salvation to everyone who believes*; demonstrated by His resurrection, purchased by the blood of one exclusive Substitute who intercedes for His own people, sends His Spirit to renew them in His image, and will return to judge all men. It calls all men to repent; *the Jew first and also to the Greek*; and believe this gospel. It calls that they all submit to this Lord, and to no other. Small wonder that the natural man stumbles over this stone, and considers it foolish!⁶

It is the power of God for salvation, nonetheless. *For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "BUT THE RIGHTEOUS man SHALL LIVE BY FAITH."* Calvin says of this: "from faith; for righteousness is offered by the gospel, and is received by faith. And he adds, to faith: for as our faith makes progress, and as it advances in

4 Oliphint, Scott & Tipton, Lane, *Revelation and Reason: New Essays in Reformed Apologetics*, Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P & R Publishing Company, 2007, 72.

5 Rom. 9:33.

6 1 Cor. 1:21.

knowledge, so the righteousness of God increases in us at the same time, and the possession of it is in a manner confirmed."⁷

The Exchanges

With this I agree - our being made righteous (by imputation of Christ's righteousness on our behalf, both passive and active) is revealed, or uncovered, from faith in reception of the gospel of God, He who is "Faithful and true"⁸ to the living faith of a sanctified life. In this, we see the great exchange of the gospel, as Mathetes expresses;

By what other one was it possible that we, the wicked and ungodly, could be justified, than by the only Son of God? O sweet exchange! O unsearchable operation! O benefits surpassing all expectation! that the wickedness of many should be hid in a single righteous One, and that the righteousness of One should justify many transgressors!⁹

In the following section, we will see Paul contrast the great, sweet exchange of the gospel with the inexcusable dark exchange of honor for dishonor; of truth for a lie. *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.* ἀποκαλύπτεται γὰρ ὀργὴ θεοῦ ἀπ' οὐρανοῦ ἐπὶ πᾶσαν ἀσέβειαν καὶ ἀδικίαν ἀνθρώπων τῶν τὴν ἀλήθειαν ἐν ἀδικίᾳ κατεχόντων (Rom 1:18)

In verse 18, Paul once again begins with "For" - to what does he refer? Given that he just finished speaking of the righteousness of God, it is clear. *Unrighteousness*, and *ungodliness* are the objects of God's wrath. Just as the righteousness of God is revealed, or uncovered, from faith to faith, the wrath of God is revealed, or uncovered as well. Oliphint puts it this way: "The *mysterium iniquitatis*, as the suppression and grotesque exchange of the knowledge of God, is only defeated in the Great Exchange of the gospel, the *mysterium Christi*."¹⁰ Apart from God's imputed righteousness, there is no righteousness in men. This is set against¹¹ the revelation of God's mercy in salvation; a contrast Paul will return to again in chapter 9¹².

Revealed Wrath

7 Calvin, *Commentary*, pg 65 - <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom38.v.v.html>.

8 Rev. 3:14.

9 Roberts & Donaldson, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: The apostolic fathers. Justin Martyr. Irenaeus; Epistle of Mathetes to Diognetus*; (New York; Charles Scribner's Sons, 1903), 28.

10 Oliphint & Tipton, *Revelation and Reason*, 73.

11 John 3:36, Rom. 5:9, Phil. 1:27-28, 1 Th. 2:16, 5:9.

12 Rom. 9:22-23.

Gill gives us the following on these verses:

This is said to be “*revealed*”, where? Not in the Gospel, in which the righteousness of God is revealed; unless the Gospel be taken for the books of the four Evangelists, or for the Gospel dispensation, or for that part of the ministry of a Gospel preacher, which represents the wrath of God as the desert of sin, the dreadfulness of it, and the way to escape it; for the Gospel, strictly taken, is grace, good news, glad tidings, and not wrath and damnation; though indeed in Christ’s sufferings for the sins of his people, which the Gospel gives us an account of, there is a great display of the wrath of God, and of his indignation against sin: but this wrath of God is revealed in the law, it is known by the light of nature, and to be perceived in the law of Moses, and may be observed in the Scriptures... This wrath is said to be God’s wrath “*from heaven*”, by the awful blackness which covers the heavens, the storms and tempests raised in them, and by pouring down water or fire in a surprising manner, on the inhabitants of the world; or “*from heaven*”, that is, openly, manifestly, in the sight of all; or from God who is in heaven, and not from second causes; and more especially it will be revealed from heaven, when Christ shall descend from thence at the day of judgment: the subject matter or object of it, *against*, or “*upon*” which it is revealed, are, *all ungodliness, and unrighteousness of men*; that is, all ungodly and unrighteous men; or all men who are guilty of ungodliness, the breach of the first table of the law, which respects the worship of God, and of unrighteousness, the breach of the second table of the law, which regards our neighbours’ good: and these persons are further described as such, *who hold the truth in unrighteousness*: meaning either such who know the Gospel, which is “*the truth*”, and do not profess it openly, but hold and imprison it in their minds, which is a great piece of unrighteousness; or if they do profess it, do not live up to it in their lives: or rather the Gentile philosophers are designed, who are spoken of in the following verse; who had some knowledge of the truth of the divine Being, and his perfections, and of the difference between moral good and evil; but did not

like to retain it themselves, nor communicate all they knew to others, nor did they live according to that knowledge which they had.¹³¹⁴

Made Evident

Because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. - διότι τὸ γνωστὸν τοῦ θεοῦ φανερόν ἐστιν ἐν αὐτοῖς ὁ θεὸς γὰρ αὐτοῖς ἐφάνησεν (Rom 1:19)

"Two features of 1:19 are relevant to this discussion. The first of these concerns the meaning of the phrase τὸ γνωστὸν τοῦ θεοῦ. Does this phrase refer to actual or merely potential knowledge? In other words, is there a real sense in which unsaved men know God, or is Paul simply saying that God is "knowable"? While γνωστὸν may have a potential meaning in Classical Greek, it seems best in light of both NT usage and the context to understand it as a reference to a real yet suppressed knowledge. There is no warrant here to speak of a potential knowledge of God to be gained by probability argumentation. Paul is certainly not attempting a "cosmological argument." Rather, he is speaking of an actual knowledge of God obtained from nature. Man suppresses this limited knowledge and thus becomes "without excuse" (1:20)."¹⁵

"In verses 19-23 (and to some extent, v. 25 as well), Paul develops and amplifies the notions of 'suppression' and 'truth'.¹⁶ The word *dioti* (διότι) links the following to the preceding discussion, signifying its connection.¹⁷ "[T]he argument of 1:18-21 seems to be built upon the conjunctions γὰρ (18, 20) and διότι (19, 21). Salvation by faith and the revelation of the righteousness of God (1:16-17) are of utmost importance because (γὰρ) the wrath of God is also being revealed (1:18). The wrath of God is being revealed because (διότι) men have not responded to the revelation of God clearly present in nature (1:19). 1:20 seems to be largely exegetical of 1:19; the γὰρ should probably be understood as explanatory ("indeed"). Men are without excuse (1:20c) because (διότι) they did not glorify God even though they knew him. (1:21a)"¹⁸ It is *because* that which is manifest in them is known that they suppress the truth. It is evident, apparent, manifest to them, because God has manifested it to them. In short, "The phrase...must, according to the invariable New Testament and LXX use, mean that which is known not that which may be known about God."¹⁹

13 *Exposition of the Old and New Testament*, Gill,

<http://goodbooksfree.com/commentaries/gill/45001.html#Romans1:18>.

14 Since this is an online journal, the author will include hyperlinks to sources that are available in the public domain, and were used in his research.

15 Turner, David L., *Cornelius Van Til and Romans 1:18-21*, *Grace Theological Journal* 2.1 (1981), 53.

16 Oliphint & Tipton, *Revelation and Reason*, 64.

17 See Hodge, *Commentary on Romans*, on Chap.1, vs. 19.

18 Turner, *Van Til and Romans*, 51-52.

19 *Explanatory Analysis of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, H. P. Liddon, (London: Longmans, Green, 1899) 26.

Ineradicable Image

Calvin's comments follow:

Inasmuch as what may be known of God, etc. He thus designates what it behoves us to know of God; and he means all that appertains to the setting forth of the glory of the Lord, or, which is the same thing, whatever ought to move and excite us to glorify God. And by this expression he intimates, that God in his greatness can by no means be fully comprehended by us, and that there are certain limits within which men ought to confine themselves, inasmuch as God accommodates to our small capacities what he testifies of himself. Insane then are all they who seek to know of themselves what God is: for the Spirit, the teacher of perfect wisdom, does not in vain invite our attention to what may be known, τὸ γνωστὸν; and by what means this is known, he immediately explains. And he said, in them rather than to them, for the sake of greater emphasis: for though the Apostle adopts everywhere Hebrew phrases, and \beth , beth, is often redundant in that language, yet he seems here to have intended to indicate a manifestation, by which they might be so closely pressed, that they could not evade; for every one of us undoubtedly finds it to be engraven on his own heart. By saying, that God has made it manifest, he means, that man was created to be a spectator of this formed world, and that eyes were given him, that he might, by looking on so beautiful a picture, be led up to the Author himself.

Calvin is here saying that in man, there is the image of God, engraven on him and ineradicable²⁰ - and outside of him, as part of the creation he was created to be a part of, there is an inescapable context for man - in which no created thing can do other than declare His glory. τὸ γνωστὸν τοῦ θεοῦ is known - it is known by the mind (created in the image of God), and it is made known to men by the entirety of creation, on which the fingerprints of God are indelibly pressed, and entirely unavoidable as a witness. It *is* manifest, because God has *made it* manifest. God uses all of His creation as the instrument for inescapably pressing His signet ring to the wax

20 "For, in the first place, no man can survey himself without forthwith turning his thoughts towards the God in whom he lives and moves; because it is perfectly obvious, that the endowments which we possess cannot possibly be from ourselves; nay, that our very being is nothing else than subsistence in God alone." - Calvin, *Institutes*, I,1,1.

of man's consciousness.²¹ The seal of God's Sovereignty is ineradicable, and cannot be effaced from the nature or consciousness of man. Man tries to suppress it, attempts to cover it over, but the image of God in His creatures cannot be escaped, cannot be broken, and cannot be separated from the essence of man. It is the nature of man to be a creature always in contact with the God of creation, and to always be faced with the glory of the God with whom he must deal, and honor accordingly.

Invisible Attributes

For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. - τὰ γὰρ ἀόρατα αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ κτίσεως κόσμου τοῖς ποιήμασιν νοούμενα καθορᾶται ἢ τε ἀίδιος αὐτοῦ δύναμις καὶ θεϊότης εἰς τὸ εἶναι αὐτοὺς ἀναπολογήτους (Rom 1:20)

For since the creation of the world (ἀπὸ κτίσεως κόσμου); Here we are presented with a universality of time in which the following has its context. What follows has universal implications within the temporal universe. (Christ uses a similar phrase in Mar 10:6 regarding the status of marriage - that "from the beginning of creation" (ἀπὸ δὲ ἀρχῆς κτίσεως) God made them male and female.) The construction of the first portion of the sentence is τὰ γὰρ ἀόρατα αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ κτίσεως κόσμου. The subject of this sentence is "His invisible attributes" - the predicate is following shortly. "Since the creation of the world" is modifying the predicate as well.

being understood through what has been made - τοῖς ποιήμασιν νοούμενα; There are two verbs present here; ποιήμασιν and καθορᾶται. have been clearly seen - καθορᾶται; His invisible attributes have been clearly seen through that which has been made. They have been seen "since the creation of the world" (ἀπὸ κτίσεως κόσμου). They are perceived with clarity (καθορᾶται), and they are understood by the mind (ποιήμασιν). They are perceived clearly; God is evident within them, as the verse prior states, for God made it evident to them. Along with Calvin, I connect this "evident within them" to the imago dei. It is an internal, revelatory apprehension of God's nature to creatures made in his image. In addition, all of creation attests to the nature of God. It is no accident that the mention of κόσμος is immediately followed by τοῖς ποιήμασιν νοούμενα - it is since the creation of the world that men have understood those invisible attributes from what has been made. Thus, we have the predicate in view (καθορᾶται), being modified, or enhanced by ποιήμασιν and discussing the subject of predication (ἀόρατα αὐτοῦ).

"His invisible attributes" (ἀόρατα αὐτοῦ) is modified as well; by "His eternal power and divine nature" (ἢ τε ἀίδιος αὐτοῦ δύναμις καὶ θεϊότης). This is not a careless modification, nor is it vague. As Calvin comments,

21 See; Augustine, *On the Trinity*, 14:25:21.

God is in himself invisible; but as his majesty shines forth in his works and in his creatures everywhere, men ought in these to acknowledge him, for they clearly set forth their Maker: and for this reason the Apostle in his Epistle to the Hebrews says, that this world is a mirror, or the representation of invisible things. He does not mention all the particulars which may be thought to belong to God; but he states, that we can arrive at the knowledge of his eternal power and divinity; for he who is the framer of all things, must necessarily be without beginning and from himself. When we arrive at this point, the divinity becomes known to us, which cannot exist except accompanied with all the attributes of a God, since they are all included under that idea.²²

Dual Aspect

Remember, of course, that Calvin and Gill both here express that there is a dual aspect to this revelatory knowledge. This is Calvin speaking of the latter aspect of that knowledge, as in vs 19 he speaks of the former; Gill, in his commentary says this; "...it is light by which that which may be known of God is manifest; and this is the light of nature, which every man has that comes into the world; and this is internal, it is in him, in his mind and conscience, and is communicated to him by God, and that by infusion or inspiration..."²³

It is also crucial to note (along with Calvin above) that this knowledge extends to all of the attributes of God, to the extent that this revelation communicates it. Murray also comments that "Eternal power is specific and it means that the attribute of eternity is predicated of God's power. The implication is that the eternity of God as well as the eternity of His power is in view. 'Divinity' is generic as distinguished from power which is specific. This term reflects on the perfections of God and denotes, to use Meyer's words, 'the totality of that which God is as a being possessed of divine attributes'. Hence divinity does not specify one invisible attribute but the sum of the invisible perfections which characterize God. So, after all, the statement "eternal power and divinity" is inclusive of a great many invisible attributes and reflects on the richness of the manifestation given in the visible creation of the being, majesty, and glory of God."²⁴²⁵

"A second noteworthy feature of 1:20 is the meaning of the verb καθορᾶται. With τὰ ἄόρατα this verb forms a striking oxymoron. The verb καθοράω is a compound form in which κατά intensifies ὁράω. The meaning is "perceive" or "notice" and can be rendered here with the

22 Calvin, *Commentary*, pg. 70 - <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom38.v.vi.html>.

23 Gill, *Exposition*, <http://goodbooksfree.com/commentaries/gill/45001.html#Romans1:19>.

24 Murray, John, *The Epistle to the Romans*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1997, 39-40.

25 Also, see Hodge's exposition of this verse for additional support.

modal participle *νοούμενα*, 'perceived with the eye of reason.'²⁶ Murray calls it an "explanatory clause", and says just prior that this is "to indicate that what is sensuously imperceptible is nevertheless clearly apprehended in mental conception..." and afterward, that "it is the seeing of understanding, of intelligent conception."²⁷

Hence, we see that in vs. 19 there is a weighty emphasis upon the internal, implanted knowledge of God in His image-bearers; while in vs. 20, there is a weighty emphasis on the knowledge of God being declared in His creation. Not merely declared, but clearly perceived, understood, and this knowledge extends to even the very nature and attributes of God. I'll close the discussion of vs. 20 with Gill's comments;

Not the angels, the invisible inhabitants of heaven: nor the unseen glories of another world; nor the decrees of God; nor the persons in the Godhead; but the perfections of God, or his "properties", as the Arabic version reads it; and which are explained by "his eternal power and Godhead": these, from the creation of the world are clearly seen; this is no new discovery, but what men have had, and might, by the light of nature, have enjoyed ever since the world was created; these being understood, in an intellectual way, by the discursive faculty of the understanding, by the things that are made; the various works of creation; all which proclaim the being, unity, and perfections of God their Creator, so that they are without excuse.²⁸

Not Whether, But How

For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. - (διότι γνόντες τὸν θεὸν οὐχ ὡς θεὸν ἐδόξασαν ἢ ἠὲχαρίστησαν ἀλλ' ἐματαιώθησαν ἐν τοῖς διαλογισμοῖς αὐτῶν καὶ ἐσκοτίσθη ἡ ἀσύνητος αὐτῶν καρδία) (Rom 1:21)

It should go without saying that it's plainly stated in the text that "they knew God"; unfortunately, it has long been fashionable, instead of taking the text for what it says, to circumvent the usage of "know" by insertion of the philosophical terminology of respective eras, or to question whether it really means "know". The question, of course, should not be whether they know God, but how. Many of the aforementioned philosophical considerations are, in fact, asking "how", not whether; but it remains plain that the contextual meaning of "know" can be

26 Turner, *Van Til and Romans*, 55.

27 Murray, *Romans*, 38-39.

28 Gill, *Exposition*, <http://goodbooksfree.com/commentaries/gill/45001.html#Romans1:20>.

seen in the text, and brought out from it, without the necessity of philosophical eisegesis. The sentence, as mentioned previously, opens with διότι, which ties it to the previous sentence, and links them together argumentatively. The end of vs. 20 tells us that they are without excuse - without a defense - without an apologetic. This is because they knew God; but they did not honor Him, glorify Him, as God (οὐχ ὡς θεὸν ἐδόξασαν) - or give thanks to Him (ἢ ἠὲ χάριστησαν). Because they knew God, this is their duty, and their proper response; yet their response was otherwise, so they have no defense before Him. To try to explain away the knowledge that men have of God is, quite simply, to cut the heart out of Paul's presentation of the state of man before God. There is no way around it, there is no option here presented. To say that men, for whatever reason, have not the knowledge of God is to leave them with an excuse - which is precisely the opposite of what Paul here tells us. Any definition of the knowledge of God which leaves men with an excuse, according to the text, is hereby precluded; if your definition of knowledge, whatever that may be, results in man not knowing God; the problem is with your definition.

Knowledge Explained

The knowledge of God here discussed is explained over the course of the previous verses; it is revelatory, it is sufficient, it is inescapable, and it is clear. It is revelatory, because the text tells us it is. God *made it manifest* to them. It is sufficient, because (a) God is who has made it manifest, and (b) It renders men indefensible before God. It is inescapable, because man *is* a creation of God, in His image, as well as a part *of* creation - he cannot escape himself, and neither can he escape his environment. It is clear, again, because God has *made it* thus. The text says, expressly, that what God has revealed is clearly seen, and understood. Paul's argument is inexorable, it is perspicuous, and it is unavoidable. Men are without an excuse, because they know God, know who He is, what is required of them, and that they have a necessary covenantal relationship with Him as His creatures. Yet, they neither glorify God as they are required to do, nor do they thank the God they know for what they know He has given them, in His common grace. In their suppression of the truth (which they are in possession of) their foolish hearts are darkened. All of their deliberations, their speculations, or arguments (διαλογισμός), are useless, worthless, or futile (ματαιόω). They have no apologetic for their lack of proper response to the God they know, and are required to glorify and give thanks to. Romans 1:21 is not the end of Paul's argument, however. His argument, in fact, continues on through the majority of Romans; we lack the time, or the space, to examine it in detail in this particular article, but we should, indeed, look at it in terms of the overarching argument of this great epistle. In the meantime, we will continue.

Fool's Bargain

Professing to be wise, they became fools, - φάσκοντες εἶναι σοφοὶ ἐμωράνθησαν (Rom 1:22)

Professing, or affirming their own wisdom, they act foolishly. In other words, by their pretensions of wisdom - by setting themselves up as the wise men, they have made fools of themselves. This brings to mind 1 Cor 1:18ff, where the "wisdom" of the world and the "foolishness" of God is contrasted; and, interestingly, where the "power of God" to salvation is also referred to. It would be beneficial to examine the parallels involved in these two passages; there are many. This verse also calls to mind the many verses in the Psalms and Proverbs concerning wisdom and foolishness. Also recall 2Ti 2:23, in connection with this verse and the preceding. In fine, the foolishness of man comes out all the plainer when he professes to be wise. This thought, however, is not completed in this verse.

and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures. - καὶ ἥλλαξαν τὴν δόξαν τοῦ ἀφθάρτου θεοῦ ἐν ὁμοιώματι εἰκόνοσ φθαρτοῦ ἀνθρώπου καὶ πετεινῶν καὶ τετραπόδων καὶ ἔρπετῶν (Rom 1:23)

The first use of "exchange" (ἥλλαξαν) is here, and will be further explained shortly. The suppression of the truth seen earlier is here expressed. The exchange of glory for the Creator is with glory for the creature. Of the incorruptible, the immortal (ἄφθαρτος), for the corruptible, the mortal (φθαρτός). Note the antithesis in the forms here - ἄ is the only change in the two words - the negation of φθαρτός. This exchange is of the real thing, for the image of the real thing. The ἐν ὁμοιώματι εἰκόνοσ φθαρτοῦ for δόξαν τοῦ ἀφθάρτου θεοῦ. I cannot help but note the connection of this exchange to the "darkened" (σκοτίζω) in vs. 21. The picture harkens back to Matthew 4:16, Luke 2:32, Ephesians 5, and will be seen shortly in 2:19; it also finds parallel in 1Tim. 6:16; μόνος ἔχων ἀθανασίαν φῶσ οἰκῶν ἀπρόσιτον. The light of the incorruptible wisdom and glory of God is exchanged for the darkness of corruption, foolishness, and dishonor.

Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. - διὸ παρέδωκεν αὐτοὺς ὁ θεὸς ἐν ταῖς ἐπιθυμίαισ τῶν καρδιῶν αὐτῶν εἰς ἀκαθαρσίαν τοῦ ἀτιμάζεσθαι τὰ σώματα αὐτῶν ἐν αὐτοῖσ (Rom 1:24)

We again see διὸ used to tie the previous verse and this verse together. Because of the preceding, God delivers them up, gives them over (παρέδωκεν αὐτοὺς ὁ θεὸς). What does He give them over in, or to? ἐν ταῖς ἐπιθυμίαισ τῶν καρδιῶν αὐτῶν εἰς ἀκαθαρσίαν - *in* the lusts, or desires of their foolishly darkened hearts, *to* impurity. They are in the state of their lustful foolishness, and God gives them over *to* impurity.²⁹ For what reason? τοῦ ἀτιμάζεσθαι τὰ σώματα αὐτῶν ἐν αὐτοῖσ - that their bodies might be dishonored among them. Interestingly, this seems to be a direct tie to their refusal to honor God in vs. 21. If God is not honored, he gives them over to dishonor the very things that they are professing to honor, instead. That which they have exchanged for is thus shown to be just as worthless as their speculations are.

²⁹ Murray, *Romans*, 43-44.

For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. - οἵτινες μετήλλαξαν τὴν ἀλήθειαν τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν τῷ ψεύδει καὶ ἐσεβάσθησαν καὶ ἐλάτρευσαν τῇ κτίσει παρὰ τὸν κτίσαντα ὅς ἐστιν εὐλογητὸς εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας ἀμήν (Rom 1:25)

The Gravity of the Offense

"Verse 25 reverts to the thought of verse 23. This virtual reiteration serves three purposes-it unfolds the character of the offense, it reaffirms the ground upon which the judicial infliction rested, and it vindicates the gravity of the infliction by emphasizing the religious perversity on account of which the penalty was imposed."³⁰ The truth of God (τὴν ἀλήθειαν τοῦ θεοῦ) here exchanged is that which God has made manifest, explained in vss. 18-20. The lie (ψεῦδος) is that which they are suppressing that manifest truth with. This suppression is expressed in the service and worship of the creation, rather than the Creator. As to ψεῦδος, a case can, and should be made that this refers back to φάσκοντες εἶναι σοφοί, in vs. 22. Their affirmation of wisdom is a *self-attestation*. It does not look to God as the fount of wisdom, and, frankly, denies the claim Paul presents in Col 2:2-3 - that all wisdom and knowledge is hidden in Christ. In short, the lie exchanged for truth is autonomy.

For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error. And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; [they are] gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful; and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.

Therefore you have no excuse, everyone of you who passes judgment, for in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. And we know that the judgment of God rightly falls

³⁰ Murray, *Romans*, 45.

upon those who practice such things. But do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment on those who practice such things and do the same [yourself], that you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance? But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to each person according to his deeds: to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation.

[There will be] tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek, but glory and honor and peace to everyone who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For there is no partiality with God. For all who have sinned without the Law will also perish without the Law, and all who have sinned under the Law will be judged by the Law; for [it is] not the hearers of the Law [who] are just before God, but the doers of the Law will be justified. For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them, on the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus. (Romans 1:26-2-16)

For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error. - διὰ τοῦτο παρέδωκεν αὐτοὺς ὁ θεὸς εἰς πάθη ἀτιμίας αἷ τε γὰρ θήλειαι αὐτῶν μετήλλαξαν τὴν φυσικὴν χρῆσιν εἰς τὴν παρὰ φύσιν ὁμοίως τε καὶ οἱ ἄρσενες ἀφέντες τὴν φυσικὴν χρῆσιν τῆς θηλείας ἐξεκαύθησαν ἐν τῇ ὀρέξει αὐτῶν εἰς ἀλλήλους ἄρσενες ἐν ἄρσεσιν τὴν ἀσχημοσύνην

κατεργαζόμενοι καὶ τὴν ἀντιμισθίαν ἣν ἔδει τῆς πλάνης αὐτῶν ἐν ἑαυτοῖς ἀπολαμβάνοντες (Rom 1:26-27)

I'm not going to offer much commentary on this particular point other than to say that there is an exchange to be seen here, as well. Abandonment of the natural for the unnatural, which is said to be indecent, or unseemly - and in vs. 26, ἀτιμία, or dishonorable.

The Morality of Knowledge

And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, - καὶ καθὼς οὐκ ἔδοκίμασαν τὸν θεὸν ἔχειν ἐν ἐπιγνώσει παρέδωκεν αὐτοὺς ὁ θεὸς εἰς ἀδόκιμον νοῦν ποιεῖν τὰ μὴ καθήκοντα (Rom 1:28)

This is a very interesting verse, with many implications. The opening clause, καὶ καθὼς οὐκ ἔδοκίμασαν, speaks of a voluntary act - a refusal to acknowledge, deem worthy, or fitting, having God in their knowledge. God's response, since they do not deem it fitting (οὐκ ἔδοκίμασαν) to have Him in their everyday knowledge, gives them over to an unfit mind (ἀδόκιμον νοῦν). In essence, the judgment is commensurate with the crime - as we saw in the last two verses.³¹ This is expressed by their unfit, improper actions (καθήκοντα). "The judgment of God falls upon the seat of thought and action. 'To do those things which are not fitting' is explanatory of what a reprobate mind entails and shows that 'the mind' as conceived of by the apostle is concerned with action as well as with thought."³² This point can be expanded, in fact. For Paul, (and for Christ, of course) the operation of the mind is just as morally culpable as the work of the hands. Thus, in every thought of every mind, there is a moral element inherent in it. Hence, we cannot look at knowledge as simply intellectual; we cannot separate out the effect of sin on the mind, nor can we separate out the moral culpability of our mind from the equation, if we are to have a truly Biblical epistemology. In fact, our conception of epistemology cannot be divorced from the rest of our theological system; it must be organic to it, and be taught by it as part of the system as a whole. What knowledge is, what it consists of, is moral as much as it is intellectual. More on that to follow.

Complications

being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; [they are] gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful; and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them. -πεπληρωμένους πάση ἀδικία πονηρία πλεονεξία κακία μεστοὺς φθόνου φόνου

31 Murray, *Romans*, 49.

32 Murray, *Romans*, 49-50.

ἔριδος δόλου κακοηθείας ψιθυριστάς καταλάλους θεοστυγεῖς ὕβριστάς ὑπερηφάνους ἀλαζόνας ἐφευρετάς κακῶν γονεῦσιν ἀπειθεῖς ἀσυνέτους ἀσυνθέτους ἀστόργους ἀνελεήμονας οἵτινες τὸ δικαίωμα τοῦ θεοῦ ἐπιγνόντες ὅτι οἱ τὰ τοιαῦτα πράσσοντες ἄξιοι θανάτου εἰσὶν οὐ μόνον αὐτὰ ποιοῦσιν ἀλλὰ καὶ συνευδοκοῦσιν τοῖς πράσσουσιν (Rom 1:29-32)

Paul begins this catalogue of vice with the description that they are "filled with all unrighteousness" - the subject which began this discourse in vs. 18, against which the wrath of God is being revealed. So, in some sense, we have come around full circle. One other note to make is in vs. 30, where the term "haters of God" is used. Calvin: "The word θεοστυγεῖς, means, no doubt, haters of God; for there is no reason to take it in a passive sense, (hated of God,) since Paul here proves men to be guilty by manifest vices. Those, then, are designated, who hate God, whose justice they seem to resist by doing wrong."³³ Gill: "haters of God; some read it, "hated of God"; as all workers of iniquity are; but rather this expresses their sin, that they were deniers of the being and providence of God, and showed themselves to be enemies to him by their evil works."³⁴ In verse 31, as several commentators point out, there is a negation in each word; without understanding, without faith (faithless), without love toward kindred, or family, and without mercy. Just as in vs. 25, vs. 32 starts with οἵτινες - οἵτινες τὸ δικαίωμα τοῦ θεοῦ ἐπιγνόντες; literally, it reads "those who know thoroughly the ordinance of God". We see that these selfsame people identified in the catalogue prior are all said to know (ἐπιγινώσκω) the ordinance of God. They know, full well, that by this ordinance, those who do such things are worthy of death; yet they not only do them, but approve of others who do the same.

The knowledge of God (as well as all other knowledge) has an inextricable moral quality, as we are creatures in His image. Far too often we are presented with a conception of "knowledge" divorced from morality, or given a conception of "pure intellect" in one sphere, and "pure morality" in another. This is simply not the case. Those who know God know His covenant requirements full well, if not comprehensively; they also know the consequences of breaking that covenant.

The moral quality of knowledge is important in a multitude of ways. Not least of these is the implication that men are "without an apologetic" due to the knowledge they themselves possess, *and are held morally culpable for suppressing it in unrighteousness*. This suppression is akin to that which is "falsely called 'knowledge;'"³⁵ That which makes arrogant, and does not humble.^{36 37} Knowledge, as we've already discussed, is not purely intellectual in nature. Knowledge is a multifaceted thing, to be sure, and true knowledge will of necessity express itself in true wisdom. Not in vain is *true* knowledge mentioned over and over in Scripture as the exemplar; but equally important is the false knowledge, false wisdom, and false morality of man

33 Calvin, *Commentary*, pg 81, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom38.v.vii.html>.

34 Gill, *Exposition*, <http://goodbooksfree.com/commentaries/gill/45001.html#Romans1:30>.

35 1 Tim. 6:20.

36 1 Cor. 8:1-3.

37 Calvin's comments on the preceding passages are well worth reading, and I commend them to the reader.

brought to light. There is a *complication*³⁸ in the equation brought about by sin. Not merely the *noetic* effects of sin, (which, to be sure, are present) but the *federal* effect of sin upon all of what a man is, in Adam. The wrath of God is being revealed upon all unrighteousness. This will and does have an effect upon God's creation. It is not to be wondered at that regeneration is a renewal of the mind³⁹, the conscience⁴⁰, of the whole man.

Indefensible

Therefore you have no excuse, every one of you who passes judgment, for in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. - διὸ ἀναπολόγητος εἶ ὃ ἄνθρωπε πᾶς ὁ κρίνων ἐν ᾧ γὰρ κρίνεις τὸν ἕτερον σεαυτὸν κατακρίνεις τὰ γὰρ αὐτὰ πράσσεις ὁ κρίνων (Rom 2:1)

The reference back to vs. 20, by the use of ἀναπολόγητος is fairly obvious. A good case for this being the referent of διὸ could be made, although this isn't of great importance. Notice first that this is, at face value, rather a puzzling condemnation being made. These who judge others seem to not be included in the catalogue that preceded; but Calvin has it right when he points out that "[t]his reproof is directed against hypocrites, who dazzle the eyes of men by displays of outward sanctity, and even think themselves to be accepted before God, as though they had given him full satisfaction." It was this same group that Christ was speaking to with His "but I say to you" in Matthew 5.⁴¹ All men know God; but not all men suppress that truth outwardly. All men sin; but not all men sin outwardly. Sins of the mind are just as much in view here as sins of the flesh; Paul's "trap" has been sprung. Many in our day fall into this selfsame trap when they do not judge with righteous judgment, but according to appearance.⁴² They fall into the selfsame trap when they allow an excuse on the basis of some other measure of knowledge, or grant to the unbeliever the false wisdom or false righteousness they profess to have. Whether one appears to know God, for instance, is irrelevant, when they sin against their better knowledge. All men do, according to God's word, know God. Those who appear to know God, yet beneath, are dead men⁴³, fall under the same condemnation; they are without a defense.

What we must ask ourselves is this; if we are to reject what the Scripture plainly teaches here about the knowledge of God plainly understood by fallen men; why are they without excuse? Are they without excuse because they could not reason to the truth by their own power? Are they without excuse because they do not accept the results of a cosmological, teleological, or

38 "Just as in the case of nature, the revelation of God in man has been made more complex just because of the wrath of God displayed against the sin of man." - Van Til, Cornelius, *Introduction to Systematic Theology: Prolegomena and the Doctrines of Revelation, Scripture, and God*. ed. William Edgar. (2nd ed), Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P & R Publishing; 2007, 162.

39 Rom 12:2, Eph. 4:23.

40 Heb. 9:14, 22.

41 Matt. 5:28-49.

42 John 7:24.

43 Matt. 23:57.

cumulative argument? It cannot be the former, because they are said to possess this truth already. It is clearly evident, because God has made it evident. It is also manifestly untrue, because Scripture plainly says that men suppress this knowledge they already possess. Why would they suppress it, if they could not, given this claim, arrive to an understanding of it? It cannot be the latter, because these arguments have not been presented to all men; yet all men are without excuse.

Inescapable

And we know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things. But do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment on those who practice such things and do the same [yourself], that you will escape the judgment of God? - οἶδαμεν δὲ ὅτι τὸ κρίμα τοῦ θεοῦ ἐστὶν κατὰ ἀλήθειαν ἐπὶ τοὺς τὰ τοιαῦτα πράσσοντας λογίζη δὲ τοῦτο ὃ ἄνθρωπε ὁ κρίνων τοὺς τὰ τοιαῦτα πράσσοντας καὶ ποιῶν αὐτὰ ὅτι σὺ ἐκφεύξῃ τὸ κρίμα τοῦ θεοῦ (Rom 2:2-3)

But we know that the judgment of God, etc. The design of Paul is to shake off from hypocrites their self-complacencies, that they may not think that they can really gain any thing, though they be applauded by the world, and though they regard themselves guiltless; for a far different trial awaits them in heaven. But as he charges them with inward impurity, which, being hid from the eyes of men, cannot be proved and convicted by human testimonies, he summons them to the tribunal of God, to whom darkness itself is not hid, and by whose judgment the case of sinners, be they willing or unwilling, must be determined.

Moreover, the truth of judgment will in two ways appear, because God will punish sin without any respect of persons, in whomsoever it will be found; and he will not heed outward appearances, nor be satisfied with any outward work, except what has proceeded from real sincerity of heart. It hence follows, that the mask of feigned sanctity will not prevent him from visiting secret wickedness with judgment. It is, no doubt, a Hebrew idiom; for truth in Hebrew means often the inward integrity of the heart, and thus stands opposed not only to gross falsehood, but also to the outward appearance of good works. And then only are hypocrites awakened, when they are told that God will take an account,

not only of their disguised righteousness, but also of their secret motives and feelings.⁴⁴

The self-deceptive nature of the sinful heart is seen here. Men all know that God will judge those who commit the sins outlined just before; yet, inwardly, that is precisely what they engage in. We are so proud that we imagine that only our outward sins will be called to account; but Paul is reminding his hearers that God knows the inner man as well – and that there is nothing hidden from God.

We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice wickedness; yet, what is being claimed by these men is that they do not practice this wickedness! Recall what the next chapter tells us; *all* men are sinners, *all* are wicked, and *none* seek for God. The Law shuts the mouth of every man!⁴⁵ Through the Law, additionally, comes the knowledge of sin.⁴⁶ Why, do you think, men suppress the truth in unrighteousness; and why are they without excuse?

Without Regard

Or do you think lightly (*καταφρονεῖς*) of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance? But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to each person according to his deeds: to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation.⁴⁷

Notice the term *καταφρονεῖς* – to have little thought, or little regard for. Paul is asking them – do you really think that little of God's common grace toward you, as sinners? He is kind, tolerant, and patient toward you – and that is the grace by which any man is kept alive in order to repent at all! Further, this is the means God is pleased to use in order to prepare those to whom he grants repentance. If you, who claim to be righteous, are ignorant of this – why is that? As Gill puts it; “God’s end in his goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, was not to testify to their innocence, as they imagined, but to lead them to repentance, of which they were ignorant”⁴⁸; here we have Paul's exposition of what the extent of the knowledge of God granted to unbelieving men is. They know that sin must be punished; their need for salvation is evident, their guilt before God is before them at all times. What they do not have knowledge of is the means by which their sin may be atoned for, and their proper response. Instead, by thinking so

44 *Commentary on Romans*, Calvin, (tr. Owen) pg 85, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom38.vi.i.html>.

45 Rom. 3:19.

46 Rom. 3:20.

47 I will not give the Greek in full from this point forward, for the sake of brevity.

48 Gill, *Exposition*, <http://goodbooksfree.com/commentaries/gill/45002.html#Romans2:4>.

little of God's mercy, they are merely storing up for themselves the wrath of God. They know quite well that God punishes sin. Why are they so willing to overlook it in their own case? Notice another thing here. It is often said that Chapter 2 is speaking specifically to the Jews; yet, there has been no mention of the Jews as yet. Paul's audience here is as yet general⁴⁹; those who consider themselves righteous – anyone who considers themselves as such⁵⁰. Those who condemn others, yet are hypocrites in practice, fall under condemnation.

Universal Condemnation

[There will be] tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek, but glory and honor and peace to everyone who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For there is no partiality with God. For all who have sinned without the Law will also perish without the Law, and all who have sinned under the Law will be judged by the Law; for [it is] not the hearers of the Law [who] are just before God, but the doers of the Law will be justified. For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively (φύσει) the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them, on the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus.

Paul affirms the universality of this condemnation⁵¹ – for there is no respect of persons, or outward judgment by appearance, or outward merit, with God. Why is this so, if God has a chosen people in this world? For, all men are judged in accordance with the extent of their knowledge. Even those without the law do the things of the law (to some extent) – and do so by their very nature, or instinctively (φύσει). Says Gill; “the Gentiles in some measure, and in some sort, did these things by nature; not that men by the mere strength of nature without the grace of God, can fulfil the law, or do anything that is acceptable to God; and indeed, what these men did was merely natural and carnal, and so unacceptable to God.” Are they truly a “law unto themselves”, autonomous⁵², as seems to be implied here? Not in the sense meant by “final arbiter”. Paul immediately tells us; the law, as written in their hearts, is shown forth by their actions. In other words, they act as if “ought” is meaningful – as well they ought! Along with the original knowledge of God, scarred by sin, is the knowledge of morality. The two are bound

49 “This chapter contains, in general, a vindication of the justice and equity of the divine procedure against men, such as are described in the preceding chapter; and a refutation of the several pleas that might be made by the Gentiles, who had not the law, and by the Jews who had it; and concludes with exposing the wickedness of the latter, and with showing who they are that are properly Jews, and circumcised persons, in the account of God.” - Gill, *Exposition*, <http://goodbooksfree.com/commentaries/gill/45002.html>.

50 The author is aware of the arguments advanced to the contrary, but favors the explanation offered by Calvin and Gill (both cited above), on exegetical grounds.

51 “This is the universal rule of the divine judgment; it shall begin with the Jews, and it shall include the whole world.” - Calvin, *Commentary*, pg 93 - <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom38.vi.ii.html>.

52 “[T]he affirmation of human autonomy denies the very foundation not only of Christian Theism but also the foundation of human reason” - Woodring, *Human Autonomy and Christian Theism; In Antithesis Vol 1*, pg 35.

inseparably, as every thought is judged as moral or immoral. Every intent, every thought⁵³, is laid open and bare – every secret judged through Christ, the Creator and Mediator. When we, as those discussed here, battle temptation, there is an inseparable link between morality and mind⁵⁴; the conscience is involved in the mind, and the law is bound up in that selfsame image of God which has been indelibly stamped upon us. We have a two-fold witness to the nature of knowledge in fallen humanity found in the opening chapters of Romans. We cannot, as we are wont, separate thought and intent, or our volition from our condition.

Universal and Sufficient Knowledge

Fallen men do not have comprehensive knowledge of their Creator. Regenerate men do not have comprehensive knowledge of their Creator, either!⁵⁵ Unregenerate men have knowledge of God sufficient to leave them without excuse; they know the God who created them exists, and enough of what He is like to well know that they are responsible to Him in all respects, and must submit to Him accordingly. They know that they are sinners against that God, and that they will have to account for their sin before Him. Yet, they do not want to hold that knowledge in the light, where it confronts them. They constantly attempt to suppress that truth, and to replace it with an unlivable lie. Their knowledge is that of the covenant-breaking rebel; the prodigal in the pigsty.⁵⁶ He cannot help but remember his Father's voice, he cannot help but recall that he should be at his Father's table – yet does not have the knowledge the returned heir has of his Father's forgiveness, of the need for a contrite spirit, or the repentance and faith granted only by the Spirit of God. Regenerate men have a renewed knowledge of God⁵⁷, through the special, expansive and specific self-revelation of the Triune God. They are constantly progressing in sanctification, and are being made perfect in the image of the Son day by day. Their knowledge is that of the covenant-keeping heir; joint heirs⁵⁸ of their heavenly Father, and all the glorious wonders of the true, deep, and rich fullness of God's personal and demonstrative love for His elect. Their knowledge is that of the new line of Adam, restored to their initial place before the face of God, and the image that burns within them is constantly imbuing them with the reflected glory of the God⁵⁹ they once again honor as they ought⁶⁰. The knowledge of wretchedly fallen and enslaved humanity is blinded by Satan⁶¹, kept captive to his will⁶²; the

53 Heb. 4:12.

54 "When we say that sin is ethical, we do not mean, however, that sin involved only the will of man and not also his intellect. Sin involves every aspect of man's personality. All of man's reactions in every relation in which God had set him were ethical and not merely intellectual; the intellectual itself is ethical." - Van Til, Cornelius. *The Defense of the Faith: Fourth Edition*. ed. K. Scott Oliphint. (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 2008), pg 70.

55 See pgs. 65, 69 of Van Til, *Defense of the Faith*.

56 Luke 15.

57 Rom. 12:2, Eph. 4:23, Col. 3:10.

58 Rom. 8:17.

59 2 Cor. 4:6.

60 1 Tim. 1:17.

61 2 Cor. 4:4.

62 2 Tim. 2:26.

image of God within them has not the radiance seen in the saints of God, but is a mere tarnished shadow of that our original parents possessed. Yet, beneath that tarnish of sin, depravity, and rebellion, the metal remains.

The Tell-Tale Image

We may not say that the image of God is utterly destroyed in His creatures; we cannot say that men know nothing of the God they cannot escape, nor that they know nothing of what He demands. There is no excuse for them to plead in their defense. That suppressed truth, however, is undeniable within the human race, according to the Scripture. However they try to hold it down, the gleam remains. They may paint it over as they please, but still it retains a gleam! It is the Tell-Tale Heart⁶³ – the rhythmic, ever-present testimony in the *Imago Dei* to what once was in Adam – and what it should be in Christ.

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