

A shield with a blue and gold design, surrounded by a fiery explosion. The shield is the central focus, with a blue upper half and a gold lower half. It is surrounded by a large, fiery explosion with orange and yellow flames and blue smoke. The text "DEFENDING THE FAITH" is written in large, white, bold, sans-serif capital letters across the center of the shield.

# **DEFENDING THE FAITH**

**Cornelius Van Til**





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# Defending the Faith

## by Cornelius Van Til

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A six-part series which appeared in *Torch and Trumpet* in 1951 and 1952.

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# Defending The Faith

*Torch and Trumpet*

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In this series of articles our concern will be to discover some of the main features of the Reformed approach in Christian Apologetics.

While seeking light on this question, let us turn first to the inaugural address of the late Dr. Valentine Hepp of the Free University of Amsterdam. The title of this address is Reformed Apologetic.[1](#) Hepp says that a Reformed Christian must naturally be Reformed in his approach to the problem of Apologetics. Men and women do not walk about first as human beings and afterward as men and women. No more can a Reformed Christian first appear as a Christian and later as a Reformed Christian. A Reformed Christian is a Reformed Christian from the outset. If Hepp is right, then the Reformed Christian will have a distinctively Reformed approach when he is trying to win "Mr. Black" to become at once a Reformed Christian, not first a Christian and then a Reformed Christian. "Mr. Black" must become a Reformed Christian not in two but in one transaction.

The late Dr. Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield once said that Calvinism or the Reformed Faith is Christianity come to its own. Warfield did not like to identify Calvinism with the so-called "five points of Calvinism": total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, and perseverance of the saints. Historically at least, Warfield asserts, these five points were but the "theological obverse" of the "five points of Arminianism." The "five



points of Calvinism" are but so many branches of the tree of Calvinism.

Looked at as a unit, Calvinism represents the "vision of God in his majesty." Regarded a little more particularly, Calvinism implies three things. "In it, objectively speaking, theism comes to its rights; subjectively speaking, the religious relation attains to its purity; soteriologically speaking, evangelical religion finds at length its full expression and its secure stability."<sup>2</sup> Amplifying this statement Warfield says: "I think it is important to insist that Calvinism is not a specific variety of theistic thought, religious experience, evangelical faith, but just the perfect manifestation of these things." There is but one kind of theism, religion, evangelicalism; and if there are several constructions laying claim to these names they differ from one another not as correlative species of a more inclusive genus, but only as more or less good or bad specimens of the same thing differ from one another."<sup>3</sup>

If Warfield is right, then our conclusion must be the same as that based on Hepp's remarks. The Reformed Faith is theism come to its own. If there be other theisms they are not true theisms. How could they be? Are there several true Gods? There is but one true God; there is therefore but one true theism, namely, Christian theism, the theism of the Bible. There is but one God, the God triune of the Scriptures. And it is the vision of this God "in his majesty" that constitutes the essence of the Reformed Faith. It is to the recognition of this God as wholly sovereign that the Reformed Christian would win "Mr. Black."

## Two Negative Conclusions

Two general conclusions of a negative nature may now be drawn. First, the Reformed apologist cannot cooperate with the Romanist in



the establishment of the existence of God. The theism of the Roman Catholic theology is not "theism come to its own"; it is a vague, general sort of theism. It is a theism in which the God of Christianity and the God of Greek philosophy, particularly the Unmoved Mover of Aristotle, are ground together into a common mixture. The theism of Romanist theology is a theism heavily freighted with pagan elements of thought. If such a theism were proved to be true, then the Christian theism of the Reformed Christian would be proved to be untrue. If with the Romanist we "prove" the existence of a god, then we have disproved the existence of the God of Christianity. It is only a perverted type of Christianity, such as constitutes Romanism, that fits onto the perverted type of theism which is "proved" by Romanist theologians.

The second major negative conclusion to be drawn from the remarks of Hepp and Warfield is that the Reformed apologist cannot co-operate with the "evangelical" in providing the truth of evangelicalism. By evangelicalism we mean what Warfield meant when he spoke of it as identical with the general non-Reformed Protestantism.[4](#)

This second negative conclusion follows directly from the first. The evangelical does want to co-operate with the Romanist in proving the truth of theism. He argues that Protestants have many doctrines in common with Romanists, and that the existence of God is the most basic of them. Why then he asks in amazement, cannot Protestants co-operate with Romanists in proving the truth of theism? Why not have the Romanist help us build the first story of the house of Christian theism? After they have helped us build the first story of our house we can dismiss them with thanks for their services and proceed to build the second story, the story of Protestantism, ourselves.



The answer to this is that if Romanists have helped us in building the first story of our house, then the whole house will tumble into ruins. It has already been noted that when they build the first story of their house the Romanists mix a great deal of the clay of paganism with the iron of Christianity. The concrete blocks may be those of Christianity, but the cement is nothing other than the sand of paganism. Woe to the Protestant who seeks to build his Protestantism as a second story upon a supposedly theistic foundation, and a first story built by Romanism or by Protestants in conjunction with Romanists. Only a defective Protestantism can be built upon the perverted theism of the Romanist type. For, as Warfield puts it, the precise characterization of evangelicalism is that which describes it as a defective Protestantism. Warfield's point is that evangelicalism is inconsistent Protestantism. It has carried into its system certain foreign elements—elements ultimately derived by way of Romanism from paganism.

Are We Extremists?

"But," some one will exclaim, "look where you have brought us! To what extremes you have gone! Not to speak of Romanists, are we not even to co-operate with evangelicals? I know many evangelicals who are much better Christians than are many Calvinists." But this is not the issue. The question is not as to who are Christians and who are going to heaven. We are not judging men's hearts. Many evangelicals are no doubt better Calvinists in practice than other men who are officially known as Calvinists.

The point is that we are now speaking of theological systems. When Warfield makes the high claim that Calvinism is "nothing more or less than the hope of the world,"<sup>5</sup> he is speaking of the Reformed system of theology and of the Reformed point of view in general.



Other types of theology are super-naturalistic in patches. To some extent they yield to the idea of autosoterism, to the idea that man to some degree is saved by his own effort. Therefore, argues Warfield, "Calvinism is just Christianity."<sup>6</sup> But then, by precisely the same reasoning, Reformed apologetics is the hope of the world. A further objection may be met here: Have not certain Reformed theologians been willing in some measure to co-operate with Romanists in defending theism and with evangelicals in defending evangelicalism, in order, after that, to defend the specific doctrines of Calvinism? Are they all wrong and are you alone right?

The answer to this objection is not easy. It would require separate and extensive discussion to do it justice. There is, no doubt, some measure of truth in the contention that at least some Reformed theologians have been willing to follow the method of co-operation first and distinctiveness afterward. Over against this stands the fact that other Reformed theologians, seeing, as they thought, the compromising result of such a method, have argued that the very idea of apologetics as a positive theological discipline is out of accord with the principles of the Reformed Faith. Or again, some have argued that apologetics must at most be given a very small task in the way of warding off the attacks of the enemy. The difference between Warfield and Kuyper on the question of apologetics is well known. Are we to be reprimanded in advance for not agreeing with Kuyper? Or for not agreeing with Warfield? Let us rather seek to listen to both Warfield and Kuyper and also to Calvin, and then do the best we can as we ask just what the genius of the Reformed Faith requires of us. Is there anything else that any one today can do?

A third party is anxious to ask a question here. Are all the efforts of evangelical apologists then to no avail? Are we to make no use



whatsoever of the research done by them in such fields as biblical history and archaeology, to mention nothing more?

Let us reply to these questions with other questions. Reformed theologians do not co-operate with Arminian theologians in the preaching of the gospel. Do they therefore conclude that all Arminian preaching is to no avail? God uses even defective preaching to accomplish his purposes; so God also uses defective reasoning to bring men to himself. And as for the results of evangelical scholarship, the Reformed apologist should gratefully employ all that is true and good in it. What is true and good in it derives from the measure of Calvinism any form of Christianity contains. But when it comes to the master plan of procedure, the Reformed apologist must go his own way; and it is only of the master plan that we speak when we deal with the question of apologetics in general. Solomon made use even of the Sidonians when building the temple of the Lord, but he did not give them membership on his building committee.

### The Basic Difference

A fourth party now asks: "Granting all this for the sake of argument, can you tell us in a few words wherein you think the main difference consists between a Reformed and a Romanist or evangelical apologetics?"

Here, indeed, is the heart of the matter. It is not easy to answer this question. But let us try to deal with it as best we can in a general way before going on to further specific points.

The basic difference between the two types of apologetics is to be found, we believe, in the primary assumption that each party makes. The Romanist-evangelical type of apologetics assumes that man can first know much about himself and the universe and afterward ask



whether God exists and Christianity is true. The Reformed apologist assumes that nothing can be known by man about himself or the universe unless God exists and Christianity is true.

It will be observed that it is this very difference that exists between the two types of theology, the Romanist-evangelical and the Reformed. The former type of theology assumes that it first knows what human freedom is from "experience." It then adjusts the doctrines of Scripture concerning God and Christianity to its notion of freedom derived from experience. The Reformed type of theology begins with Scriptures and defines human freedom in terms of its principles alone.

It is natural that this difference which is basic in the two types of theology should also be basic in the two types of apologetics. Thomas Aquinas, the Roman Catholic, and Bishop Butler, the Arminian, both talk a great deal about the nature of man and of reality as a whole before they approach the question of the existence of God or of the truth of Christianity. At least, they assume much about the nature of man and of reality as a whole while they are speaking about the possibility of the existence of God or of the truth of Christianity. Over against them stands Calvin. He will not say one word about man or about the universe except in the light of the revelation of God as given in Scripture. The very first page of *The Institutes* is eloquent testimony to this fact.

Otherwise expressed, it may be said that the Reformed apologist does while the Romanist-evangelical apologist does not make the Creator-creature distinction basic in all that he says about anything. His argument is that unless this distinction is made basic to all that man says about anything, then whatever man says is fundamentally untrue. The natural man, who assumes that he himself and the facts



about him are not created, therefore assumes what is basically false. Everything he says about himself and the universe will be colored by this assumption. It is therefore impossible to grant that he is right, basically right, in what he says about any fact. If he says what is right in detail about any fact, this is in spite of, not because of his basically false assumption.

Since the Romanist-evangelical apologist does not make the Creator-creature distinction basic to the very first thing that he says about man or the universe, he is willing to join hands with the natural man, and together with him "discover" many "truths" about man and the universe. He will make common ground with the unbeliever as in science or in philosophy they investigate together the nature of Reality as a whole. He will agree with the natural man as he speaks about "being in general," and only afterward argue against the unbeliever for the necessity of introducing the Creator-creature distinction. So Butler agrees with the deists on their view of the "course and constitution" of nature, and afterward tries to persuade them that they ought also to believe in Christ.

Of course, the reason why the one type of apologetics does and the other does not wish to make the Creator-creature distinction basic at the outset of all predication is to be found in the differing conceptions of sin. The natural man does not want to make the Creator-Creature distinction basic in his thought. The sinner does not want to recognize the fact that he is a creature of God, as such responsible to God, and because of his sin under the judgment of God. This is to be expected. But why should Christians who have confessed their sins to God, who have therefore recognized him as Creator and Lord, and especially why should evangelicals who confess that they hold to the Bible as their only infallible rule of authority, not wish to bring their every thought captive to the



obedience of Christ? In other words, how do you account for the fact that evangelicals carry into their theology and into their apologetics so much foreign material? It is, of course, because of their defective view of sin. In fact, their defective view of sin is itself of foreign origin. More must be said about this subject later.

For the moment: let us be keenly aware of the fact that we who seek to escape the defective views of sin and of creation involved in evangelical theology and apologetics are always defective in practice. Precisely the same tendency toward the acceptance of a low view of sin and of creation that we deprecate in our brethren is found in ourselves. We should therefore seek to win ourselves in practice as well as our brethren in theory to an acceptance of the implications of a fully biblical view of sin and creation in the field of apologetics. Of these implications it will be our concern to speak in what follows.

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## **The Believer Meets the Unbeliever**

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In the first article of this series the contention was made that one who holds to the Reformed Faith in theology should, to be consistent, also hold to a Reformed method in Apologetics. In practice this means that we should try to win Mr. Black, the non Christian, to an acceptance of Christianity as it is to be identified with the Reformed Faith, which is Christianity come to its own. We should not try to win men to acceptance first of Christianity in general and afterwards to "the five points of Calvinism." The



transition from non-Christianity or paganism to the Reformed Faith as full-fledged Christianity must be made in one transaction.

To see clearly what is meant think of a dentist. You go to him with a "bad tooth." Does he take care of your tooth in two operations? To be sure, you may have to come back to have him finish the job. But it is one job he is doing. He takes all the decayed matter out before he fills the cavity. Well, Mr. Black is the man with the toothache, and you, as a Reformed Christian, are the dentist. Would you first convert him to Evangelicalism and then to the Reformed Faith? Then you would be like a dentist who would today take half the decayed matter out and fill the cavity, and tomorrow or next week take out the rest of the decayed matter and fill the cavity again. Or, rather, you would be like the dentist who takes part of the decayed matter out, fills the cavity, and then lets the patient go until a long time later he returns complaining again of a toothache.

Indeed, it is no fun to have the dentist drill deep into your tooth. And it is the last and deepest drilling that hurts most. So Mr. Black is likely to feel more at home in the office of the "evangelical" dentist than in the office of the "Reformed" dentist. Will the latter have any customers? He is likely to fear that he will not. He is ever tempted, therefore, to advertise that he is cooperating with all good "conservatives" in all good dentistry, but that he has a specialty which it would be very nice for people to see him about.

### The X-ray Machine

Let us now ask by what means we may diagnose Mr. Black. For that purpose we use the X-ray machine. Whence do you know your misery? Out of the law, the revealed will of God, answers the Reformed Christian. Let us call him Mr. White. It is by means of the Bible, not by personal experience, that he turns the light on himself,



as well as on Mr. Black. He does not appeal to "experience" or to "reason" or to "history" or to anything else as his source of information in the way that he appeals to the Bible. He may appeal to experience, but his appeal will be to experience as seen in the light of the Bible. So he may appeal to reason or to history, but, again, only as they are to be seen in the light of the Bible. He does not even look for corroboration for the teachings of Scripture from experience, reason or history except insofar as these are themselves first seen in the light of the Bible. For him the Bible, and therefore the God of the Bible, is like the sun from which the light that is given by oil lamps, gas lamps and electrical light is derived.

Quite different is the attitude of the "evangelical" or "conservative." Let us call him Mr. Grey. Mr. Grey uses the Bible, experience, reason or logic as equally independent sources of information about his own and therefore about Mr. Black's predicament. I do not say that for Mr. Grey the Bible, experience and reason are equally important. Indeed they are not. He knows that the Bible is by far the most important. But he none the less constantly appeals to "the facts of experience" and to "logic" without first dealing with the very idea of fact and with the idea of logic in terms of the Scripture.

The difference is basic. When Mr. White diagnoses Mr. Black's case he takes as his X-ray machine the Bible only. When Mr. Grey diagnoses Mr. Black's case he first takes the X-ray machine of experience, then the X-ray machine of logic, and finally his biggest X-ray machine, the Bible. In fact, he may take these in any order. Each of them is an independent source of information for him.

### Mr. Grey Analyzes Mr. Black

Let us first look briefly at a typical sample of procedure generally followed in conservative or evangelical circles today. Let us, in other



words, note how Mr. Grey proceeds with an analysis of Mr. Black. And let us at the same time see how Mr. Grey would win Mr. Black to an acceptance of Christianity. We take for this purpose a series of articles which appeared in the January, February and March, 1950, issues of Moody Monthly, published by the Moody Bible Institute in Chicago. Edward John Carnell, Ph.D, author of *An Introduction to Christian Apologetics* and professor of Apologetics at Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, California, wrote this series. Carnell's writings are among the best that appear in evangelical circles. In fact, in his book Carnell frequently argues as we would expect a Reformed apologist to argue. By and large, however, he represents the evangelical rather than the Reformed method in Apologetics.

When Mr. Carnell instructs his readers "How Every Christian Can Defend His Faith," he first appeals to facts and to logic as independent sources of information about the truth of Christianity. Of course, he must bring in the Bible even at this point. But the Bible is brought in only as a book of information about the fact of what has historically been called Christianity. It is not from the beginning brought in as God's Word. It must be shown to Mr. Black to be the Word of God by means of "facts" and "logic." Carnell would thus avoid at all costs the charge of reasoning in a circle. He does not want Mr. Black to point the finger at him and say: "You prove that the Bible is true by an appeal to the Bible itself. That is circular reasoning. How can any person with any respect for logic accept such a method of proof?"

Carnell would escape such a charge by showing that the facts of experience, such as all men recognize, and logic, such as all men must use, point to the truth of Scripture. This is what he says: "If you are of a philosophic turn, you can point to the remarkable way in



which Christianity fits in with the moral sense inherent in every human being, or the influence of Christ on our ethics, customs, literature, art and music. Finally, you can draw upon your own experience in speaking of the reality of answered prayer and the witness of the Spirit in your own heart. . . . If the person is impressed with this evidence, turn at once to the gospel. Read crucial passages and permit the Spirit to work on the inner recesses of the heart. Remember that apologetics is merely a preparation. After the ground has been broken, proceed immediately with sowing and watering."[7](#)

It is assumed in this argument that Mr. Black agrees with the "evangelical," Mr. Grey, on the character of the "moral sense" of man. This may be true, but then it is true because Mr. Grey has himself not taken his information about the moral sense of man exclusively from Scripture. If with Mr. White he had taken his conception of the moral nature of man from the Bible, then he would hold that Mr. Black, as totally depraved will, of course, misinterpret his own moral nature. True, Christianity is in accord with the moral nature of man. But this is so only because the moral nature of man is first in accord with what the Bible says it is, that is, originally created perfect, but now wholly corrupted in its desires through the fall of man.

### The Boy Or The Rock

If you are reasoning with a naturalist, Carnell advises his readers, ask him why when a child throws a rock through his window, he chases the child and not the rock. Presumably even a naturalist knows that the child, not the rock, is free and therefore responsible. "A bottle of water cannot ought; it must. When once the free spirit of man is proved, the moral argumentâ€”the existence of a God who imposes moral obligationsâ€”can form the bridge from man to God."[8](#)



Here the fundamental difference between Mr. Grey's and Mr. White's approach to Mr. Black appears. The difference lies in the different notions of the free will of man. Or, it may be said, the difference is with respect to the nature of man as such. Mr. White would define man, and therefore his freedom, in terms of Scripture alone. He would therefore begin with the fact that man is the creature of God. And this implies that man's freedom is a derivative freedom. It is a freedom that is not and can not be wholly ultimate, that is, self-dependent. Mr. White knows that Mr. Black would not agree with him in this analysis of man and of his freedom. He knows that Mr. Black would not agree with him on this any more than he would agree on the biblical idea of total depravity.

Mr. Grey, on the other hand, must at all costs have "a point of contact" in the system of thought of Mr. Black, who is typical of the natural man. Just as Mr. Grey is afraid of being charged with circular reasoning, so he is also afraid of being charged with talking about something that is "outside of experience." And so he is driven to talk in general about the "free spirit of man." Of course, Mr. Black need have no objections from his point of view in allowing for the "free spirit of man." That is at bottom what he holds even when he is a naturalist. His whole position is based upon the idea of man as a free spirit, that is, a spirit that is not subject to the law of his Creator God. And Carnell does not distinguish between the biblical doctrine of freedom, as based upon and involved in the fact of man's creation, and the doctrine of freedom, in the sense of autonomy, which makes man a law unto himself.

Of course, Mr. Black will be greatly impressed with such an argument as Mr. Grey has presented to him for the truth of Christianity. In fact, if Christianity is thus shown to be in accord with the moral nature of man, as Mr. Black himself sees that moral



nature, then Mr. Black does not need to be converted at all to accept Christianity. He only needs to accept something additional to what he has always believed. He has been shown how nice it would be to have a second story built on top of the house which he has already built according to his own plans.

To be sure, the evangelical intends no such thing. Least of all does Carnell intend such a thing. But why then does not the "Evangelical" see that by presenting the non-Christian with Evangelicalism rather than with the Reformed Faith he must compromise the Christian religion? And why does he not also see that in doing what he does the non-Christian is not really challenged either by fact or by logic? For facts and logic which are not themselves first seen in the light of Christianity have, in the nature of the case, no power in them to challenge the unbeliever to change his position. Facts and logic, not based upon the creation doctrine and not placed in the context of the doctrine of God's all-embracing Providence, are without relation to one another and therefore wholly meaningless.

It is this fact which must be shown to Mr. Black. The folly of holding to any view of life except that which is frankly based upon the Bible as the absolute authority for man must be pointed out to him. Only then are we doing what Paul did when he said: "Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of the world" (1 Cor 1:20)?

Mr. White Analyzes Mr. Black

As a Reformed Christian Mr. White therefore cannot cooperate with Mr. Grey in his analysis of Mr. Black. This fact may appear more clearly if we turn to see how Mr. Black appears when he is analyzed by Mr. White in terms of the Bible alone.



Now, according to Mr. White's analysis, Mr. Black is not a murderer. He is not necessarily a drunkard or a dope addict. He lives in one of the suburbs. He is every whit a gentleman. He gives to the Red Cross and to the Red Feather campaigns. He was a boy scout; he is a member of a lodge; he is very much civic minded; now and then his name is mentioned in the papers as an asset to the community. But we know that he is spiritually dead. He is filled with the spirit of error. Perhaps he is a member of a "fine church" in the community, but nevertheless he is one of a "people that do err in their heart" (Ps 95:10). He lives in a stupor (Rom 11:8). To him the wisdom of God is foolishness. The truth about God, and about himself in relation to God, is obnoxious to him. He does not want to hear of it. He seeks to close eyes and ears to those who give witness of the truth. He is, in short, utterly self-deceived.

Actually, Mr. Black is certain that he looks at life in the only proper way. Even if he has doubts as to the truth of what he believes, he does not see how any sensible or rational man could believe or do otherwise. If he has doubts it is because no one can be fully sure of himself. If he has fears it is because fear is to be expected in the hazardous situation in which modern man lives. If he sees men's minds break down he thinks this is to be expected under current conditions of stress and strain. If he sees grown men act like children he says that they, after all, were once children; if he sees them act like beasts he says that they were once beasts. Everything, including the "abnormal" is to him "normal." In all this Mr. Black has obviously taken for granted that what the Bible says about the world and himself is not true. He has taken this for granted. He may never have argued the point. He has cemented yellow spectacles to his own eyes. He cannot remove them because he will not remove them. He is blind and loves to be blind.



Do not think that Mr. Black has an easy time of it. He is the man who always "kicks against the pricks." His conscience troubles him all the time. Deep down in his heart he knows that what the Bible says about him and about the world is true. Even if he has never heard of the Bible he knows that he is a creature of God and that he has broken the law of God (Rom 1:19-20; Rom 2:14-15). When the prodigal son left his father's house he could not immediately efface from his memory the look and the voice of his father. How that look and that voice came back to him when he was at the swine trough! How hard he had tried to live as though the money with which he so freely entertained his "friends" had not come from his father! When asked where he came from he would answer that he came "from the other side." He did not want to be reminded of his past. Yet he could not forget it. It required a constant act of suppression to forget the past. But that very act of suppression itself keeps alive the memory of the past.

So also with Mr. Black. He daily changes the truth of God into a lie. He daily worships and serves the creature more than the Creator. He daily holds the truth in unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18). But what a time he has with himself! He may try to sear his conscience as with a hot iron. He may seek to escape the influence of all those who witness to the truth. But he can never escape himself as witness-bearer to the truth.

His conscience keeps telling him: "Mr. Black, you are a fugitive from justice. You have run away from home, from your father's bountiful love. You are an ingrate, a sneak, a rascal! You shall not escape meeting justice at last. The father still feeds you. Yet you despise the riches of his goodness and forbearance and long-suffering; not recognizing that the goodness of God is calculated to lead you to repentance (Rom 2:4). Why do you kick against the pricks? Why do



you stifle the voice of your conscience? Why do you use the wonderful intellect that God has given you as a tool for the suppression of the voice of God which speaks to you through yourself and through your environment? Why do you build your house on sand instead of on rock? Can you be sure that no storm is ever coming? Are you omniscient? Are you omnipotent? You say that nobody knows whether God exists or whether Christianity is true. You say that nobody knows this because man is finite. Yet you assume that God cannot exist and that Christianity cannot be true. You assume that no judgment will ever come. You must be omniscient to know that. And yet you have just said that all man declares about 'the beyond' must be based upon his brief span of existence in this world of time and chance. How, then, if you have taken for granted that chance is one of the basic ingredients of all human experience, can you at the same time say what can or cannot be in all time to come? You certainly have made a fool of yourself, Mr. Black," says Mr. Black to himself. "You reject the claims of truth which you know to be the truth, and you do that in terms of the lie which really you know to be the lie."

It is not always that Mr. Black is thus aware of the fact that he lives like the prodigal who would eat of the things the swine did eat, but who knows he cannot because he is a human being. He is not always thus aware of his follyâ€”in part at least, because of the failure of evangelicals, and particularly because of the failure of Reformed Christians to stir him up to a realization of his folly. The evangelical does not want to stir him up thus. It is in the nature of his own theology not to stir him up to a realization of this basic depth of folly. But the Reformed Christian should, on his basis, want to stir up Mr. Black to an appreciation of the folly of his ways.



However, when the Reformed Christian, Mr. White, is to any extent aware of the richness of his own position and actually has the courage to challenge Mr. Black by presenting to him the picture of himself as taken through the X-ray machine called the Bible, he faces the charge of "circular reasoning" and of finding no "point of contact" with experience. And he will also be subject to the criticism of the evangelical for speaking as if Christianity were irrational and for failing to reach the man in the street.

Thus we seem to be in a bad predicament. There is a basic difference of policy between Mr. White and Mr. Grey as to how to deal with Mr. Black. Mr. Grey thinks that Mr. Black is not really such a bad fellow. It is possible, he thinks to live with Mr. Black in the same world. And he is pretty strong. So it is best to make a compromise peace with him. That seems to be the way of the wise and practical politician. On the other hand, Mr. White thinks that it is impossible permanently to live in the same world with Mr. Black. Mr. Black, he says, must therefore be placed before the requirement of absolute and unconditional surrender. And surely it would be out of the question for Mr. White first to make a compromise peace with Mr. Black and then, after all, to require unconditional surrender. But what then about this charge of circular reasoning and about this charge of having no point of contact with the unbeliever?

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## **Needed: A Consistent Witness!**

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The one main question to which we are addressing ourselves in this series of articles is whether Christians holding to the Reformed faith should also hold to a specifically Reformed method when they are engaged in the defense of the faith.

This broad question does not pertain merely to the "five points of Calvinism." When Lutherans or Arminians attack these great doctrines (total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, perseverance of the saints) we, as Calvinists, are quick to defend them. We believe that these five points are directly based upon Scripture. But the question now under discussion is whether, in the defense of any Christian doctrine, Reformed Christians should use a method all their own.

### The Negative Answer

People easily give a negative reply to this question. Do we not have many doctrines in common with all evangelicals? Don't all orthodox Protestants hold to the substitutionary atonement of Christ? More particularly, what about the simple statements of fact recorded in Scripture? How could anyone, if he believes such statements at all, take them otherwise than as simple statements of fact? How could anyone have a specifically Reformed doctrine of such a fact as the resurrection of Christ? If together with evangelicals we accept certain simple truths and facts of Scripture at face value, how then can we be said to have a separate method of defense of such doctrines?

### The Positive Answer

Yet it can readily be shown that this negative answer cannot be maintained. Take, for example, the doctrine of the atonement. The Arminian doctrine of the atonement is not the same as the Reformed doctrine of the atonement. Both the Arminian and the Calvinist



assert that they believe in the substitutionary atonement. But the Arminian conception of the substitutionary atonement is colored, and as Calvinists we believe discolored, by his view of "free will." According to the Arminian view, man has absolute or ultimate power to accept or to reject the salvation offered him. This implies that the salvation offered to man is merely the possibility of salvation.

To illustrate: suppose I deposit one million dollars to your account in your bank. It is still altogether up to you to believe that such wealth is yours, and to use it to cover the floor of your house with Persian rugs in place of the old threadbare rugs now there. Thus, in the Arminian scheme, the very possibility of things no longer depends exclusively upon God, but, in some areas at least, upon man. What Christ did for us is made to depend for its effectiveness upon what is done by us. It is no longer right to say that with God all things are possible.

It is obvious, therefore, that Arminians have taken into their Protestantism a good bit of the leaven of Roman Catholicism. Arminianism is less radical, less consistent in its Protestantism than it should be. And what is true of Arminianism is true also, though in a lesser degree, of orthodox Lutheranism.

#### Mr. Grey On The Atonement

Now Mr. Grey, the evangelical, seems to have a relatively easy time of it when he seeks to win Mr. Black, the unbeliever, to an acceptance of "the substitutionary atonement." He can stand on "common ground" with Mr. Black on this matter of what is possible and what is impossible. Listen to Mr. Grey as he talks with Mr. Black.

"Mr. Black, have you accepted Christ as your personal Savior? Do you believe that he died on the cross your substitute? If you do not, you will surely be lost forever."



"Well now," replies Mr. Black, "I've just had a visit from Mr. White on the same subject. You two seem to have a 'common witness' on this matter. Both of you believe that God exists, that he has created the world, that the first man, Adam, sinned, and that we are all to be sent to hell because of what that first man did, and so forth. All this is too fatalistic for me. If I am a creature, as you say I am, then I have no ultimate power of my own and therefore am not free. And if I am not free, then I am not responsible. So, if I am going to hell, it will be simply because your 'god' has determined that I should. You orthodox Christians kill morality and all humanitarian progress. I will have none of it. Good-by!"

"But wait a second," says, Mr. Grey, in great haste. "I do not have a common witness with the Calvinist. I have a common witness with you against the Calvinist when it comes to all that determinism that you mention. Of course, you are free. You are absolutely free to accept or to reject the atonement that is offered to you. I offer the atonement through Christ only as a possibility. You yourself must make it an actuality for yourself. I agree with you over against the Calvinist in saying that 'possibility' is wider than the will of God. I would not for a moment say with the Calvinist that God's counsel determines 'whatsoever comes to pass.'"

"Besides, even extreme Calvinists like J. Oliver Buswell, Jr., virtually agree with both of us. Listen to what Buswell says: 'Nevertheless, my moral choices, are choices in which we are ourselves ultimate causes.' Buswell himself wants to go beyond the 'merely arbitrary answer' in Romans 9:20â€"21, which speaks of the potter and the clay, to the 'much more profound analysis of God's plan of redemption' in Romans 9:22â€"24, in which Paul pictures Pharaoh as 'one who, according to the foreknowledge of God, would rebel against God.'" [9](#)



## Mr. Black On The Atonement

"Do I understand then," replies Mr. Black, "that you evangelicals and even the more moderate Calvinists are opposed to the determinism of the regular, old-style Calvinists of the historic Reformed Confessions? I am glad to hear that. To say that all things have been fixed from all eternity by God is terrible! It makes me shudder! What would happen to all morality and decency if all men believed such a teaching? But now you evangelicals have joined us in holding that 'possibility' is independent of the will of God. You have thus with all good people and with all modern and neo-modern theologians, like Barth, made possible the salvation of all men."

"That means, of course, that salvation is possible too for those who have never heard of Jesus of Nazareth. Salvation is therefore possible without an acceptance of your substitutionary atonement through this Jesus, of whom you speak. You certainly would not want to say with the Calvinists that God has determined the bounds of all nations and individuals and has thus, after all, determined that some men, millions of them, in fact, should never hear this gospel."

"Besides, if possibility is independent of God as you evangelicals and moderate Calvinists teach, then I need not be afraid of hell. It is then quite possible that there is no hell. Hell, you will then agree, is that torture of a man's conscience which he experiences when he fails to live up to his own moral ideals. So I do not think that I shall bother just yet about accepting Christ as my personal Savior. There is plenty of time."

## Mr. Grey's First Failure

Poor Mr. Grey. He really wanted to say something about having a common testimony with the Calvinists after all. At the bottom of his



heart he knew that Mr. White, the Calvinist, and not Mr. Black, the unbeliever, was his real friend. But he had made a common witness with Mr. Black against the supposed determinism of the Calvinist. Still it was difficult for him to turn about face and also make a common testimony with Mr. White against Mr. Black. He had nothing intelligible to say. His method of defending his faith had forced him to admit that Mr. Black was basically right. He had given Mr. Black an opportunity of knowing what he was supposed to accept, but his testimony had confirmed Mr. Black in his belief that there was no need of his accepting Christ at all.

It is true, of course, that in practice Mr. Grey is much better in his theology and in his method of representing the gospel than he is here said to be. But that is because in practice every evangelical who really loves his Lord is a Calvinist at heart. How could he really pray to God for help if he believed that there was a possibility that God could not help? In their hearts all true Christians believe that God controls "whatsoever comes to pass." But the Calvinist cannot have a common witness for the substitutionary atonement with "evangelicals" who first make a common witness with the unbeliever against him on the all-determining question whether God controls all things that happen.

### Requirements For Effective Witness

It must always be remembered that the first requirement for effective witnessing is that the position to which witness is given be intelligible. Evangelicalism, when consistently carried out, destroys this intelligibility. The second requirement for effective witnessing is that he to whom the witness is given must be shown why he should forsake his own position and accept that which is offered him. Evangelicalism, when consistently carried out, also destroys the



reason why the unbeliever should accept the gospel. Why should the unbeliever change his position if he is not shown that it is wrong? And, in particular, why should he change if the one who asks him to change is actually encouraging him in thinking that he is right? The Calvinist will need to have a better method of defending the doctrine of the atonement, for example, than that of the evangelical.

### The Resurrection Of Christ

We have dealt with the doctrine of the atonement. That led us into the involved question whether God is the source of possibility, or whether possibility is the source of God. It has been shown that the "evangelical" or Arminian fundamentalist holds to a position which requires him to make both of these contradictory assertions at once. But how about the realm of fact? Do you also hold, I am asked, that we need to seek for a specifically Reformed method of defending the facts of Christianity? Take the resurrection of Christ as an example why can there be no common witness on the part of the evangelical and the Calvinist to such a fact as that?

### Mr. Grey On The Resurrection

Once more Mr. Grey, the evangelical punches the doorbell at Mr. Black's home. Mr. Black answers and admits him. "I am here again, Mr. Black," begins Grey, "because I am still anxious to have you accept Christ as your personal Savior. When I spoke to you the other time about the atonement you got me into deep water. We got all tangled up on the question of 'possibility.'"

"But now I have something far simpler. I want to deal with simple facts. I want to show you that the resurrection of Jesus from the dead is as truly a fact as any that you can mention. To use the words of Wilbur Smith, himself a Calvinist but opposed to the idea of a



distinctively Reformed method for the defense of the faith: 'The meaning of the resurrection is a theological matter, but the fact of the resurrection is a historical matter; the nature of the resurrection body of Jesus may be a mystery, but the fact that the body disappeared from the tomb is a matter to be decided upon by historical evidence.'[10](#) And the historical evidence for the resurrection is the kind of evidence that you as a scientist would desire."

"Smith writes in the same book: 'About a year ago, after studying over a long period of time this entire problem of our Lord's resurrection, and having written some hundreds of pages upon it at different times, I was suddenly arrested by the thought that the very kind of evidence which modern science, and even psychologists, are so insistent upon for determining the reality of any object under consideration is the kind of evidence that we have presented to us in the Gospels regarding the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, namely, the things that are seen with the human eye, touched with the human hand, and heard by the human ear. This is what we call empirical evidence. It would almost seem as if parts of the Gospel records of the resurrection were actually written for such a day as ours when empiricism so dominates men's thinking.'[11](#)

"Now I think that Smith is quite right in thus distinguishing sharply between the fact and the meaning of the resurrection. And I am now only asking you to accept the fact of the resurrection. There is the clearest possible empirical evidence for this fact. The living Jesus was touched with human hands and seen with human eyes of sensible men after he had been crucified and put into the tomb. Surely you ought to believe in the resurrection of Christ as a historical fact. And to believe in the resurrected Christ is to be saved."



"But hold on a second," says Mr. Black. "Your friend the Calvinist, Mr. White, has been ahead of you again. He was here last night and spoke of the same thing. However, he did not thus distinguish between the fact and the meaning of the resurrection. At least, he did not for a moment want to separate the fact of the resurrection from the system of Christianity in terms of which it gets its meaning. He spoke of Jesus Christ the Son of God, as rising from the dead. He spoke of the Son of God through whom the world was made and through whom the world is sustained as having risen from the dead. And when I asked him how this God could die and rise from the dead, he said that God did not die and rise from the dead but that the second person of the trinity had taken to himself a human nature, and that it was in this human nature that he died and rose again. In short, in accepting the fact of the resurrection he wanted me also to take all this abracadabra into the bargain. And I have a suspicion that you are secretly trying to have me do something similar."

"No, no," replies Mr. Grey. "I am in complete agreement with you over against the Calvinist. I have a common witness with you against him. I, too, would separate fact and system. Did I not agree with you against the Calvinist, in holding that possibility is independent of God? Well then, by the same token I hold that all kinds of facts happen apart from the plan of God. So we evangelicals are in a position, as the Calvinists are not, of speaking with you on neutral ground. With you, we would simply talk about the facts of Christianity without bringing into the picture anything about the meaning or the significance of those facts."

"It makes me smile," continues Mr. Grey, "when I think of Mr. White coming over here trying to convert you. That poor fellow is always reasoning in circles. I suppose that such reasoning in circles goes with his determinism. He is always talking about his self-contained



God. He says that all facts are what they are because of the plan of this God. Then each fact would of necessity, to be a fact at all, prove the truth of the Christian system of things and, in turn, would be proved as existing by virtue of this self-same Christian system of things. I realize full well that you, as a modern scientist and philosopher, can have no truck with such horrible, circular reasoning as that."

"It is for this reason that, as evangelicals, we have now separated sharply between the resurrection as a historical fact and the meaning of the resurrection. I'm merely asking you to accept the fact of the resurrection. I am not asking you to do anything that you cannot do in full consistency with your freedom and with the 'scientific method.'"

#### Mr. Black Replies On The Resurrection

"Well, that is delightful," replies Mr. Black. "I always felt that the Calvinists were our real foes. But I read something in the paper the other day to the effect that some Calvinist churches or individuals were proposing to make a common witness with evangelicals for the gospel. Now I was under the impression that the gospel had something to do with being saved from hell and going to heaven. I knew that the modernists and the 'new modernists,' like Barth, do not believe in tying up the facts of history with such wild speculations. It was my opinion that 'fundamentalists' did tie up belief in historical facts, such as the death and the resurrection of Jesus, with going to heaven or to hell. So I am delighted that you, though a fundamentalist, are willing to join with the modernist and the neo-modernist in separating historical facts from such a rationalistic system as I knew Christianity was."



"Now as for accepting the resurrection of Jesus," continued Mr. Black, "as thus properly separated from the traditional system of theology. I do not in the least mind doing that. To tell you the truth, I have accepted the resurrection as a fact now for some time. The evidence for it is overwhelming. This is a strange universe. All kinds of 'miracles' happen in it. The universe is 'open.' So why should there not be some resurrections here and there? The resurrection of Jesus would be a fine item for Ripley's Believe It or Not. Why not send it in?"

Mr. Grey wanted to continue at this point. He wanted to speak of the common witness that he had, after all, with the Calvinist for the gospel. But it was too late. He had no "common" witness left of any sort. He had again tried to gallop off in opposite directions at the same time. He had again taken away all intelligibility from the witness that he meant to bring. He had again established Mr. Black in thinking that his own unbelieving reason was right. For it was as clear as crystal to Mr. Black, as it should have been to Mr. Grey, that belief in the fact of the resurrection, apart from the system of Christianity, amounts to belief that the Christian system is not true, is belief in the universe as run by Chance, is belief that it was not Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who rose from the dead.

To be sure, in practice the "evangelical" is much better in his witness for the resurrection of Christ than he has been presented here. But that is because every evangelical, as a sincere Christian, is at heart a Calvinist. But witnessing is a matter of the head as well as of the heart. If the world is to hear a consistent testimony for the Christian faith, it is the Calvinist who must give it. If there is not a distinctively Reformed method for the defense of every article of the Christian faith, then there is no way of clearly telling an unbeliever just how Christianity differs from his own position and why he should accept



the Lord Jesus Christ as his personal Savior. We are happy and thankful, of course, for the work of witnessing done by evangelicals. We are happy because of the fact that, in spite of their inconsistency in presenting the Christian testimony, something, often much, of the truth of the gospel shines through unto men, and they are saved.

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## **The Authority Of Scripture**

*Torch and Trumpet*

1951

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The difference between a Reformed and an Evangelical method of approach to unbelievers is our main concern in these articles. Our contention has been that the very nature of Reformed theology requires a distinct approach in the matter of its defense. Let us again discuss this question, this time in relation to the central problem of biblical authority.

How will the Evangelical or Conservative urge upon the unbeliever the idea of accepting the Bible as the Word of God? He will, of course, tell the unbeliever that his eternal weal or woe is involved. "Christ died for your sins, and you must accept him as your Savior or you will be eternally lost," says Mr. Grey, the Conservative, to Mr. Black, the unbeliever.

Rational Probability

"But how can anyone know anything about the 'Beyond'?" asks Mr. Black.



"Well, of course," replies Mr. Grey, "if you want absolute certainty such as one gets in geometry, Christianity does not offer it. We offer you only 'rational probability.' Christianity, as I said in effect a moment ago when I spoke of the death of Christ, is founded on historical facts, which, by their very nature, cannot be demonstrated with geometric certainty. All judgments of historical particulars are at the mercy of the complexity of the time-space universe. . . . If the scientist cannot rise above rational probability in his empirical investigation, why should the Christian claim more?"<sup>12</sup> "And what is true of the death of Christ," adds Mr. Grey, "is, of course, also true of his resurrection. But this only shows that 'the Christian is in possession of a world-view which is making a sincere effort to come to grips with actual history.'"<sup>13</sup>

### Gobble-de-Gook

By speaking thus, Mr. Grey seeks for a point of contact with Mr. Black. For Mr. Black, history is something that floats on an infinitely extended and bottomless ocean of Chance. Therefore he can say that anything may happen. Who knows but the death and resurrection of Jesus as the Son of God might issue from this womb of Chance? Such events would have an equal chance of happening with "snarks, boojums, splinth, and gobble-de-gook." God himself may live in this realm of Chance. He is then "wholly other" than ourselves. And his revelation in history would then be wholly unique.

Now the Evangelical does not challenge this underlying philosophy of Chance as it controls the unbeliever's conception of history. He is so anxious to have the unbeliever accept the possibility of God's existence and the fact of the resurrection of Christ that, if necessary, he will exchange his own philosophy of fact for that of the unbeliever. Anxious to be genuinely "empirical" like the unbeliever, he will throw



all the facts of Christianity into the bottomless pit of Chance. Or, rather, he will throw all these facts at the unbeliever, and the unbeliever throws them over his back into the bottomless pit of Chance.

Of course, this is the last thing that such men as Wilbur Smith, Edward J. Carnell, and L Oliver Buswell, Jr., want to do. But in failing to challenge the philosophy of Chance that underlies the unbeliever's notion of "fact," they are in effect accepting it.

This approach of Mr. Grey is unavoidable if one holds to an Arminian theology. The Arminian view of man's free will implies that "possibility" is above God. But a "possibility" that is above God is the same thing as Chance. A God surrounded by Chance cannot speak with authority. He would be speaking into a vacuum. His voice could not be heard. And if God were surrounded by Chance, then human beings would be too. They would live in a vacuum, unable to hear either their own voices or those of others. Thus the whole of history, including all of its facts, would be without meaning.

It is this that the Reformed Christian, Mr. White, would tell Mr. Black. In the very act of presenting the resurrection of Christ, or in the very act of presenting any other fact of historic Christianity, Mr. White would be presenting it as authoritatively interpreted in the Bible. He would argue that unless Mr. Black is willing to set the facts of history in the framework of the meaning authoritatively ascribed to them in the Bible, he will make gobble-de-gook of history.

Nobody Knows

If history were what Mr. Black assumes that it is, then anything might happen and then nobody would know what may happen. No one thing would then be more likely to happen than any other thing.



David Hume, the great skeptic, has effectively argued that if you allow any room for Chance in your thought, then you no longer have the right to speak of probabilities. Whirl would be king. No one hypothesis would have any more relevance to facts than any other hypothesis. Did God raise Christ from the dead? Perchance he did. Did Jupiter do it? Perchance he did. What is Truth? Nobody knows. Such would be the picture of the universe if Mr. Black were right.

No comfort can be taken from the assurance of the Conservative that, since Christianity makes no higher claim than that of rational probability, "the system of Christianity can be refuted only by probability. Perhaps our loss is gain."[14](#) How could one ever argue that there is a greater probability for the truth of Christianity than for the truth of its opposite if the very meaning of the word probability rests upon the idea of Chance? On this basis nature and history would be no more than a series of pointer readings pointing into the blank.

### But You Are Wrong

In assuming his philosophy of Chance and thus virtually saying that nobody knows what is back of the common objects of daily observation, Mr. Black also virtually says that the Christian view of things is wrong.

If I assert that there is a black cat in the closet, and you assert that nobody knows what is in the closet, you have virtually told me that I am wrong in my hypothesis. So when I tell Mr. Black that God exists, and he responds very graciously by saying that perhaps I am right since nobody knows what is in the "Beyond," he is virtually saying that I am wrong in my "hypothesis." He is obviously thinking of such a God as could comfortably live in the realm of Chance. But the God of Scripture cannot live in the realm of Chance.



Mr. Black's response when confronted with the claims of God and his Christ, is essentially this: Nobody knows, but nevertheless your hypothesis is certainly wrong and mine is certainly right. Nobody knows whether God exists, but God certainly does not exist and Chance certainly does exist.

When Mr. Black thus virtually makes his universal negative assertion, saying in effect that God cannot possibly exist and that Christianity cannot possibly be true, he must surely be standing on something very solid. Is it on solid rock that he stands? No, he stands on water! He stands on his own "experience." But this experience, by his own assumption, rests again on Chance. Thus, standing on Chance, he swings the "logician's postulate" and modestly asserts what cannot be in the "Beyond," of which he said before that nothing can be said.

### The Law Of Noncontradiction

Of course, what Mr. Black is doing appears very reasonable to himself. "Surely," he says, if questioned at all on the subject, "a rational man must have systematic coherence in his experience. Therefore he cannot accept as true anything that is not in accord with the law of noncontradiction. So long as you leave your God in the realm of the 'Beyond,' in the realm of the indeterminate, you may worship him by yourself alone. But so soon as you claim that your God has revealed himself in creation, in providence, or in your Scripture, so soon I shall put that revelation to a test by the principle of rational coherence."

"And by that test none of your doctrines are acceptable. All of them are contradictory. No rational man can accept any of them. If your God is eternal, then he falls outside of my experience and lives in the realm of the 'Beyond,' of the unknowable. But if he is to have



anything to do with the world, then he must himself be wholly within the world. I must understand your God throughout if I am to speak intelligently of any relationship that he sustains to my world and to myself. Your idea that God is both eternal and unchangeable and yet sustains such relationships to the world as are involved in your doctrine of creation and providence, is flatly contradictory."

"For me to accept your God," continues Mr. Black, "you must do to him what Karl Barth has done to him, namely, strip him of all the attributes that orthodox theology has assigned to him, and thus enable him to turn into the opposite of himself. With that sort of God I have a principle of unity that brings all my experience into harmony. And that God is wholly within the universe. If you offer me such a God and offer him as the simplest hypothesis with which I may, as a goal, seek to order my experience as it comes to me from the womb of Chance, then the law of noncontradiction will be satisfied. As a rational man I can settle for nothing less."

### Rationalism And Determinism

All this amounts to saying that Mr. Black, the lover of a Chance philosophy, the indeterminist, is at the same time an out-and-out determinist or fatalist. It is to say that Mr. Black, the irrationalist, who said that nobody knows what is in the "Beyond," is at the same time a flaming rationalist. For him only that can be whichâ€”so he thinksâ€”he can exhaustively determine by logic must be. He may at first grant that anything may exist, but when he says this he at the same time says in effect that nothing can exist and have meaning for man but that which man himself can exhaustively know. Therefore, for Mr. Black, the God of Christianity cannot exist. For him the doctrine of creation cannot be true. There could be no revelation of



God to man through nature and history. There can be no such thing as the resurrection of Christ.

Strangely enough, when Mr. Black thus says that God cannot exist and that the resurrection of Christ cannot be a fact, and when he also says that God may very well exist and that the resurrection of Christ may very well be a fact, he is not inconsistent with himself. For he must, to be true to his method, contradict himself in every statement that he makes about any fact whatsoever. If he does not, then he would deny either his philosophy of Chance or his philosophy of Fate. According to him, every fact that he meets has in it the two ingredients: that of Chance and that of Fate, that of the wholly unknown and that of the wholly known. Thus man makes the tools of thought, which the Creator has given him in order therewith to think God's thoughts after him on a created level, into the means by which he makes sure that God cannot exist, and therefore certainly cannot reveal himself.

When Mr. White meets Mr. Black he will make this issue plain. He will tell Mr. Black that his methodology cannot make any fact or any group of facts intelligible to himself. Hear him as he speaks to the unbeliever:

"On your basis, Mr. Black, no fact can be identified by distinguishing it from any other fact. For all facts would be changing into their opposites all the time. All would be gobble-de-gook. At the same time, nothing could change at all; all would be one block of ice. Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? He clearly has. I know you cannot see this even though it is perfectly clear. I know you have taken out your own eyes. Hence your inability to see is at the same time unwillingness to see. Pray God for forgiveness and repent."



## Mr. Grey On Logic

But what will be the approach of the Conservative, Mr. Grey, on this question of logic? He will do the same sort of thing that we saw him do with respect to the question of facts. Mr. Grey will again try to please Mr. Black by saying that, of course, he will justify his appeal to the authority of the Bible by showing that the very idea of such an appeal, as well as the content of the Bible, are fully in accord with the demands of logic.

"You are quite right in holding that nothing meaningful can be said without presupposing the validity of the law of noncontradiction," says Mr. Grey.<sup>15</sup> "The conservative ardently defends a system of authority."<sup>16</sup> But "without reason to canvass the evidence of a given authority, how can one segregate a right authority from a wrong one? . . . Without systematic consistency to aid us, it appears that all we can do is to draw straws, count noses, flip coins to choose an authority. Once we do apply the law of contradiction, we are no longer appealing to ipse dixit authority, but to coherent truth."<sup>17</sup> "The Scriptures tell us to test the spirits (1 Jn 4:1). This can be done by applying the canons of truth. God cannot lie. His authority, therefore, and coherent truth are coincident at every point. Truth, not blind authority, saves us from being blind followers of the blind."<sup>18</sup>

"Bring on your revelations," continues Mr. Grey. "Let them make peace with the law of contradiction and the facts of history, and they will deserve a rational man's assent."<sup>19</sup> Any theology which rejects Aristotle's fourth book of the *Metaphysics* is big with the elements of its own destruction."<sup>20</sup> "If Paul were teaching that the crucified Christ were objectively foolish, in the sense that he cannot be



rationally categorized, then he would have pointed to the insane and the demented as incarnations of truth."[21](#)

### Mr. Black's Reaction

"Well," says Mr. Black, "this is great news indeed. I knew that the modernists were willing with us to start from human experience as the final reference point in all research. I knew that they were willing with us to start with Chance as the source of facts, in order then to manufacture such facts of nature and of history as the law of noncontradiction, based on Chance, will allow. I also knew that the new modernist, Karl Barth, is willing to make over his God so that he can change into the opposite of himself, in order that thus he may satisfy both our irrationalist philosophy of Chance and our rationalist philosophy of logic. But I did not know that there were any orthodox people who were willing to do such a thing. But you have surprised me before. You were willing to throw your resurrection into the realm of Chance in order to have me accept it. So I really should have expected that you would also be willing to make the law of noncontradiction rest upon man himself instead of God." "And I am extremely happy that not only the Arminian Fundamentalists but also you less extreme or moderate Calvinists, like Buswell and Carnell, are now willing to test your own revelation by a principle that is wholly independent of that revelation. It is now only a matter of time and you will see that you have to come over on our side altogether."

"I do not like the regular Calvinists. But they are certainly quite right from their own point of view. Mr. White claims that I am a creature of God. He says that all facts are made by God and controlled by the providence of God. He says that all men have sinned against God in Adam their representative. He adds that therefore I am spiritually



blind and morally perverse. He says all this and more on the basis of the absolute authority of Scripture. He would interpret me, my facts, and my logic in terms of the authority of that Scripture. He says I need this authority. He says I need nothing but this authority. His Scripture, he claims, is sufficient and final. And the whole thing, he claims, is clear."

"Now all this looks like plain historic Protestantism to me. I can intellectually understand the Calvinist on this matter of authority. I cannot understand you. You seem to me to want to have your cake and eat it. If you believe in scriptural authority, then why not explain all things, man, fact, and logic in terms of it? If you want with us to live by your own authority, by the experience of the human race, then why not have done with the Bible as absolute authority? It then, at best, gives you the authority of the expert."

"In your idea of the rational man who tests all things by the facts of history and by the law of noncontradiction, you have certainly made a point of contact with us. If you carry this through, you will indeed succeed in achieving complete coincidence between your ideas and ours. And, with us, you will have achieved complete coincidence between the ideas of man and the ideas of God. But the reason for this coincidence of your ideas with ours, and for the coincidence of man's ideas with God's, is that you then have a God and a Christ who are identical with man."

"Do you not think, Mr. Grey, that this is too great a price for you to pay? I am sure that you do not thus mean to drag down your God into the universe. I am sure that you do not thus mean to crucify your Christ afresh. But why then halt between two opinions? I do not believe Christianity, but, if I did, I think I would stand with Mr. White."

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# Special And General Revelation

*Torch and Trumpet*

1952

Volume 2, Issue 2.

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We are concerned in this series of articles with the problem of Reformed apologetics. In the first three articles we discussed the general nature of Reformed apologetics. Its method, we saw, is radically different from that of Romanist-evangelical apologetics. The latter starts from the presupposition that man has a measure of ultimacy or autonomy. This method assumes therefore that man can correctly interpret an area of life without referring to the God of the Bible. Over against this Reformed apologetics contends that man himself must first be interpreted in terms of the Bible before he can, without falsification, interpret any area of life.

## The Bible

In the fourth and fifth articles we dealt with the Bible itself. Reformed theology holds that Scripture speaks for itself. The sort of God of which the Bible speaks cannot speak otherwise than with absolute authority. The biblical notion of God as self-contained or self-sufficient and the notion that the Bible is self-authenticating are involved in one another.

This simple foundation truth of Protestantism is virtually rejected by evangelical Protestants.



Evangelicals make a two-fold charge against the Reformed doctrine of Scripture. On the one hand they say that it is irrationalistic. We saw how Carnell sets up the autonomous or "rational man" as a judge before whom the Bible must prove its right to speak with authority. This is as though a child were sitting in judgment on its parents, graciously permitting these parents to speak to it with authority.

On the other hand evangelicals say that the Reformed doctrine of Scripture is rationalistic. We saw how Pieper, the Lutheran, sets up the autonomous man as judge over the contents of the Bible. He insists that inasmuch as the Bible teaches the "freedom" of man it can and must also teach the doctrine of a changing God who adjusts himself to the ultimate decisions of man.

### The Autonomous Man

On the surface it seems strange that the Reformed doctrine of Scripture should be charged both with irrationalism and with rationalism. And on the surface it also seems strange that the two seemingly exclusive charges spring from the same source, namely, from evangelicalism. Yet there is really nothing else that we could expect from evangelicalism. The root error of evangelicalism, as noted earlier, is its ascription of a measure of ultimacy to man. This partly ultimate man only claims its "rights" when it charges the idea of the absolute, self-authenticating authority of Scripture with irrationalism, and when it charges the idea of the absolute, self-consistent God with rationalism.

### Evangelical Compromise

Of course the evangelical, Mr. Grey, has the best of intentions in all this. He wants to win Mr. Black, the non-believer, to an acceptance of the Bible as God's Word and to an acceptance of the God of the Bible



as his God. But Mr. Black has his conditions. Hard-pressed though he is, he none the less is not ready, he says, to consider the idea of an unconditional surrender, such as Mr. White, the Reformed apologist, has placed before him. Accordingly Mr. Grey offers Mr. Black a compromise proposal. The principle of human autonomy and ultimacy is to be combined with that of biblical authority. Yet Mr. Black does not readily accept this compromise proposal.

Why not? Because he cannot clearly see, from Mr. Grey's reasoning, why he should exchange his position for that of Christianity at all. He is not shown by Mr. Grey how utterly desperate his own situation is. Nor is he shown how completely the Christian position solves the problems that are wholly baffling on his own position. Mr. Black is left in confusion. The witness of the gospel has not really been placed before him as a challenge!

Unconditional Surrender!

Meanwhile the Reformed apologist, Mr. White, has pressed upon Mr. Black the ultimatum of unconditional surrender to the authority of Scripture. He has shown that unless one presupposes this authority as absolute and not merely as that of an expert, then man's experience operates in a vacuum. He has made plain to Mr. Black that all discussion about Christianity as being "in accord with the law of contradiction" is worse than pointless unless it first be asked on what fulcrum the law of contradiction itself rests. What sort of answer does Mr. Black give to this question? He prefers not to discuss this problem. He assumes that it rests on man thought of as ultimate or autonomous. But on what does man then rest? Man rests on a vacuum. And so Mr. Black presents the picture of man resting on "nothing," using the law of contradiction as a revolving door in



order by means of it to move "nothing" into "nothing." His whole procedure is that of an "encounter with nothing."

Mr. White has also made plain to Mr. Black that all discussion about Christianity being "in accord with the facts of experience" is worse than pointless unless one first has shown that he has a philosophy of fact that enables him at least to distinguish one fact from another. Can Mr. Black, on his assumed principle, distinguish one fact from another fact? No, his philosophy of fact is the philosophy of chance. His "principle of individuation," that is, the principle by which any fact is supposed to be different from any other fact, is that of chance. On this basis one cannot even count! No fact has any identity of its own. The procedure at the "tower of Babel" would be as orderly as the strictest military discipline in comparison with a scientific methodology based on such a philosophy of fact.

"So then," says Mr. White to Mr. Black, "you see that unless you are willing to presuppose the Bible as absolutely authoritative, your 'law of contradiction' could not get into gear with 'facts' and your 'facts' would not be amenable to the operation of the law of contradiction. Only on the presupposition of the absolute authority of Scripture as the Word of that God who controls 'whatsoever comes to pass' do you have a philosophy of 'reason,' a philosophy of 'the law of contradiction' and a philosophy of 'facts' that enables you to make sense out of life. Unconditional surrender to the absolute authority of Scripture is your only hope. It is your only hope for eternity. It is also the only hope for your scientific and philosophic endeavor in this life."

It appears then that the Reformed doctrine of Scripture is the only truly Protestant doctrine of Scripture. It also appears that unless we are willing to begin from this fully Protestant doctrine of Scripture



we cannot with Paul challenge the wisdom of this world, showing that it has been made foolishness with God.

### General Revelation

It is to be expected that with a specifically Reformed concept of Scripture there goes a specifically Reformed concept of revelation through nature and history. And it is also to be expected that this specifically Reformed doctrine of revelation in nature and history will be charged with being both irrationalistic and rationalistic by Romanists and non-Reformed Protestants or evangelicals.

### Calvinistic Rationalism

Let us look first at that aspect of the Reformed teaching on revelation in nature and history that is frequently charged with being rationalistic. The Reformed faith stresses the fact that it is God's plan that is being realized in and through what man does as well as in and through man's environment. Whatsoever comes to pass comes to pass in accordance with the one all comprehensive plan or counsel of God.

All the facts that confront man as he looks about himself and as he looks within himself are therefore revelational of God. The human mind as knowing no less than the trees that are known is revelational of God. For what happens according to the plan of God happens in accordance with the nature of God's being. Nothing could exist, either as directly made by God or as made by man, the creature of God. The subject of knowledge and the object of knowledge alike are revelational of God.

The apostle Paul says in the first chapter of Romans that all men know God. They cannot help but know God. Therefore they cannot



help but know that they themselves are creatures of God. Human self-consciousness involves God-consciousness. Human self-consciousness would be self-consciousness in a vacuum unless it implied consciousness of God. Calvin speaks of this when he says that man has the sense of deity ineradicably impressed upon him. Therefore his freedom is the freedom of God's creature. It is freedom to do that which is in accord with or to do that which is against the revealed will of God, but in either case that which is in accord with the plan of God.

## Evil

Special emphasis should be placed upon the fact that even the evil that man does by virtue of his sinful will is still in accord with the plan of God and as such is revelatory of God. Man, not God, is the responsible author of sin. But man could not sin if his sinning were not, in spite of himself, revelatory of God. Man does not sin in a vacuum. He could not sin in a vacuum. The possibility of sin presupposes the all-comprehensive plan of God. God reveals his holiness in his wrath upon the sinner. God is angry with the wicked every day. "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold down truth in unrighteousness" (Rom 1:18). Paul tells us that the sinner's conscience excuses or accuses him according as he obeys or disobeys the revealed will of God (Rom 2:14-15). Man's self-consciousness is moral self-consciousness. And as self-consciousness in general involves consciousness of God, so man's moral self-consciousness involves consciousness of covenant relationship to God. To know himself at all man must know himself to be a covenant being. He knows he is either keeping or breaking the covenant.



Calvin greatly stresses the fact that all things that happen in history are revelational of God. Men ought to see God everywhere, he says. God is clearly to be seen by men whether they look round about them or within them, whether they look to the past or look to the future. The whole scene of history in all of its aspects reveals God to man. Men ought to see God as their Creator. They ought to see him as their bountiful benefactor. They ought to see him as their judge. He is everywhere clearly to be seen. Men cannot look in any direction without seeing the face and therewith the claims of God. Every man walks under the brilliant spotlight of the revelational claims of God.

### The Foundation Of Science

When modern Calvinists present their views on the foundation and unity of human knowledge in the fields of science, philosophy, and theology they constantly refer to this basic, inescapable revelational character of all created reality.<sup>22</sup> The essence of false science, false philosophy and false theology consists therefore in the suppression and rejection of this revelational foundation of human effort and enterprise. And the very purpose of squarely opposing those who reject this revelational foundation of man's work is to the intent that this work might be placed upon its proper foundation again. The antithetical effect of the Christian's effort is not an end in itself. The idea of the antithesis is based upon and is correlative to the positive idea of the all comprehensive revelational character of the universe.

### The Point Of Contact

It is the basically revelational character of all created being that constitutes the foundation of truth for man. Man is inherently enveloped in and by truth. But truth is not an abstraction. Truth is truth about God and the universe. Thus man is naturally confronted by truth. When he speaks untruth he speaks that which, at bottom,



he knows to be untruth. When philosophers think out systems of philosophy that are not based upon the Creator-creature distinction they know, in the depth of their hearts, that they are doing this in order to suppress the truth about themselves. Knowing God to be their Creator they glorify him not as such.

When Mr. White, the Reformed apologist, approaches Mr. Black, the unbeliever, with the claims of God and of Christ, he knows in advance that the victory is his. He knows that no man can successfully seek for truth if first he has cut himself off from truth. And he knows that those who try to cut themselves off from truth cannot really succeed in doing so. Accordingly Mr. Black, the man who starts from himself without owning his own creatureliness is like the man who, standing in the light of the sun, takes out his eyes and then wonders whether the sun exists.

In talking to Mr. Black, Mr. White will be courteous and kind. But he will not fail to point out that on his assumptions, Mr. Black cannot find the truth because he cannot even seek for it. He cannot on his basis ask a single intelligent question. When Mr. Black hears of this he turns to Mr. Grey for sympathy. He knows that Mr. White is right but, unless the Holy Spirit quickens him, he will continue to suppress the truth.

### Negotiated Peace

Mr. Grey, the evangelical, hastens to assure Mr. Black that Mr. White is an extremist. "As for myself," says he, "I do not hold to the determinism and rationalism of Mr. White." He would rather say that God limited himself when he created man. To give man true freedom, true personality, God was willing to forego his absolute control over him. God gave man a bit of the same sort of being that he himself possesses. Man's freedom is, like God's freedom, ability to



initiate something wholly new in the world. And so man is not exclusively revelatory of God, the controller of all things. Rather God and man are together participant of the same sort of being. Suppose, says Mr. Grey, that you and I need a dollar for a bit of breakfast. You, as the man of means, contribute ninety-eight cents. I, representing the poorer class, contribute two cents. I feel rather dependent on you. Even so, my two cents are worth exactly as much as any two cents that you have contributed. I can, if I wish, buy two cents worth of pretzels and make them do for breakfast. Even if you had given me the two cents that I possess, now that I have them, I have a measure of absolute independence over against you.

In thus asserting his idea of "freedom" Mr. Grey has compromised the revelational character of the constitution of man. He has approved of Mr. Black's basic assumption to the effect that man must begin by thinking of himself as knowing himself apart from God. Mr. Grey has sided with the Romanist idea of the analogy of being as over against the Protestant principle of the exhaustively revelational character of all created being.

Having thus taken over "in part at least" Mr. Black's conception of man, Mr. Grey, naturally also takes over "in part at least" Mr. Black's conception of man's environment.

For Mr. Grey history is partly revelational of God and partly revelational of man. God as the father, carries ninety pounds and man, as the child, carries only ten pounds. But the ten pounds carried by man is in no wise carried by God. Mr. Grey feels that if one says with Mr. White, the "whatsoever come to pass" comes to pass by virtue of the ultimate plan of God, that then one must make God to be the author of sin, and kill all human responsibility. He therefore joins Mr. Black in rejecting the "rationalism" of Mr. White.



## Mr. Grey And Non-Christian Irrationalism

The foundation on which Mr. Grey stands when he rejects the "rationalism" of Mr. White is the foundation on which Mr. Black also stands. It is that of non-Christian irrationalism. It is the assumption that man is not created but is ultimate and therefore autonomous.

From this point forward Mr. Grey is at the mercy of Mr. Black. Mr. Grey has now to accept all the false problematics of Mr. Black as though they were genuine. In particular Mr. Grey must assume with Mr. Black that the facts of man's environment are not exclusively revelational of God. When he argues with Mr. Black about the existence of God he can only claim that a limited God probably exists. And he must prove his point by first cutting both himself and Mr. Black loose from the truth of the revelational character of all created being.

It should be noted that Mr. Grey's attitude toward general revelation is the same as that of Mr. Pieper, the Lutheran, toward Scriptural revelation. Mr. Pieper also argued in effect that the God of the Bible must be limited in order to make room for the freedom of man. In both cases the attitude toward the revelation of God is determined by the assumption of human freedom as a measure of independence from God. In both cases there is no real ground for saying that the revelation of God is really ultimately the revelation of God, the self-contained and self-sufficient God of which the Bible speaks.

## Calvinistic "Irrationalism"

So far we have dealt with the Reformed conception of general revelation from the point of view of its supposed rationalism. To this we must now add a few words about the Reformed conception of



general revelation from the point of view of its supposed "irrationalism."

Here too the point is very simple and taken directly from Scripture. It is to the effect that from the beginning of history, even before the entrance of sin, supernatural thought-communication on the part of God to man was added to God's revelation to man in his own constitution and in the universe about him. The two forms of revelation, revelation in the facts of the created universe whether within or about man, and revelation by way of God's directly speaking to man, are mutually involved in one another. Just as two rafters of a house need to support one another, so these two forms of revelation need to support one another.

#### Mr. Grey's Rationalism

The significance of this basically simple point cannot well be overestimated. The entire Reformed philosophy of history is colored by it. Think for a moment of some one living where the gospel call has not penetrated. What are the responsibilities of such a person? Is he responsible only for the revelation that speaks to him through his own constitution and through his environment? Mr. Grey would answer yes but Mr. White would answer no. Mr. Grey has no eye for the supplemental character of the two forms of revelation. And that too was the fault of Adam and Eve when they sinned against God. Adam and Eve thought that they could interpret themselves and nature about them independently of the supernatural thought-communication of God. And Mr. Grey does not see that this was a grievous sin. He still thinks that Mr. Black, the non-believer, is not wrong when he interprets at least some areas of life without reference to the supernatural thought-communication of God to man in Scripture. When Paul says that "from the creation of the world"



God has clearly manifested himself to man (Rom 1:20) and that at the beginning of the history of the world every man in Adam sinned against God, (Rom 5:12) Mr. Grey rejects all this as so much irrationalism. How could men in far off Africa be held responsible for what happened in paradise thousands of years ago? When Mr. Black ridicules this simple biblical teaching Mr. Grey joins in with him in saying that surely Mr. White is being an extremist again. This time Mr. White is said to be an irrationalist as before he was said to be a rationalist!

In doing so Mr. Grey again does not realize that he has accepted the basic assumption of Mr. Black about man's independence of God. Little does he realize that he has again accepted the basically false problematics of Mr. Black as though they were sound. And little does he realize that after this he can, if consistent, only ask Mr. Black to accept a God who is a supplement to nature and to man, a finite god who probably existsâ€”and probably does not exist!

In particular it should be noted that this form of argument which fails to see the interdependence of supernatural and natural revelation springs from the non-Christian rationalism of Mr. Black. It is the sort of position maintained by Carnell when he says that Mr. Black must not be asked to accept any sort of authority which he as a "rational man" is not able to approve by a standard that he used prior to his meeting of the demands of the revelation in question.

### The Sum Of The Matter

In conclusion we may sum up the matter as follows: there is a distinctly Reformed doctrine of Scripture. This is for Mr. White always "the first book." This distinctly Reformed doctrine of Scripture is rejected by Mr. Grey, the evangelical, because he thinks that it is both rationalistic and irrationalistic. It is rationalistic he



says, because it insists that whatsoever happens, happens in accord with the plan of God. It is irrationalistic, he says, because it holds that human reason itself in all its cultural effort must be made subservient to the self-authenticating authority of God.

Similarly there is a distinctly Reformed doctrine of general revelation. This is the "second book" of Mr. White. This distinctly Reformed doctrine of general revelation is implied in the distinctively Reformed doctrine of Scripture. One must, to be consistent, either take both or neither. One cannot read the book of nature aright without the book of Scripture. This Reformed doctrine of general revelation is again rejected by Mr. Grey, the evangelical, because he thinks it is both rationalistic and irrationalistic. He says this doctrine is rationalistic in that it holds that all the facts of the universe, including those done by the will of man, whether good or bad, are revelational of the plan and therefore of the nature of God. He says this doctrine is irrationalistic because it asserts that all men everywhere are responsible for what happened at the beginning of history when Adam disobeyed the supernatural revelation of God.

Yet in making the double charge of rationalism and irrationalism against the only consistently Reformed doctrine of revelation, inclusive of the two "books" of Scripture and nature, the evangelical is basing himself upon the assumption of Mr. Black. It is to be expected that Mr. Black would call the biblical position rationalistic. It goes against his idea of "freedom" to say that whatever he does is within the plan of God.

It is also to be expected that he will call the biblical position irrationalistic. It goes against his idea of the ultimacy of his reason to say that reason itself, from the beginning of history, was meant to



function in self-conscious subordination to the authoritative thought-communication of God.

But what shall we say of Mr. Grey? Is not he supposed to be winning Mr. Black over to the truly biblical position? Why then does he join Mr. Black in charging the simple teaching of Scripture with respect to itself and with respect to general revelation with being both rationalistic and irrationalistic? And when will he realize that by his method he cannot show Mr. Black just how Christianity differs from its opposite and just why Mr. Black should become a Christian? Only Mr. White can really challenge Mr. Black to forsake his idols and serve the living God. His witness must be heard throughout the world. Let him then not be high-minded but rather strengthen his heart in the Lord his God.

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## **Proofs For The Existence Of God**

*Torch and Trumpet*

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In preceding articles we have sought to indicate something of the difference between a Reformed and "evangelical" apologetics. Both Mr. White, the Reformed apologete, and Mr. Grey, the evangelical apologete, seek to defend the truth of Christianity. Both seek to get Mr. Black, the non-believer, to accept the truth about God and his creation. To both this is a matter of the greatest importance; they want to see Mr. Black redeemed from the "wrath of God" that rests upon him.



However, Mr. White and Mr. Grey have their internal disagreement about how best to win Mr. Black. And the reason for this disagreement is the fact that they disagree on the nature of that to which they would win Mr. Black. Their difference with respect to the method of apologetics is based on their difference with respect to theology. Mr. White holds to an unqualified while Mr. Grey holds to a qualified recognition of the sovereignty of God on condition that his own sovereignty be not altogether abolished.

Naturally there will be a difference between them on the requirement they will place before Mr. Black. Mr. White will require absolute surrender to God; Mr. Grey will be satisfied with a negotiated peace. Mr. White will require that Mr. Black henceforth interpret the whole of his life in terms of God; Mr. Grey will advise Mr. Black to interpret most of his life in terms of God.

### 1. Authority in Scripture

When Mr. Black objects against Mr. White that unconditional surrender to the authority of Scripture is irrational, then Mr. Grey nods approval and says that, of course, the "rational man" has a perfect right to test the credibility of Scripture by logic. When the Bible speaks of God's sovereign election of some men to salvation this must mean something that fits in with his "rational nature." When Mr. Black objects to Mr. White that unconditional surrender to Scripture is rationalistic, then Mr. Grey again nods approval and says that, of course, genuine human personality has a perfect right to test the content of Scripture by experience. When the Bible speaks of God by his counsel controlling whatsoever comes to pass, this must mean something that fits in with man's freedom. God created man and gave man a share in his own freedom; men therefore participate in his being.



## 2. Authority In "General Revelation"

But what of natural or general revelation? Here surely there can be no difference, you say, between the requirements of Mr. White and Mr. Grey. Here there is no law and no promise; here there is only fact. How then can you speak of requirement at all? Here surely Mr. White can forge his "five points of Calvinism" and join Mr. Grey in taking Mr. Black through the picture gallery of this world, pointing out its beauties to him so that with them he will spontaneously exclaim, "The whole chorus of nature raises one hymn to the praises of its Creator."

## 3. Mr. White's Silence

Let us think of Mr. White as trying hard to forget his "five points." "Surely," he says to himself, "there can be nothing wrong with joining Mr. Grey in showing Mr. Black the wonders of God's creation. We believe in the same God, do we not? Both of us want to show Mr. Black the facts of Creation so that he will believe in God. When Mr. Black says: 'I catch no meaning from all I have seen, and I pass on, quite as I came, confused and dismayed' Mr. Grey and I can together take him by plane to the Mt. Wilson observatory so he may see the starry heavens above. Surely the source of knowledge for the natural sciences is the Book of Nature, which is given to everyone. Do not the Scriptures themselves teach that there is a light in nature, *per se*, which cannot be, and is not, transmitted through the spectacles of the Word? If this were not so, how could the Scriptures say of those who have only the light of nature that they are without excuse?"

## 4. Mr. Grey's Eloquence

So the three men, Mr. White, Mr. Grey and Mr. Black, go here and there and everywhere. Mr. White and Mr. Grey agree to pay each half



of the expense. Mr. Black is their guest.

They go first to the Mt. Wilson observatory to see the starry skies above. "How wonderful, how grand!" exclaims Mr. Grey. To the marvels of the telescope they add those of the microscope. They circle the globe to see "the wonders of the world." There is no end to the "exhibits" and Mr. Black shows signs of weariness. So they sit down on the beach. Will not Mr. Black now sign on the dotted line?

As they wait for the answer, Mr. Grey spies a watch someone has lost. Holding it in his hand he says to Mr. Black: "Look round the world: contemplate the whole and every part of it: you will find it to be nothing but one great machine, subdivided into an infinite number of lesser machines, which again admit of subdivisions, to a degree beyond that which human senses and faculties can trace and explain. All these various machines, and even their minute parts, are adjusted to each other with an accuracy, which ravishes into admiration all men, who have ever contemplated them. The curious adapting of means to ends, throughout all nature, resembles exactly, though it much exceeds, the productions of human contrivance; of human designs, thought, wisdom and intelligence. Since, therefore, the effects resemble each other, we are led to infer, by all the rules of analogy, that the causes also resemble; and that the Author of Nature is somewhat similar to the mind of man; though possessed of much larger faculties, proportioned to the grandeur of the work, which he has executed."

"Now, Mr. Black, I don't want to put undue pressure on you. You know your own needs in your own business. But I think that as a rational being, you owe it to yourself to join the theistic party. Isn't it highly probable that there is a God?"



"I'm not now asking you to become a Christian. We take things one step at a time. I'm only speaking of the Book of Nature. Of course, if there is a God and if this God should have a Son and if this Son should also reveal himself, it is not likely to be more difficult for you to believe in him than it is now to believe in the Father. But just now I am only asking you to admit that there is a great accumulation of evidence of the sort that any scientists or philosopher must admit to be valid for the existence of a God back of and above this world. You see this watch. Isn't it highly probable that a power higher than itself has made it? You know the purpose of a watch. Isn't it highly probable that the wonderful contrivances of nature serve the purpose of a God? Looking back we are naturally led to a God who is the cause of this world; looking forward we think of a God who has a purpose with this world. So far as we can observe the course and constitution of the universe there is, I think, no difficulty on your own adopted principles, against belief in a God. Why not become a theist? You do want to be on the winning side, don't you? Well, the Gallup poll of the universe indicates a tendency toward the final victory of theism."

## 5. Mr. Black Politely Declines

When Mr. Grey had finished his obviously serious and eloquent plea, Mr. Black looked very thoughtful. He was clearly a gentleman. He disliked disappointing his two friends after all the generosity they had shown him. But he could not honestly see any basic difference between his own position and theirs. So he declined politely but resolutely to sign on the dotted line. He refused to be "converted" to theism. In substance he spoke as follows: "You speak of evidence of rationality and purpose in the universe. You would trace this rationality or purpose back to a rational being back of the universe who, you think, is likely to have a purpose with the universe. But who



is back of your God to explain him in turn? By your own definition your God is not absolute or self-sufficient. You say that he probably exists; which means that you admit that probably he does not exist. But probability rests upon possibility. Now I think that any scientific person should come with an open mind to the observation of the facts of the universe. He ought to begin by assuming that any sort of fact may exist. And I was glad to observe that on this all important point you agree with me. Hence the only kind of God that either of us can believe in is one who may not exist. In other words, neither of us do or can believe in a God who cannot not exist. And it was just this sort of God, a God who is self-sufficient, and as such necessarily existent, that I thought you Christian theists believed in."

By this time Mr. White was beginning to squirm. He was beginning to realize that he had sold out the God of his theology, the sovereign God of Scripture by his silent consent to the argument of Mr. Grey. Mr. Black was right, he felt at once. Either one presupposes God back of the ideas of possibility or one presupposes that the idea of possibility is back of God. Either one says with historic Reformed theology on the basis of Scripture that what God determines and only what God determines is possible, or one says with all non-Christian forms of thought that possibility surrounds God. But for the moment Mr. White was stupefied. He could say nothing. So Mr. Black simply drew the conclusion from what he had said in the following words:

"Since you in your effort to please me have accepted my basic assumption with respect to possibility and probability it follows that your God, granted that he exists, is of no use whatsoever in explaining the universe. He himself needs in turn to be explained. Let us remember the story of the Indian philosopher and his elephant. It was never more applicable than to the present subject. If the material world rests upon a similar ideal world, this ideal world



must rest upon some other; and so on, without end. It were better, therefore, never to look beyond the present material world. In short, gentlemen, much as I dislike not to please you, what you offer is nothing better than what I already possess. Your God is himself surrounded by pure possibility or Chance; in what way can he help me? And how could I be responsible to him? For you, as for me, all things ultimately end in the irrational."

## 6. Mr. Grey Appeals To Logic

At this point Mr. Grey grew pale. In his desperation he searched his arsenal for another argument that might convince Mr. Black. There was one that he had not used for some time. The arguments for God that he had so far used he labeled a posteriori arguments. They ought, he had thought, to appeal to the "empirical" temper of the times. They started from human experience with causation and purpose and by analogy argued to the idea of a cause of and a purpose with the world as a whole. But Mr. Black had pointed out that if you start with the ideas of cause and purpose as intelligible to man without God when these concepts apply to relations within the universe, then you cannot consistently say that you need God for the idea of cause or purpose when these concepts apply to the universe as a whole. So now Mr. Grey drew out the drawer marked a priori argument. In public he called this the argument from finite to absolute being. "As finite creatures," he said to Mr. Black, "we have the idea of absolute being. The idea of a finite being involves of necessity the idea of an absolute being. We have the notion of an absolute being; surely there must be a reality corresponding to our idea of such a being; if not all our ideas may be false. Surely we must hold that reality is ultimately rational and coherent and that our ideas participate in this rationality. If not how would science be possible?"



## 7. Mr. Black Again Declines

When Mr. Grey had thus delivered himself of this appeal to logic rather than to fact then Mr. White for a moment seemed to take courage. Was not this at least to get away from the idea of a God who probably exists? Surely the "incommunicable attributes of God," of which he had been taught in his catechism classes, were all based upon and expressive of the idea of God as necessarily existing. But Mr. Black soon disillusioned him for the second time. Said he in answer to the argument from Mr. Grey, "Again I cannot see any basic difference between your position and mine. Of course, we must believe that reality is ultimately rational. And of course, we must hold that our minds participate in this rationality. But when you thus speak you thereby virtually assert that we must not believe in a God whose existence is independent of our human existence. A God whom we are to know must with us be a part of a rational system that is mutually accessible to and expressive of both. If God is necessary to you then you are also necessary to God. That is the only sort of God that is involved in your argument."

## 8. Mr. Grey Testifies

"But Mr. Black, this is terrible, this is unbearable! We do want you to believe in God. I bear witness to his existence. I will give you a Bible. Please read it! It tells you of Jesus Christ and how you may be saved by his blood. I am born again and you can be born again too if you will only believe. Please do believe in God and be saved."

## 9. Mr. White Hopes For The Best!

Meanwhile Mr. White took new courage. He realized that he had so far made a great mistake in keeping silent during the time that Mr. Grey had presented his arguments. The arguments for the existence



of God taken from the ideas of cause and purpose as set forth by Mr. Grey had led to pure irrationalism and Chance. The argument about an absolute being as set forth by Mr. Grey had led to pure rationalism and determinism. In both cases, Mr. Black had been quite right in saying that a God whose existence is problematic or a God who exists by the same necessity as does the universe is still an aspect of or simply the whole of the universe. But now he felt that perhaps Mr. Grey was right in simply witnessing to the existence of God. He thought that if the arguments used are not logically coercive they may at least be used as means with which to witness to unbelievers. And surely witnessing to God's existence was always in order. But poor Mr. White was to be disillusioned again. For the witness bearing done by Mr. Grey was based on the assumption that the belief in God is a purely non-rational or even irrational matter.

#### 10. Mr. Black Asks Some Pertinent Questions

Mr. Black's reply to the words of Mr. Grey indicated this fact all too clearly. Said Mr. Black to Mr. Grey: "I greatly appreciate your evident concern for my eternal welfare. But there are two or three questions that I would like to have you answer. In the first place I would ask whether in thus witnessing to me you thereby admit that the arguments for the existence of God have no validity? Or rather do you not thereby admit that these arguments, if they prove anything, prove that God is finite and correlative to man and therefore that your position is not basically different from mine?"

Mr. Grey did not answer because he could not answer this question otherwise than by agreeing with Mr. Black.

"In the second place," asked Mr. Black, "you are now witnessing to Christ as well as to God, to Christianity as well as to theism. I suppose your argument for Christianity would be similar in nature to



your argument for theism would it not? You would argue that the Jesus of the New Testament is probably the Son of God and the he quite probably died for the sins of men. But now you witness to me about your Christ. And by witnessing instead of reasoning you seem to admit that there is no objective claim for the truth of what you hold with respect to Christ. Am I right in all this?"

Again Mr. Grey made no answer. The only answer he could consistently have given would be to agree with Mr. Black.

"In the third place," asked Mr. Black, "you are now witnessing not only to God the Father, to Jesus Christ the Son, but also to the Holy Spirit. You say you are born again, that you know you are saved and that at present I am lost. Now if you have had an experience of some sort it would be unscientific for me to deny it. But if you want to witness to me about your experience you must make plain to me the nature of that experience. And to do that you must do so in terms of principles that I understand. Such principles must needs be accessible to all. Now if you make plain your experience to me in terms of principles that are plain to me as unregenerate then wherein is your regeneration unique? On the other hand, if you still maintain that your experience of regeneration is unique then can you say anything about it to me so that I may understand? And does not then your witness bearing appear to be wholly unintelligible and devoid of meaning? Thus again you cannot make any claim to the objective truth of your position."

"Summing up the whole matter, I would say in the first place that your arguments for the existence of God have rightfully established me in my unbelief. They have shown that nothing can be said for the existence of a God who is actually the Creator and controller of the world. I would say in the second place that using such arguments as



you have used for the existence of God commits you to using similar arguments for the truth of Christianity with similar fatal results for your position. In both cases you first use intellectual argument upon principles that presuppose the justice of my unbelieving position. Then when it is pointed out to you that such is the case you turn to witnessing. But then your witnessing is in the nature of the case an activity that you yourself have virtually admitted to be wholly irrational and unintelligible."

#### 11. Mr. White Sees The Richness Of His Faith

When Mr. Black had finished Mr. White was in a great distress. But it was this very distress that at last he saw the richness of his own faith. He made no pretense to having greater intellectual power than Mr. Grey. He greatly admired the real faith and courage of Mr. Grey. But he dared keep silence no longer. His silence had been sin, he knew. Mr. Black had completely discomfited Mr. Grey so that he had not another word to say. Mr. Black was about to leave them established rather than challenged in his unbelief. And all of that in spite of the best intentions and efforts of Mr. Grey, speaking for both of them. A sense of urgent responsibility to make known the claims of the sovereign God pressed upon him. He now saw clearly first that the arguments for the existence of God as conducted by Mr. Grey, are based on the assumption that the unbeliever is right with respect to the principles in terms of which he explains all things. These principles are: (a) that man is not a creature of God but rather is ultimate and as such must properly consider himself instead of God the final reference point in explaining all things; (b) that all other things beside himself are non-created but controlled by Chance; and (c) that the power of logic that he possesses is the means by which he must determine what is possible or impossible in the universe of Chance.



At last it dawned upon Mr. White that first to admit that the principles of Mr. Black, the unbeliever, are right and then to seek to win him to the acceptance of the existence of God the Creator and judge of all men is like first admitting that the United States had historically been a province of the Soviet Union but ought at the same time be recognized as an independent and all-controlling political power.

In the second place, Mr. White now saw clearly that a false type of reasoning for the truth of God's existence and for the truth of Christianity involves a false kind of witnessing for the existence of God and for the truth of Christianity. If one reasons for the existence of God and for the truth of Christianity on the assumption that Mr. Black's principles of explanation are valid, then one must witness on the same assumption. One must then make plain to Mr. Black, in terms of principles which Mr. Black accepts, what it means to be born again. Mr. Black will then apply the principles of modern psychology of religion to Mr. Grey's "testimony" with respect to his regeneration and show that it is something that naturally comes in the period of adolescence.

In the third place Mr. White now saw clearly that it was quite "proper" for Mr. Grey to use a method of reasoning and a method of witness bearing that is based upon the truth of the anti-Christian and anti-theistic assumptions. Mr. Grey's theology is Arminian or Lutheran. It is therefore based upon the idea that God is not wholly sovereign over man. It assumes that man's responsibility implies a measure of autonomy of the sort that is the essence and foundation of the whole of Mr. Black's thinking. It is therefore to be expected that Mr. Grey will assume that Mr. Black needs not to be challenged on his basic assumption with respect to his own assumed ultimacy or autonomy.



From now on Mr. White decided that, much as he enjoyed the company of Mr. Grey and much as he trusted his evident sincerity and basic devotion to the truth of God, yet he must go his own way in apologetics as he had, since the Reformation, gone his own way in theology. He made an appointment with Mr. Black to see him soon. He expressed to Mr. Grey his great love for him as a fellow believer, his great admiration for his fearless and persistent efforts to win men to an acceptance of truth as it is in Jesus. Then he confessed to Mr. Grey that his conscience had troubled him during the entire time of their troubles with Mr. Black. He had started in good faith thinking that Mr. Grey's efforts at argument and witnessing might win Mr. Black. He had therefore been quite willing, especially since Mr. Grey was through his constant efforts much more conversant with such things than he was, to be represented by Mr. Grey. But now he had at last come to realize that not only had the effort been utterly fruitless and self-frustrating but more than that it had been terribly dishonoring to God. How could the eternal I Am be pleased with being presented as being a god and as probably existing, as necessary for the explanation of some things but not of all things, as one who will be glad to recognize the ultimacy of his own creatures. Would the God who had in Paradise required of men implicit obedience now be satisfied with a claims and counter claims arrangement with his creatures?

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Endnotes:

1. *Gereformeerde Apologetiek*, Kampen, 1922.
2. *Calvin as Theologian and Calvinism Today*, p 23.
3. *Idem.*, p. 24.
4. cf. *The Plan of Salvation*.



5. The original text indicates the presence of a footnote here, but none is listed.â€”ed.
6. *Idem.*, p. 1.
7. *Moody Monthly*, January, 1950, p. 313.
8. *Idem.*, p. 343.
9. *What is God*. Grand Rapids. 1937. pp. 53, 54.
10. *Therefore Stand, Boston*. 1945, p. 386.
11. *Idem.*, p. 389 390.
12. Edward John Carnell, *An Introduction to Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmann, 1948), p. 113.
13. *Idem.*, p. 114.
14. *Idem.*, p. 115, note.
15. Cf. Carnell, *Op. Cit*, p. 57.
16. *Idem.*, p. 71.
17. *Idem.*, p. 72.
18. *Idem.* p. 73.
19. *Idem.*, p. 178.
20. *Idem.*, p. 78.
21. *Idem.*, p. 85.
22. Cf. V. Hepp, *De basis van de eenheid der wetenschap*. Assen, 1937.

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