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The Apologetics of Jesus: Survey and Significance	1
<i>Norman Geisler</i>	
Reflections on the Place of Friendship in the Practice of Christian Apologetics	25
<i>Gary Habermas</i>	
Faustus Socinus's A Tract Concerning God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit	37
<i>Alan W. Gomes</i>	
Cross-Examination: Socinus and the Doctrine of the Trinity	59
<i>Robert M. Bowman, Jr.</i>	
The Straw Man Strikes Back: When Gödel's Theorem is Misused	79
<i>Winfried Corduan & Michael J. Anderson</i>	
Sankara's Two-Level View of Truth: Nondualism on Trial	105
<i>Douglas Groothuis</i>	
Assessing Modern Psychic Phenomena	113
<i>Ron Rhodes</i>	
<u>BOOK REVIEWS</u>	137

- *Claiming Christ: A Mormon–Evangelical Debate and Bridging the Divide: The Continuing Conversation between a Mormon and an Evangelical.*
- *A World of Difference: Putting Christian Truth-Claims to the Worldview Test*
- *At the Origins of Modern Atheism*

Journal of the International Society of Christian Apologetics

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The Apologetics of Jesus: Survey and Significance

Norman Geisler

If apologetics is defined broadly as providing evidence and arguments for the truth of the Christian Faith, then Jesus was an apologist since He used many different kinds of evidence in presenting His message. And if apologetics is divided into two broad categories of evidential and non-evidential apologetics, then Jesus was an evidentialist for the same reason. He definitely was not a fideist since He did not simply call on people to believe without evidence. In fact, He provided very persuasive arguments in support of His truth claims. Further, within the two overall classifications of rational and non-rational apologetics, Jesus was on the side of reason. As for more precisely which particular contemporary classification of apologetics Jesus would fit into, such as presuppositional or classical apologetics, that must await the analysis below to determine more specifically how He argued apologetically.

The Various Ways in Which Jesus Used Apologetics

Jesus engaged people apologetically in at least nine different ways.¹ Each way fit the occasion and audience. It was contextualized apologetics. He knew precisely what would be effective with His listeners, and He used apologetics masterfully to persuade them of the truth He was presenting.

Jesus' Use of Testimony (Witness) as an Apologetic

In John 5, Jesus presented five credible witnesses: John the Baptist, His works, the Father, the Old Testament, and Moses. In John 8, Jesus points to the testimony of His heavenly Father and added the testimony of Abraham and of His own sinless life. The power of Jesus' argument rested in the integrity and credibility of His witnesses. Not only did He present forceful witnesses, but in the process of defending Himself, He turns the tables on His accusers. No reasonable Jew had any valid grounds on which to reject Jesus' witnesses. His apologetic use of witnesses relevant to the hearers was both comprehensive and compelling.

From these examples of Jesus we learn several key lessons. First, in making His case, Jesus gave reasons and evidence for His claims. He did not expect His listeners simply to believe or make a blind leap of faith. Second, the evidence Jesus gave included first-hand, eyewitness and supernatural events. Third, Jesus provided multiple witnesses in defense of His claims. This was a key part of Jesus' apologetics which included the testimony from credible witnesses. Thus, given His monotheistic context, Jesus was an evidentialist, not a fideist, in that He believed in the use of evidence to convince others of the truth of His claims.

Jesus' Use of Miracles as an Apologetic

The monotheistic Jews to whom Jesus spoke understood miracles as divine confirmations of truth claims. The Jewish Rabbi Nicodemus said: "Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs [miracles] that You do unless God is with Him" (Jn. 3:2). It was customary for God to validate His spokesperson in this way. Both Moses (Ex. 4) and Elijah the prophet (1 Kings 18) were confirmed by miracles. Indeed, the Jews of Jesus day sought for a sign from God (Mt. 12:39).

Professor Blomberg correctly states that "The purposes of Jesus' miracle-working ministry have been described as 'evidential, evangelistic, empathetic, and eschatological. . . . But the primary focus is Christological—to demonstrate that Jesus is the divine Messiah and that the

kingdom of God is now breaking into human history with new force (Matthew 11:2-6, Luke 11:20).”²

In Deuteronomy 18:14-20, God promised that He would one day raise another prophet like Moses through whom He would speak. The miracles of Christ were signs that He was that prophet and more. The Jews seeing the signs should have made the connection. Although not everyone was convinced, many saw the connection. In John 2, it was His miraculous work of turning water into wine that caused His disciples to place their faith in Him. The text reads, “This was the first of his miraculous signs Jesus performed at Cana in Galilee. He thus revealed His glory and His disciples put their faith in Him.” In John 3 the Jewish leader Nicodemus recognized miracles as a confirmation of God (Jn. 3:2).

Several words are used for miracle in the gospels.³ *Teras* occurs sixteen times in the New Testament and never appears alone but is used in combination with *semeion* or “signs.” It stresses the startling, imposing and amazement-waking aspect of the miracle. *Dynamis* emphasizes the power revealed in the miracle and the spiritual energy behind it. *Endoxos* emphasizes miracles as being works in which the glory of God and the Son is revealed. *Paradoxos* is used only in Luke 5:26 and it is translated “remarkable things.” It emphasizes that a miracle is contrary to the natural order of the world. *Thaumasios* is used only in Matthew 21:15 and is used of something that provokes wonder. *Semeion* is used to point to the power or meaning behind the miracle, and it is the word most often used as “sign” in the Greek. It is used seventy-seven times in the New Testament and primarily in the Gospels where it is used forty-eight times. The basic meaning of *semeion* is a sign by which one recognizes a particular person or thing and serves as an authenticating mark or token. When associated with the miraculous, it can indicate a miracle accomplished by divinity or a miracle-worker which goes against the natural course of things.⁴

The terms used for miracle in the New Testament lead us to conclude that miracles are a unique and extraordinary event awakening wonder (*teras*), brought about by divine power (*dynamis*), accomplishing

some practical and benevolent work (*ergon* and *endoxos*), and authenticating the message and messenger as coming from God (*semeion*).⁵

However, there is greater meaning to miracles than just the event itself. Five dimensions to biblical miracles can be listed.⁶ First, miracles have an unusual character. As a wonder they attract attention. Second, miracles have a theological dimension. God who created and sustains the universe can intervene when He chooses to. Third, there is a moral dimension. Miracles reflect the character of God and bring glory to God. Fourth, miracles have a doctrinal dimension. They are often connected to truth claims and confirm God's message and messenger. Fifth, miracles have a teleological dimension. They are never performed to entertain but to glorify God and provide evidence for people to believe that God's authority was upon the messenger.

The miracles of Christ are unique. Not only did He perform many miracles, but there were many witnesses of them. And the nature of many of the miracles He performed placed them beyond reasonable question. He not only cured otherwise incurable diseases, but He multiplied loaves, walked on water, and raised the dead. These miracles serve as the crowning confirmation of the truth claims Christ made. Along with His resurrection, they provided "many infallible proofs" (Acts 1:3) of His claims to deity.

Jesus' supernatural power over the cosmos was seen by the fact that He manifested control over every category of the cosmos as listed by the famous Greek philosopher Aristotle in his *Categories*.⁷ Note Jesus' power over:

Substance (what?) - Turning water into wine

Quantity (how much?) - Feeding 5000

Quality (what kind?) - Blind man gets quality of sight

Relation (to what?) - Raising Lazarus to his relationship

Space (where?) – Healing nobleman’s son from a distance

Time (when?) – Healing an invalid of 38 years of time

Position (on what?) – Walking on water, an unnatural position

Action (from what?) – His Victorious Death

Passion (on what?) – His Triumphant Resurrection

State or Habit (under what condition?) – Catching a batch of fish under unusual conditions

When Christ establishes His kingdom on earth, all creation will be subject to Him. Sin, sickness, death, and disease will ultimately be overcome (1 Cor. 15:25-26; Rev. 21:4), and the subjects of the kingdom will never be in want. The king will supply all their needs. The miracles of Christ reflect His divine character and demonstrate His authority over creation.

Jesus’ Use of the Resurrection as an Apologetic

As the crowning miracle of His ministry, the resurrection deserves special attention. In John 11:25 Jesus stated, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me will live, even though he dies, and whoever lives and believes in Me will never die.” Jesus claimed to be the source of life and the victor over physical death. Many “saviors” have made this claim, but in the unique event of His resurrection, Jesus alone confirmed it. The resurrection affirms that Jesus is unique among all people. He alone predicted His death, burial, and resurrection and accomplished this feat. The founders of all religions have died but Christ alone predicted and accomplished His resurrection from the dead. Jesus used evidence to support His claims to be the Son of God. His most powerful evidence was miracles. Miracles confirm God’s message and His messenger (Heb. 2:2-4). And the most important miracle was His

resurrection from the dead. Given a theistic context wherein miracles are possible, this remains to this day the best apologetic for the truth of Christianity.

Unlike Jesus, however, we have an added burden, namely, to show the historicity of these events.⁸ But since there is overwhelming evidence for that, the defense of and appeal to Jesus' miracle of the resurrection remains to date the most effective evidence for the deity of Christ.⁹

Jesus' Resurrection as a Fulfillment of Prophecy

Jesus' resurrection proved to be a powerful apologetic for another reason. It was a fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah. Isa. 53:8-10 states, "By oppression and judgment he was taken away. And who can speak of his descendants? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was stricken. He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth. Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand." He adds that the Messiah will be "cut off from the land of the living. . . ." In other words, the Messiah would be killed. However, the Messiah will also "see his offspring and prolong his days," which indicates He will be raised to life. Psalm 16:10 states that God's "Holy One" will not remain in Sheol, nor will He see "decay." In addition, Psalm Two predicted the resurrection, saying, "I will proclaim the decree of the Lord; He said to me, 'You are my Son; today I have become your Father. Ask of me and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession'" (Psa. 2:7-8 cf. Acts 13:33-34). Not only did Jesus claim to be the Messiah (Jn. 4:25; Mk.14:61-62), thus fulfilling the Old Testament predictions about the Messiah's resurrection, but He too predicted and accomplished it. This is unprecedented in the annals of religions.

Jesus' Use of Reason as an Apologetic

A major component of Jesus' mission was to teach and defend truth, and to correct error (Jn. 8:32). Through this process, Jesus showed Himself to be a brilliant philosopher who used the laws of logic to reveal truth, demolish arguments, and point out error. When we analyze the arguments of Jesus, we soon realize that He was the greatest thinker who ever set foot upon the earth. Contemporary philosopher Dallas Willard states, "We need to understand that Jesus is a thinker, that this is not a dirty word but an essential work, and that his other attributes do not preclude thought, but only insure that he is certainly the greatest thinker of the human race: 'the most intelligent person who ever lived on earth.' He constantly uses the power of logical insight to enable people to come to the truth about themselves and about God from the inside of their own heart and mind. Quite certainly it also played a role in his own growth in 'wisdom.'"¹⁰

Jesus used logic to expose the errors of the Pharisees and teachers of the law. While He did not articulate the laws of logic as the first principles of all thought, Jesus certainly understood them and applied them when He debated the Jewish authorities. First principles of knowledge are self-evident truths, that is, their truth is obvious and undeniable.¹¹ Since a first principle is that from which everything else in its order follows, first principles of knowledge are those basic premises from which all else follows in the realm of knowing.¹²

The use of reason and logic were essential to the apologetics of Jesus. Using carefully reasoned arguments, He dismantled the arguments of His opponents and pointed out their errors in thinking. Pointing out contradictions and fallacies in logic were methods He employed to establish His view. He also used categorical and hypothetical syllogisms. One of Jesus' favorite logical device was an *a fortiori* (with the greater force) argument.¹³

This does not mean that Jesus excluded the work of the Holy Spirit and relied exclusively on logical reasoning. The illuminating work of the Holy Spirit works with man's reasoning and rational capacity. Dr. James Sire stated that understanding God's truth comes to the *mind* — "not to

some nonrational faculty like our 'emotions' or our 'feelings.' To know God's revelation means to use our minds. This makes knowledge something we can share with others, something we can talk about. God's Word is in words with ordinary rational content."¹⁴ The Holy Spirit reveals truth to the mind of men and women before they respond to these truths with their emotions and wills. God want's to reach our hearts, but He does not bypass the head on the way to the heart.

Related to this, Dr. Roy B. Zuck reminds us that "...the Spirit is 'the Spirit of truth'" (John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13), and that "He would not teach concepts that failed to meet the tests of truth.... The Spirit seeks to aid the Spirit-filled learner to think clearly and accurately. The interpreter must employ principles of reasoning in making inductions, deductions, analogies, and comparisons."¹⁵

Truth corresponds to reality, and it is internally consistent. Therefore, logic and reason must be used to interpret and discern truth from error. Jesus demonstrated this as He used reason to expose error and present truth. So, the use of the basic principles and procedures of reasoning were an essential part of Jesus' apologetic. All men, even in their fallen state, have this ability, and Jesus used it in attempting to help them see the truth. Fallen as they are, they are still in God's image (Gen. 1:27; 9:6)—so much so that God's general revelation is said to be "manifest" to them and "clearly seen" by them so that they are "without excuse" (Rom. 1:19-20). For God's image in fallen humanity is effaced but not erased. If sin had destroyed fallen man's ability to see the truth of general revelation, then he would not be accountable.

Jesus' Use of Parables as an Apologetic

Jesus' use of parables demonstrates the value of stories to convey a message and persuade an audience which cannot always be achieved by direct discourse. Perhaps this is part of the reason for Jesus' reluctance to be more forthright in His claim to deity. As a direct claim, this is too much for most people to swallow. However, direct admissions that He was the Messiah were made in private, one to a Samaritan woman (Jn. 4:25) and the other to the high priest at His trial (Mk. 14:61-62). And

even His admission in the later case drew a violent reaction and the charge of blasphemy (Mk. 14:64). Indeed, even more covert claims to deity evoked a strong response (Jn. 10:30-33; Mk. 2:5-7). Little wonder that Jesus used parables to lessen the offense of more overt claims.

Jesus' apologetic technique was simple but powerful. Relying on their knowledge of the Old Testament, Jesus argued as follows: 1) In the Old Testament God is portrayed as the Rock, Shepherd, Master of the Vineyard, etc. 2) I am all of these. 3) Therefore, I am God. A scholarly discussion of Jesus' use of parables to show His deity was set forth by Dr. Philip Payne in his Cambridge dissertation.¹⁶

The indirect method of claiming deity through story has the added value of eliciting self discovery. It was only after Jesus had taught His disciples in parables that He asked them who they thought He was which elicited that great confession of Peter: "You are the Christ [Messiah], the Son of the living God!" (Matthew 16:16) So, by adding the interrogative "Socratic" method to the parabolic method, Jesus was able to persuade His followers of the most outlandish claim any human being has ever made—"I am God almighty in human flesh!"¹⁷ This was an incredible apologetic technique whose value needs to be exploited as we do pre-evangelism in this post-modern world that is so opposed to the claims of Christ.

Jesus' Use of Direct Discourse as an Apologetic

In addition to Jesus claim to be the "I am" (God) who existed before Abraham (Jn. 8:58), John alone contains the famous seven "I am" statements of Christ. Jesus claimed: 1) "I am the Bread of Life" (6:35); 2) "I am the Light of the World" (8:12); 3) "I am the Gate for the sheep" (10:7, 9); 4) "I am the Good Shepherd" (10:11, 14); 5) "I am the Resurrection and the Life" (11:25); 6) "I am the Way and the Truth and the Life" (14:6); 7) "I am the true vine" (Jn. 15:1). He also used direct discourse with both individuals, like Nicodemus (Jn. 3) and the Samaritan woman (Jn. 4), as well as many groups, including the Pharisees, Sadducees, lawyers, and politicians of his time (see Mt. 22).

Since Jesus' claim to be God is crucial to both the uniqueness and

truth of the Christian religion, it is of great apologetic importance to establish this claim. Jesus did this in His discourse in numerous ways, both direct and indirect. For He claimed to be and to do what only God can be and do, and in many ways, including the outright claims to be Yahweh, the Great I Am (Jn. 5:58) who revealed Himself to Moses. On many occasions those to whom He spoke recognized His claim to be God (Mk. 2:10; Jn. 8:59; 10:33; Mat. 26:65). Thus, this pillar of Christian apologetics was firmly established by Christ. For in a Jewish monotheistic context (where a theistic God exists and miracles are possible), Jesus not only claimed to be God in human flesh, but He also proved to be God by numerous supernatural events done in connection with His claims to be God. Thus, these direct discourse claims form an essential link in the apologetic of Jesus.

Jesus' Use of Prophecy as an Apologetic

Deuteronomy 18 provides a crucial test for a false prophet: "When a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken." In short, a false prophecy is indication of a false prophet of which Jesus said we should "beware" (Mt. 7:15 cf. 24:11). Further, the sign of a true prophet is that he can unerringly predict the future. The true God said through Isaiah, "For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me; declaring the end from the beginning. . . . Indeed I have spoken it; I will bring it to pass. I have purposed it; I will also do it" (Isa. 46:9, 11). God said to Isaiah, "Even from the beginning I have declared it to you; before it came to pass, I proclaimed it to you, lest you should say, 'My idol had done them' (Isa. 48:5). "Besides Me there is no God. And who can proclaim as I do the things that are coming and shall come?" (Isa. 44:6-7). In brief, only God can accurately and repeatedly predict the future, particularly the distant future.

Given this background, Jesus' use of prediction takes on a special apologetic value. He was personally aware of the apologetic value of prophecy. Jesus said, "See, I have told you before hand," implying that this would add to its credulity (Mt. 24:25). In John 14:29 He said explic-

itly, "I have told you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe."

Jesus' Use of the Old Testament Prophecies about Himself

Jesus was conscious that He was fulfilling Old Testament prophecies about Himself. He said so on a number of occasions. For example, knowing about the prediction in Zechariah of a triumphal entry into Jerusalem, Jesus instructed two disciples to get the donkey He would need to ride on into the city (Mt. 21:1-3). In the very next verse it says, "All this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying: 'Tell the daughter of Zion, "Behold your King is coming to you, lowly, and sitting on a donkey"' (v. 4). Even more explicitly, Jesus Himself said of those who came to seize Him to crucify Him, "but all this was done that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled" (Mt. 26:56).

Of course, there were predictions about Himself of which He was conscious but over which He could have no control.¹⁸ These include what tribe He would come from (Gen. 49:10); whose dynasty He would come from (2 Sam. 7:12f); what city He would be born in (Micah 5:2); and that He would be born of a virgin (Isa. 7:14), to name only a few. More are listed below. But conscious or not, these prophecies played a significant apologetic role in the life of Christ. Indeed, they are unprecedented and unparalleled, for no other religious leader had any significant and long-range group of predictions which were made hundreds of years in advance and all of which were fulfilled. This is truly supernatural.

Jesus' Personal Prophecies about Himself and Others

In addition to knowing that He was fulfilling Old Testament prophecies, Jesus also made predictions Himself. Some of these predictions were fulfilled in His lifetime, others were fulfilled later, and some are yet to be fulfilled at His second coming. These many predictions of Jesus are one of the reasons critical scholars are anxious to give a late date for the Gospels (between 70 and 100 A.D.). Dates prior to A.D. 70 would

make his predictions about the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem look supernatural (see Mt. 24), and their anti-supernatural bias would not allow this. However, there is good evidence for the synoptic Gospels being written in the late 50s and early 70s.¹⁹ If Jesus actually made these predictions before they happened, then it is truly an apologetic for His deity.

Predictions in Matthew

Just the Gospel of Matthew alone lists 58 predictions made by Jesus.²⁰ Professor Barton Payne noted that “the Gospel of Matthew contains more predictions than any other book of the New Testament. Within the whole of Scripture, indeed, the number is exceeded only by the major prophecies of Isaiah and Jeremiah in the OT.”²¹ Indeed, this is “26% of the [Gospel of Matthew]. A truly high figure for historical narrative. . . .”²² Some of the 58 predictions of Jesus in Matthew’s record include the following:

1. The Word of God will abide forever (5:18)
2. Some unbelievers will protest on judgment day (7:19-23)
3. Abraham, Isaac, and others will be in the kingdom on judgment day (8:11)
4. The day will come when Christ will be taken away (9:15)
5. There will be degrees of punishment on judgment day (10:15)
6. The apostles will be persecuted (10:17-23)
7. Jesus will reunite with the apostles before the preaching tour ended (10:23)
8. Jesus will ascend into heaven (10:32-33)

9. Jesus will die and rise three days later (12:40)
10. There will be a resurrection of believers in the end time (12:41)
11. The saved will be separated from the unsaved in the end time (13:30)
12. The kingdom of heaven will experience great growth (13:31-32)
13. The Church Christ will build will never be destroyed (16:18)
14. Christ will return in glory with His angels and reward His followers (16:27)
15. The twelve apostles will reign with Christ over the tribes of Israel (19:28)
16. James and John will undergo suffering for Christ (20:23)
17. Christ will be rejected by His people and Gentiles brought in (21:42-41)
18. There will be a resurrection and no marriage in heaven (22:30)
19. Jerusalem will reject Christ and become desolate (23:38)
20. Jerusalem will be destroyed and the temple destroyed (24:2)
21. Mary's act of anointing Jesus will be remembered throughout the world (26:13)

22. Jesus' betrayer Judas will be doomed (26:24)

23. Jesus' disciples will flee at His death (26:31)

24. Peter will deny Christ three times (26:34)

Other Predictions by Jesus

Mark records 47 predictions made by Jesus, almost all of which are the same as those recorded in Matthew. Some 22% of the narrative of Luke is predictive.²³ Twenty-six of these passages come in the first two chapters before Christ's birth. Most of the rest were made by Christ. John contains 45 predictions, which is 20% of the entire book. Again, most of the predictions were made by Christ. Since John offers a fresh approach, not following that of the synoptic Gospels, it contains some predictions not found there. These include:

1. Jesus had another group of sheep to bring into His fold (10:16)
2. Lazarus would be raised from the dead (11:4, 11, 23, 40)
3. The Holy Spirit would come and teach the disciples (14 and 16)
4. Those who reject Jesus' words will be judged by them in the last day (12:48)
5. The disciples would do greater works than Jesus did (14:12)
6. The disciples would get a great catch of fish when they cast their net on the other side of the boat (21:6)
7. John would live to an old age (21:18)

Matthew's Record of "Fulfillment"

Of course, not all prophecies are strictly predictive. Some are typo-

logical, awaiting a higher completion in the future. The word “fulfill” (Greek: *plerotha*), as used by Matthew (cf. 1:23), means to fill completely, to accomplish, to make full, to complete, to end. Matthew uses this fifteen times of Christ (Matt. 1:23; 2:15; 2:17-18; 2:23; 4:14-15; 5:17; 8:17; 12:17-18; 13:14; 13:35; 21:4-5; 26:54; 26:56; 27:9; 27:35). Even though these are not all strictly predictive, nonetheless, all of them are anticipatory and find their fulfillment in Christ. Likewise, the Passover Lamb pointed forward to a future fulfillment of its type in Christ. For Paul said, “Even Christ our Passover Lamb is sacrificed for us” (1 Cor. 5:7). In this sense, Christ is the fulfillment of all these kinds of Old Testament typological references.

Old Testament Texts That are Predictive

However, many Old Testament texts are truly predictive. That is, they were specifically about the coming Messiah and, hence, their fulfillment has clear apologetic value. As the above discussion indicates, Jesus was not only aware of these predictions but, as the Messiah, He was conscious that He was the fulfillment of them. Most, if not all, of the following texts fit into this category.

The prediction that the Messiah would be:

1. *The Seed of the Woman*: “I will put enmity between you [the Serpent] and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; it shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” (Gen. 3:15)
2. *The Line of Seth*: “And Adam knew his wife again; and she bare a son, and called his name Seth: For God, said she, hath appointed me another seed instead of Abel, whom Cain slew.” (Gen. 4:25)
3. *A Descendent of Shem*: “And he said, Blessed [be] the LORD God of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant.” (Gen. 9:26)
4. *The Seed of Abraham*: “I will bless them that bless you, and curse him that curses you: and in you shall all families of the earth be

blessed.” (Gen. 12:3; cf. Gen. 15:5)

5. *The Tribe of Judah*: “The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be.” (Gen. 49:10)

6. *From the House of David*: “And when thy days be fulfilled, and you shall sleep with your fathers, I will set up thy seed after you, which shall proceed out of your body, and I will establish his kingdom.” (2 Sam. 7:12,16). “The days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King, who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land. . . . This is the name by which he will be called: The Lord Our Righteousness.” (Jer. 23:5-6)

7. *Conceived of a Virgin*: “So, the Lord Himself shall give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall be with child and shall bring out a son, and they shall call His name Immanuel. (Isa. 7:14)

8. *Born in Bethlehem*: “And you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, you being least among the thousands of Judah, out of you He shall come forth to Me, to become Ruler in Israel, He whose goings forth have been from of old, from the days of eternity.” (Micah 5:2)

9. *He Would Die About A.D. 33*: “Seventy sevens are divided as to your people and as to your holy city, to finish the transgression and to make an end of sins, and to make atonement for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the Most Holy. Know therefore and understand, that from the going out of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem [444 B.C.], to Messiah the Prince, shall be seven sevens, and sixty-two sevens” [= 483] (Dan. 9:24-25).²⁴

Seven sevens and sixty two sevens are 69 sevens or 483 lunar years

of 360 days each by the Jewish lunar calendar. Add to this 6 more years for the five extra days times 483 years, and it makes exactly 483 years (477 + 6) from 444 B.C. to 33 A.D. Add to this the fact that, even by the critics' late date for Daniel (c. 165 B.C.), nearly 200 years in advance Daniel predicted the very time the Messiah would die. This is an amazing prediction.

10. *He Would be Heralded by a Forerunner*: "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; Make straight in the desert a highway for our God.'" (Isaiah 40:3)

11. *He Would be Proclaimed as King*: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold your king is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, Lowly and riding on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey" (Zech. 9:9)

12. *He Would Suffer and Die for our Sins*: "Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows: Yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed.... The Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all.... He was led as a lamb to the slaughter.... For the transgression of my people He was stricken. And He made His grave with the wicked—but with the rich at His death.... Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief.... He bore the sins of many and made intercession for the transgressors." (Isa. 53).

13. *His Side Would be Pierced*: "They will look on me whom they have pierced; they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn." (Zech. 12:10)

14. *He Would Rise From the Dead*: "For you will not leave my soul in Sheol, nor will you allow Your Holy One to see corruption. You will

show me the path of life” (Psa.16:10; cf. Acts 2:30-32). “When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days.” (Isa. 53:10). “The rulers take counsel against His Anointed.... Yet I have set My King on My holy hill of Zion.... The Lord said to Me, You are My son, Today I have begotten You [from the dead].” (Psa. 2:2, 6-7; cf. Acts 13:33-35).

Given the theistic context, the use of predictive prophecy by Jesus and His disciples in the New Testaments places it beyond the realm of reasonable human possibility that these can be explained naturally for several reasons. First, unlike the vague prognostications of Nostradamus or many contemporary prognosticators, these are specific and verifiable predictions. Second, unlike most psychic predictions,²⁵ these were long range, made hundreds of years in advance, and have been fulfilled as predicted.

The numerous, specific, and long-range predictions about Christ’s first coming are beyond the realm of human projections. And there is nothing really supernatural about human prognosticators getting a small percentage of short-term predictions correct. This can be done by reading personalities, inside information, trickery, and luck. But the repeated, long-term, specific and highly accurate predictions about Christ place them in the category beyond the natural course of events.

Jesus’ Use of Arguments for God as an Apologetic

Jesus never directly spelled out any arguments for the existence of God. He did not need to do so. His primary audience already believed in God—they were monotheistic Jews. However, both by the teachings of the Old Testament which Jesus embraced, as well as the New Testament disciples of Christ who reflected the views of their Master, we can piece together the kinds of arguments Jesus would have used or approved of using in defending theism against any non-theisms He would have encountered. For example, Jesus would have agreed with Solomon’s implied argument from the existential need for God which can be stated as follows: 1) Whatever a person really needs, really exists. 2) Everyone

needs God. 3) Therefore, there is a God. So strong is the instinct for God that the Old Testament calls atheists “fools.” David said, “The fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God’” (Psalm 14:1). His son Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived, observed that a life without God is meaningless: “‘Vanity of vanities,’ says the Preacher; ‘Vanity of vanities, all is vanity’” (Eccl. 1:2). It is absurd to believe that if we really need water there is no water anywhere. All of nature rushes to fill a vacuum. And if there is a God-sized vacuum in the human heart, then there must really be a God who can fill it.

Also, Jesus would have concurred with David’s evidence for God (which is an implied teleological argument): The psalmist said, for example, “He who planted the ear, shall He not hear? He who formed the eye, shall He not see?” (Psalm 94:9) This implies that every effect not only has a cause but one that is similar to it. Also in the Psalms, David declared: “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork” (Psa. 19:1). The argument can be spelled out this way: 1) The heavens show intelligent design. 2) But all intelligent design has an intelligent designer. 3) Therefore, the heavens have an intelligent Designer. Even the anthropic principle argument from the preplanned tuning of the universes has echoes in Psalm 8.²⁶

What we have found in pursuing these inferences and implications is that Jesus was a rational theist who would have appealed to the cosmological, teleological, and moral arguments for God’s existence. Indeed, He would have agreed with the argument for the existential need for God as well.

Jesus’ Use of His Sinless Life as an Apologetic

Knowing that Christ was thoroughly and utterly human in every respect makes His sinlessness all the more amazing. His impeccable character is confirmed by both friend and foe who were His contemporaries. Jesus’ sinlessness was confirmed by those who knew him best. The apostles and immediate disciples of Christ affirmed His sinlessness. The writer of Hebrews who knew the twelve apostles (Heb. 2:3-4) declared: “For we . . . have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet

was without sin” (Heb. 4:15). Peter, a leader among the twelve apostles said, “Christ [is] a lamb without blemish or defect” (1 Peter 1:19). “He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth” (1 Peter 2:22). He added, “For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous...” (1 Peter 3:18). John, Jesus’ “beloved” disciple said, “He is righteous” (1 Jn. 2:29) and “He is pure” (1 Jn. 3:3).

Jesus’ flawless character was also confirmed by His enemies and others. Jesus challenged His enemies, saying, “Which of you convicts me of sin?” (Jn. 8:46). His betrayer Judas confessed: “I have sinned by betraying innocent blood” (Mt. 27:4). Governor Pilate who tried Jesus declared: “I am innocent of the blood of this just person” (Mt. 27:24). Pilate’s wife told him: “Have nothing to do with that just man. . .” (Mat. 27:19). A centurion who helped crucify Jesus exclaimed: “Certainly this was a righteous man” (Lk. 23:47). Again, a centurion said: “Truly this was the Son of God!” (Mt. 27:54). The thief on the cross was so impressed by Jesus that he requested: “Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom” (Lk. 23:42). Even the Herodians who opposed Jesus admitted: “Teacher, we know that you are true, and teach the way of God in truth: nor do you care about anyone, for you do not regard the person of men” (Mt. 22:16).

So, both friend and foe attested to Jesus’ flawless character. No one successfully met His challenge to accuse Him of sin (Jn 8:46). In addition, what we know of Christ’s enemies outside the New Testament does not contradict what we have from His direct contemporaries. Jesus not only had an apologetic; He was an apologetic. He not only persuaded people with His arguments, He also persuaded them with His life. Indeed, Jesus’ life of sacrificial love was His greatest apology for the Christian Faith. There is something about an act of sacrificial love that has the ability to persuade people of its genuineness. Without a doubt, love is a great apologetic. Jesus said, “By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (Jn. 13:35). Love and truth are the two great weapons in the war for the souls of men. Love attracts them and truth enlightens them. The cold truth often repels people. And fuzzy love can make people *feel* better, but without truth it

cannot make them *be* better. Jesus said, “You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (Jn. 8:32). But Paul reminded us that we should always be engaged in “speaking the truth in love” (Eph. 4:15). The wedding of the two make a powerful apologetic.

Jesus and World View Apologetics

Jesus never had a direct conflict with pantheist or atheist, so we have no direct evidence of how He would have handled this apologetic task. Nonetheless, we have two very good indirect sources to draw from in determining how He would have approached this subject. First, Jesus was completely familiar with the Old Testament. Indeed, He claimed to be a fulfillment of it (Mt. 5:17-18). So, we can correctly infer that Jesus would have approached other world views with a similar apologetic as the Old Testament prophets did. Second, Jesus trained the apostles and promised the guidance of His Spirit in their teaching (Jn. 14:26; 16:13). Given this, we can infer several things about Jesus’ apologetic approach to other world views. For one, it means that He would have approached “heathen” the way Paul did (in Acts 14) by appealing to general revelation. Likewise, educated unbelievers would have been approached much like Paul did in Romans 1:19-20 (cf. Acts 17), arguing from creation to Creator (which is a cosmological type argument).

Given the soundness of this discussion, it seems that Jesus would have preferred the classical apologetics approach. For all his use of evidence, testimony, miracles (including the resurrection) is in the context of those who already believed in God (Jewish monotheists). But given His background in the Old Testament and His teaching to the apostles, both of which implied theistic argumentation, Jesus would have embraced the classical apologetic approach of establishing the existence of God (which then makes miracles possible) and then using the latter to establish His claims to deity, as indeed He did in the Gospels.

Several things are certain: One, Jesus was not a fideist. Two, He believed it was necessary to use evidence to support His truth claims. Three, given His deep commitment to Scripture (which employs forms of the standard arguments for God), the picture emerges of Jesus as one

who could be classified as a classical apologist.

Conclusion

Of course, Jesus relied on the Holy Spirit to convict (Jn. 16:7) and convince His hearers of the truth. He knew that the Holy Spirit not only inspired the truth (2 Tim. 3:16), but that He alone could illuminate their minds to its significance for their life. Indeed, those who finally and irrevocably rejected the truth were said to “blaspheme” the Holy Spirit (Mk. 3:28-30). He knew no one could come to God unless drawn by the Father (Jn. 6:44) through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Indeed, Jesus realized the limits of apologetics when He said of some closed-minded and hard-hearted rejectors: “Neither would they believe though one were raised from the dead” (Lk. 16:31). As a matter of fact, after Jesus had done a series of indisputable miracles climaxed with the raising of Lazarus, John records: “but although He [Jesus] had done so many signs before them, they did not believe in Him” (John 12:37). Jesus knew that you can lead the apologetic horse to the water by evidence and reason, but only the Holy Spirit can persuade him to drink. He was aware that apologetics may be able to show the mind that He spoke the truth, but that it was still necessary for the will to believe. For Jesus lamented, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem. . . . How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing” (Mt. 23:37). Jesus knew that in the final analysis one could see the truth provided by apologetic evidence and argument and still stubbornly refuse to believe in the Christ to whom it pointed. Further, He knew that apologetics can only lead the horse to the water, only the Holy Spirit can persuade him to drink. And those who, by their stubborn will refuse to accept the evidence, Jesus knew that “neither would they believe though one rose from the dead” (Luke 16:31).

Notes

1. This article is based on research for a forthcoming book by Pat Zukeran and me on *The Apologetics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, late 2008). There will be a chapter on each of the main points in this article.
2. Craig Blomberg, *Jesus and the Gospels* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1997), 275.
3. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Zondervan Publishing, 1981), 117.
4. Collin Brown ed., *Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Volume II (Grand Rapids, MI.: Zondervan Publishing, 1986), 629 & 626.
5. John Witmer, *Immanuel* (Nashville, TN.: Word Publishing, 1998), 97-98.
6. Norman Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Apologetics* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Books, 1999), 451.
7. Norman Geisler, *Survey of the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Books, 2007).
8. See Craig Bloomberg, *ibid.*; F. F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are they Reliable* (Downers Grove, IVP, 1960), and Gary Habermas, *The Historical Jesus: Ancient Evidence for the Life of Christ* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1989).
9. See Gary Habermas, *The Resurrection of Jesus: An Apologetic* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1980).
10. Dallas Willard, "Jesus the Logician," *Christian Scholars Review* (Summer 1999): 610.
11. See my treatment of the need and use of reason in theology in *Systematic Theology* (St. Paul, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2002), Vol. I, Chap. 5
12. See Norman Geisler, *Thomas Aquinas: An Evangelical Appraisal* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1991), 73.
13. Jesus argued that if it is permissible to do the good of circumcising on the Sabbath, then (with the greater force) it is good to heal a man on the Sabbath (Mark 3).
14. James W. Sire, *Scripture Twisting* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 17.
15. Roy B. Zuck, "The Role of the Holy Spirit in Hermeneutics," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 141 (April-June 1984): 126.
16. This approach of Jesus' use of parables in support of His deity was set forth in the excellent presentation by Dr. Philip Payne titled, "Interpreting Jesus' Parables," (Ph.D. dissertation) Cambridge University, 1980.
17. Over 200 of the questions Jesus asked are recorded in the Gospels. Many of them reveal His indirect apologetic message. This is a relatively unexplored area of Jesus' apologetic.

18. This refutes the old "Passover Plot" thesis that Jesus was a Messianic pretender who connived to make it look like He had fulfilled the Old Testament predictions about the Messiah. See H. J. Schonfield, *The Passover Plot: New Light on the History of Jesus* (NY: Bantam, 1967).
19. Roman historian Colin Hemer demonstrated that Acts was written before A.D. 62 in his landmark work entitled, *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenic History* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1960), Chap. 9. This would place the other two synoptic Gospels (Matthew and Mark) before that, say, no later than the late 50s. One critical New Testament scholar, the late "Death of God" theologian, Bishop Robinson, placed some of the Gospels as early as the 40s! (See his *Redating the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976).
20. See Barton Payne in *Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1987), pp. 477-493.
21. Ibid., 477.
22. Ibid., 477.
23. Payne, *ibid.*, 501.
24. See Harold Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1978).
25. Note, for example, the failed psychic predictions about the next year which were 92% wrong! Among the failed predictions were 1) all three news anchors would be replaced; 2) the Queen of England would abdicate; 3) Kathie Lee Gifford would replace Jay Leno; 4) Cindy Crawford would have triplets; 5) Hillary Clinton would plead guilty for shoplifting; 6) Charles Manson would get a sex-change operation; 7) Whitney Houston would marry Mike Tyson; 8) an African plant would cure aids; 9) Volcanic action would make a land bridge to Cuba; 10) Madonna would marry Boy George; 11) the Sears Tower in Chicago would lean like tower of Pisa; 12) a national lottery would cut taxes in half; 13) a teenager would build and detonate a nuclear bomb in South Carolina; 14) Madonna would marry a sheik and become a house wife; 15) scientists would build a car that runs on tap water. See Andre Kole and Al Jansen, *Miracles and Magic* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1984).
26. See Hugh Ross, *The Fingerprints of God* (Orange, CA: Promise, 1989) for a contemporary statement of this argument for God.

Reflections on the Place of Friendship in the Practice of Christian Apologetics

Gary R. Habermas

This is a topic that I have been contemplating for many years. I think it is healthy for believers to stop from time to time to assess their lives and ministries in order to ascertain whether they fall within the parameters set in the New Testament. We must guard here against inflexibility, so that our minds are open to how the Holy Spirit might work differently in our lives.

A Question That Changed My Ministry

Several years ago I was the speaker for the annual meeting of a well-known evangelical apologetics organization. During the question-and-answer period, one member of the group asked a question that has changed the way I interact with unbelievers. The question concerned my speaking engagements at secular universities and similar places. He wanted to know whether I, or other published apologists that I knew, were able to observe many people becoming Christians while we used apologetics in these contexts. I had heard the question before, so I proceeded to give one of my typical answers. I said something like, "Well, since I'm only there for one or two nights, I must turn any inquiring students over to a local Christian group, often one of the sponsoring or-

ganizations that was responsible for bringing me to campus. Of course, a day or two is not very much time to work with these seekers.”

I need to mention briefly that I took very seriously my handing of seekers over to Christian organizations before I left town. I generally inquired beforehand as to the procedure they would use, how they would follow-up with interested students, even long afterwards, and so on. I have often requested that they inform me later concerning the results. Among other things, I was most interested in whether or not any of these seekers became believers.

But in this particular instance the questioner continued with a well-placed follow-up. He asked how I could ever hope to reach unbelievers with such “one night stands.” Several of his colleagues quickly challenged his boldness. But by this time I had been among these folks for a couple of days and I’d gotten to know the questioner, so not only was I not offended by his pressing the issue, but I actually told him that it was an excellent follow-up. As I said, I heard the question on many other occasions and I still think my answer is the one that must be given. After all, what was the alternative? When invited to speak at a university, one can hardly move in for a semester or more!

Nonetheless, the question troubled me for a long time, actually for a few years! Of course I could not stay for an extended amount of time whenever I took such a speaking engagement. But the follow-up question caused me to wonder if the Lord could use me in additional ways that I had not yet considered to do more than present the data in favor of Christianity. Could I actually witness, on a regular basis, lives being forever transformed by the Holy Spirit’s use of apologetics with individuals? Was there something I could do to further the process of working with people, whether or not they ever came to the Lord? And could I also be helpful in the follow-up process, in order to make sure that young believers got a good start in the Lord?

From the beginning, one objection to my follow-up ideas was immediately perplexing. With a schedule that was already filled to the brim with up to 60-70 hours per week, teaching graduate school and writing for publication, as well as the speaking engagements themselves, how

was I to possibly carve out enough time to get involved regularly with individual lives? This was a serious enough matter that I could not even imagine a way out. Actually, it appeared rather daunting . What would I give up?

So I brought this entire matter before the Lord regularly in prayer, questioning whether I should make room in my life for another dimension of ministry. Humanly speaking, I did not care to add anything to my personal agenda, especially if something else had to be removed. So it seemed like it would have been better had the campus groups continued making the contacts and taking care of the follow-up. But on the other hand, the prospects of being a part of individuals coming to the Lord was simply exciting. So I continued praying.

Jesus' Ministry to Unbelievers

My initial thought was that perhaps I should establish friendships with unbelievers who had come to me with questions or even to deal with their own religious doubts. I decided to see if I could find support in Scripture for this next step; could it just be a popular conviction of this generation but without support in the life of Jesus and others? After all, some would say that our only job in this matter is to preach or otherwise witness to unbelievers and come down heavily on their sin and lack of belief.

The first hint of support I saw in the Gospels was Jesus' general mindset and action regarding his enemies. He commanded his hearers to be merciful to those who opposed them, to love and pray for them, and to be willing to lend to them without ever expecting anything in return. Jesus even taught that we should bless our enemies when they curse us (Mt. 5:43-48; Lk. 6:27-36)!

Putting these commands into action, Jesus fed and healed many with all sorts of problems, including demon possession. Many unbelievers and even Gentiles were included in this number (such as Mk. 7:24-30; Lk. 7:1-10). Jesus continued to love and weep over them, even

after they rejected him (Mk. 10:21-22; Lk. 13:34-35; 19:41-42). And of course, Jesus prayed to his Father that those who tortured and crucified him would be forgiven (Lk. 23:34).

These texts may all sound very familiar to us, but I think we generally miss the radical nature of Jesus' commands here. The interaction to which he calls us sounds far from the sort of advice that we hear from time to time. Through his teachings and the life he lived, Jesus modeled this attitude toward those who opposed him, used him, tortured him, and finally killed him. It is no wonder that what we see here has solidified Jesus' reputation as a great wise man and ethical teacher. But going even beyond this, there is another aspect to his actions that is significant: he willingly died so that others could live (Mk. 10:45).

The next hint takes us to the very heart of our topic. Jesus fellowshiped regularly with unbelievers, such as sharing the dinner table with sinners, Pharisees, and even tax collectors, who had reputedly defrauded his people.¹ For these actions, he was often criticized. Jesus himself reported the "word on the streets": he was said to be a glutton, a drunkard, and a friend of sinners (Mt. 11:19; Lk. 7:34)!

In terms of contemporary research, the texts in the last paragraph are strongly attested for at least three major reasons, which explain their very wide acceptance among critical scholars today.² These texts are found in three of the four synoptic sources, including the "Q" material in Matthew and Luke, which is often accepted as the earliest and best Gospel source. Further, the well-recognized "principle of embarrassment" is definitely applicable here. Given the offensive and even shocking nature of these statements, such as Jesus being called a drunkard and glutton, these proclamations were reported at a cost to Jesus' reputation. Yet, they were recorded because they were true: Jesus did fellowship with such persons, and so the rumors spread. Lastly, the criticism was obviously made by those who opposed Jesus, thus we have an example of "enemy attestation," where even Jesus' critics conceded the point.

Thus, Jesus' behavior of spending fellowship time with the Pharisees as well as the "sinners" of society is a very special insight into his life and practice. And while the criticism obviously goes too far, it still

points out a crucial truth: Jesus must have exhibited the characteristics of friendship with unbelievers, as taught in the Gospels, because otherwise it is far too difficult to explain why *they* would want to be found in *his* presence. In other words, Jesus most likely would not have had repeated audiences with such persons, unless he had been at least somewhat friendly towards them and was concerned for their welfare. No doubt, he was also straightforward in his denunciation of their sin, but unless he also exhibited some of these personal, friendly characteristics, it is difficult to see why there was no shortage of folks who wanted to be in his presence.

We also have to be very careful not to miss another hint. Both crowds as well as individuals were numbered among Jesus' audiences, and they gathered around him in spite of his very strong words directed at least some of those he had befriended. For example, he was especially critical of the Pharisees, as in his series of lengthy "woes" pronounced against them (Lk. 11:37-54), including his declarations of judgment aimed at those who rejected him (Mt. 7:21-23; 11:20-24). True, he did miracles among them. But this alone would seem not to explain at least the private meals.

What does all of this tell us about Jesus? He loved unbelievers as well as believers, including (as the biblical text also indicates) those who tortured and finally killed him. He was more than willing to meet both the physical as well as the spiritual needs of those who sought him. And he taught his followers to do the same. In spite of his many strong pronouncements of judgment and correction, he was sought after by unbelievers and fraternized with them often enough that he was criticized by the rumor that he was a "partier." Even this derogatory label indicates his friendship with, or at the very least his availability to and presence among, those who would ultimately reject him.

From Jesus to the Early Church

So what was it about Jesus that caused him to be in such high

demand? A wide variety of listeners regularly came to hear him preach and teach, some presumably traveling a distance to do so. Over and over again, we read some variation of the idea that the people were simply amazed at Jesus' teaching as well as his overall authority, and that he plainly exceeded that of the religious leaders of the day in teaching, preaching, and ministering.³ His apostles and a number of female followers were utterly devoted to him, and many died later for this commitment.

Of course, Jesus' miracles drew many of these people. This topic is in itself an interesting juxtaposition of contrasts. For example, we are told that some believed Jesus' miracles, while apparently not wanting to follow him (Jn. 2:23-25). Jesus himself seemed to prefer that people believe him because of the truth of his teaching. But he also realized that some listeners needed to see the miracles, so he encouraged them in this regard (Jn. 14:11).

But what can we conclude about the groups of Pharisees, tax collectors, and those who were simply known as "sinners," who experienced another side of Jesus' ministry? Specifically, what about those dinners and other occasions where Jesus was presumably invited into their presence? What principle(s) did Jesus employ personally in order to distinguish those who were encouraged and befriended in this manner versus those who were openly criticized and judged?

In light of the fact that unbelievers exhibit all sorts of differences, one suggestion⁴ is that Jesus differentiated between those "insiders" who were troublemakers and who would mislead his followers if given the opportunity and those who were "outsiders." While the latter were also mistaken, they were not in a position or context to mislead his followers and generally were not involved in trying to do so. The former were the ones who argued with Jesus publicly and received the bulk of Jesus' denunciations, refutations, and other strong treatments. This suggestion can also be extended to the early church, where apostles like Paul were much less critical of unbelievers who were outside the church than they were of false prophets and those who sought to mislead the church from the inside. The operative principle here might be the influence that the

persons exerted on the faithful. False teachers and “sowers of discord” were not to be tolerated in the church. Rather, they were to be exposed and separated from fellowship.

While I think that these suggestions exhibit some good insights, I prefer the complementary differentiation of “seekers” from those who were settled in their theological opposition to the teachings of Jesus or the early church. There are ample cases of sincere individuals who sought Jesus and received sympathetic attention from him, such as the rich young man (Mk. 10:17-31) and Nicodemus (Jn. 3:1ff.).⁵ I would suggest that many of the individual Pharisees, tax collectors, and other “sinners” who had dinner with Jesus may also have been persons with this sort of mentality. One hint would come from the case of Zacchaeus, who became a believer after having dinner with Jesus (Lk. 19:1-10). These persons would be in stark contrast to the particular Pharisees, scribes, and other religious leaders who openly challenged Jesus’ teachings and were publicly rebuked for doing so.

This same differentiation can be seen in the early church. For example, throughout the entire book of Acts, the early leaders were often drawn to individuals such as Phillip and the Ethiopian eunuch (8:26-39), Peter and Cornelius (10:1-48), Paul and his companions, and Lydia (16:13-15). On other occasions, entire groups of people were open to the Gospel message. In fact, we are even told that Paul’s customary method of engaging such people was to visit a local synagogue and begin vigorous discussions regarding the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (17:2-4). It seems that Paul had something like this in mind when he asserted that his methodology was to come to people as they were and take them from that point to the Gospel message (1 Cor. 9:19-22, especially v. 22b).

It is possible that the early church dealt more harshly with those within their own groups, whether believers or not, who were espousing false teachings. Examples would include Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11), Simon the Sorcerer (Acts 8:9-24), or Hymenaeus and Philetus (2 Tim. 2:14-19). In each of these cases, the emphasis is clearly on the affect

that these persons exercised on the local body of believers (see especially 2 Tim. 2:14,18).⁶

Contemporary Application

How did I apply this to my own situation? Throughout the years, I have been contacted by hundreds of individuals who expressed religious questions or doubts. Generally, these persons fall into two broad categories, each with a fairly large range of variables within them. Many questioners express clearly their Christian faith, but sometimes the level of doubt is so severe that these individuals indicate that they are close to leaving the faith, however they define it. On the other hand, a good percentage of these contacts are individuals who clearly identify themselves as non-Christians. Usually, they are “seekers” or open-minded skeptics who sometimes simply wonder if there is any basis for the Christian faith.

In the large majority of cases, whatever the individual’s personal beliefs, they are chiefly interested in one or just a very few issues. We usually talk or e-mail briefly, and that is the end of the contact. But periodically it becomes obvious that a person is in need of an additional time commitment. Typically, this is either a believer who is very distraught, or a nonbeliever who is clearly open, seeking, and sometimes seemingly close to the Kingdom. To be approached by a person in the latter category is exhilarating.

In both cases, I look for individuals who are more interested in moving forward than they are in winning debates. Preferably, though not always, they are not overly protective of their own views and are good conversation partners. This is more important especially for those in the “seeker” category. But there comes a moment when a decision must be made regarding whether or not to extend the conversation to an indefinite period of time. This is where prayer becomes crucial. Whatever the individual case, my primary concern is to locate the right person who, as nearly as can be ascertained, can most be helped by a lengthier time

commitment.

I am always acutely aware that time is my major concern. To be clear, it is *never* the case that such a discussion with an individual is given a back seat to my free time. Individuals always win in such a scenario, because persons are to be valued above all. But such potential discussions must be evaluated in lieu of my other ministry commitments.

It is difficult to explain what actually happens next. Oftentimes the seeker/questioner simply ends the process, generally because he or she received the information for which they were looking. After a few contacts, it becomes obvious in the majority of situations if a person is a good candidate for the sort of help that the Lord has equipped me to give. At that point, I invite them into an ongoing dialogue, followed by regular appointments and discussions.

In recent years, I have usually kept running discussions with between a half-dozen and a dozen persons. Not all of them are active simultaneously. In fact, sometimes I grow convicted that a few individuals may have seemingly slipped to the sidelines. In such cases, I try to reopen the contact.

But in recent years, there has been a distinct change in the make-up of the group. Prior to the challenging question I described at the beginning of this essay, there were very few non-Christians on my list. So I began to stay alert specifically for such opportunities to befriend seekers. I often prayed that the Lord would direct me to those with whom he would have me talk. Accordingly, in the last few years, perhaps half or more of those on the list were unbelievers, while the others were believers who have doubts.

When I was initially challenged to take part in the lives of unbelievers, I was not sure what that might look like. Since then I have done a lot of thinking about the nature of friendship. Perhaps I should say a word here regarding some of the things I mean, as well as do not mean, by the term "friendship." It is definitely *not* a situation where I do all the talking and they do all the listening. Our discussions are fair, with each participant on an equal footing. I think the seekers themselves would say that they feel free to disagree or say whatever they would like to.

Neither am I some sort of mercenary, looking to “chalk up” another conversion. This is so for more than one reason. It must be remembered that each of these persons initiated the process by first contacting me; *they* asked me to help them. They usually described themselves as seekers or open-minded skeptics, and inquired as to what Christianity had to offer, beginning with the actual data. I could hardly fail to oblige them!

Further, and more crucially according to Scripture, I have absolutely no ability whatsoever to force or “power” anyone into the Kingdom of God. I have no ability to control or coerce a conversion. It is simply not a human prerogative. For that very reason, I like to pray that the result of a given situation not be by might, nor by power, but by God’s Spirit.⁷ He must move in any situation if conversion is to result.

Additionally, Christians should be interested in far more than conversion alone. This makes follow-up and discipleship exceptionally crucial. Once again, this is the realm where the Holy Spirit works. There are too many situations where believers try to impress or out-think either unbelievers or young Christians, only to find the latter wandering away for no apparent reason. The Holy Spirit uses human instruments, but we certainly need his presence and power in these situations.

Returning to other aspects of friendship, we need to be there for these people whether or not they ever become Christians. Although we are generally much more focused on faith issues, on occasion we talk about politics or sports and never quite get to religious subjects. Other times, I end up trying to help with a totally different situation that has nothing to do with faith. These are some of things that friends do for friends.

The end result has been nothing short of incredible. During these last years, a fundamental principle I have held to is that persons are always to be valued above things. Therefore, with few exceptions, it is always the case that the needs of these persons are placed ahead of other items such as publishing deadlines. True, the latter also affect lives, but less directly. What could take precedence over real life situations where there is an opportunity to speak directly to another person when eternity hangs in the balance? What could be more important?

What about our earlier thoughts regarding Jesus and his apostles? How does all of this relate to them? It seems to me that both of my categories—seekers or fair-minded skeptics as well as believers with doubts—fit the categories that Jesus probably used when he was blamed with befriending sinners. I cannot think of a more likely scenario. We have said that the strong demand for Jesus' presence must be an indication that he had much to offer, even for those who did not believe the way he did. And as we look at the apostles such as Paul, at the very least, we see that he placed a priority on discussions and debates with unbelievers,⁸ which indicates an incredible outlay of his time. It seems that there is no reason to abandon taking similar steps in the present.

I prefer not to address in detail the question of final "tallies" that the Lord has worked in individual lives, given my very strong conviction that these are the sorts of things that our left hand even keeps from our right. But it may be encouraging simply to note that God's Holy Spirit has worked wonderfully in the lives of a good number of skeptics and seekers, who today would announce that they are children of the Kingdom due to the diligent work of believers. Their later growth in discipleship is almost equally amazing. An even greater number of believers have turned decisively from their doubts. I continually marvel at the results when God gets involved in our lives!

Notes

1. Mk. 2:13-17; Lk. 14:1, 12-13; 15:1-2; 19:1-7.
2. For example, see Marcus J. Borg, *Jesus, a New Vision: Spirit, Culture, and the Life of Discipleship* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1987), pp. 131-133; 145, note 26; 192.
3. Mk. 1:22, 27; 6:2-3; 12:17, 37; Mt. 7:28-29; Lk. 19:48.
4. This idea was suggested to me by a recent graduate student, Colin Martin, in a letter dated October 27, 2007.
5. Even though Jesus initiated the conversation, the woman at the well exhibited similar characteristics (Jn. 4:1-42).
6. This is Martin's suggestion. Like Acts 8:13, it is difficult to ascertain whether or not each of the individuals mentioned were truly believers. Whichever view is preferred, Martin's

suggestion would still apply.

7. This reference is obviously taken from Zechariah 4:6, where the context is somewhat different, but I think still applicable to my situation.
8. This is confirmed by the Greek terms used especially in Acts 13-19. As we saw earlier, such debates, dialogues, and other discussions were Paul's most used method according to Acts 17:24.

Faustus Socinus's *A Tract* Concerning God, Christ, and *the Holy Spirit*

Introduction, Translation, and Contemporary Relevance

Alan W. Gomes

Introduction

As I pointed out in a recently published book chapter,¹ one of the values of studying historical theology is that it allows us to “pump intellectual iron” with some of the great thinkers of yesteryear. We can learn a tremendous amount from the theological debates of the past because they were often waged by intellectual giants, the likes of whom we typically do not see today. Nor should we think that the orthodox had a monopoly on all of the brains in these disputes. As I noted in that chapter, I commonly tell my students that they simply do not make heretics like they used to! As an example, I often cite Faustus Socinus (1539-1604), well known for his denial of many of the cardinal teachings of orthodoxy, such as the doctrine of the Trinity, the deity of Christ, penal substitution, and God’s foreknowledge of future contingent events. In Socinus “we encounter a mind well versed in the biblical languages, classical literature, logic, philosophy, exegesis, and theology, all pressed into the service of overturning the historic doctrines of the faith!”²

Now, there are at least two reasons for engaging the arguments of a “dead and buried” opponent like Socinus, particularly for someone

called to an apologetics ministry. First, “in this way we may be able to spar vicariously with adversaries tougher than the ones we face in our day-to-day ministries.”³ This builds up our “theological muscles,” making it easier to deal with less formidable opponents. If one can refute the arguments of Socinus against, say, the Trinity or God’s foreknowledge, then he or she can lay waste to the ruminations of the Watchtower or of the open theists “without shifting out of first gear.”⁴ The second reason is that, as a matter of intellectual honesty, it is best to refute a position in its strongest rather than in its weakest form. Again, consider the doctrine of the Trinity. We believe that the doctrine of the Trinity is true. Since it is true, there can be no argument or set of arguments that ultimately disprove it. Yet, it does not follow from this that every argument against the Trinity is as plausible as any other. That is, certain arguments against the Trinity are more formidable than others, even though all of the arguments against it are, in the end, false. But if we refute the strongest arguments then we and others can know that we have been fair to the opposing view, giving the opposition its best shot at proving its case. Furthermore, we ourselves can have confidence that we have dealt solidly with the problem. We should not be reluctant to engage the best the enemy has to offer, for “orthodoxy is sufficiently robust to stand against the worst that heterodoxy can dish out.”⁵

In an attempt to “field test” these ideas and values, the editors of this journal have agreed to publish a translation of a particular treatise against the doctrine of the Trinity by Faustus Socinus (a smart heretic long dead) and then allow Prof. Robert M. Bowman (a smart theologian very much alive) to take a whack at refuting it. The treatise I have selected to translate is Socinus’s *A Tract concerning God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit*,⁶ which I think provides a pretty good window into Socinus’s argumentation and thought processes. Although Socinus wrote a good deal more against the Trinity than this, I believe this is a fair specimen and it is one that fits within the confines of an article-length piece.

Since some readers of this article may be unfamiliar with Socinus, I shall provide the briefest of introductions.⁷ Fausto Paolo Sozzini (Latinized as “Faustus Socinus”) was born in Italy in 1539 of noble parent-

age. Some of the members of his family had distinguished themselves in the field of law and he, too, pursued legal studies early on. Faustus was influenced particularly by his uncle Laelius, who harbored unorthodox sentiments on the Trinity, the satisfaction of Christ on the cross, and other key orthodox doctrines. Laelius had traveled throughout Europe making the acquaintance of important Reformation figures, sometimes in person and in other cases only through written correspondence. Laelius typically did not assert positively his own views. Rather, he posed questions, which he offered as hypothetical objections to the orthodox view, as though seeking answers in order to defend the orthodox position. Some, such as Calvin, soon became convinced that these “questions” were a thinly veiled ruse by which Laelius sought to cloak and at the same time advance his own heterodox opinions. Others, such as Bullinger, were more hopeful, thinking that Laelius was most probably orthodox albeit particularly inquisitive. In this matter Calvin’s instincts proved correct.⁸

Faustus shared none of his uncle’s tentativeness, and when the time was right he would eventually set forth his views boldly, vigorously, and systematically in his voluminous writings. On the death of his patron, Cosimo I, he resigned his position at the Florentine Court, where he served as a secretary under Duke Paolo Giordano Orsini, husband of Isabella de’ Medici and Cosimo’s son-in-law. Recognizing that Italy would not be a safe abode should his heretical opinions become known, he departed his native land permanently at the age of 35. He, like his uncle before him, traveled through different Reformation territories, studying theology and engaging in occasional written and oral debates, such as his famous dispute in Basle with Jacques Covetus (a French Reformed minister) against the doctrine of Christ’s satisfaction on the cross.

Socinus’s great intellectual gifts and rhetorical power came to the attention of George Blandrata, a Piedmontese physician and one of the leaders of the antitrinitarian party in Transylvania and Poland.⁹ In 1578 Blandrata prevailed upon Socinus to migrate to Transylvania, where he greatly helped to systematize the theology of the antitrinitarians in order to defend against polemical attacks from both Catholics and orthodox

Protestants. He was also called upon to address some of the internal conflicts within the antitrinitarian movement, such as the hotly debated issue of whether Christ should receive worship, granting that on unitarian terms he is not God by nature. Socinus eventually settled in Poland, where he became the “theological brain,” as it were, of the Polish Unitarians, also known as the Minor Reformed Church.

As for the theological positions that Faustus held, he is of course well known for his denial of the Trinity, the subject of the present treatise. Naturally, he denied the concomitant doctrine of the two natures in Christ. He did not believe that the Holy Spirit is a person but rather is the power of God. He also rejected the substitutionary atonement, i.e., the doctrine of the Christ’s vicarious satisfaction for our sins. He eschewed the doctrines of original sin, justification by faith alone through the imputed righteousness of Christ, God’s foreknowledge of future contingent events, creation *ex nihilo*, and eternal conscious punishment for the lost.

But Socinus’s theology is not mere negation. He held to the absolute authority of Scripture, which he regarded as a revelation from God, necessary for the salvation of human beings, and the source on which Christian doctrine must be built.¹⁰ In fact, Socinus wrote what may be the first work of modern evidential apologetics for the reliability of the Bible: *De auctoritate sacrae scripturae* (*Concerning the authority of Holy Scripture*). Unlike modern rationalist theologies (such as Deism or modern liberalism), Socinus accepted the supernatural elements in the Bible without hesitation. Regarding Christology, Socinus believed that Jesus was a true man. He did not exist before his conception in the womb of the virgin, but came into being when he was miraculously conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit. God brought forth Jesus into the world in order to show us the way of salvation, which we attain by imitating him.¹¹ After his baptism but before the commencement of his earthly ministry, God literally raptured Jesus into heaven where, in a literal audience with God, he received instruction in the plan of salvation, which he was then sent down to teach to men.¹² Although Jesus is not God, he is to be given divine honor as a man, as God himself requires. He is to re-

ceive religious worship from men and his aid may be invoked in prayer; anyone who denies this cannot be saved.¹³ Jesus literally died on a cross to demonstrate his commitment to his teaching, and God vindicated Christ and his teaching by raising him bodily from the dead to immortal life. Human beings may also attain bodily resurrection and immortal life if they follow his precepts in obedience. As for the wicked, they will not be raised to immortal life but will experience annihilation.

Socinus wrote the present work, *A tract concerning God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit*, probably in 1583. He apparently composed this short work as part of his response to some lectures conducted at the Posnanian College, a Jesuit school.¹⁴ In these lectures the Jesuits sought to refute the unitarian position in a series of theses entitled, *Theological assertions concerning the triune God, against the new Samosateans*.¹⁵ Socinus excerpted these theses, added his own rejoinders to them, and then published them in 1583 under the aforementioned title. This separate *Tractatus*, which I have translated in this article, relates to the *Theological Assertions* in Socinus's collected works and has reference to that same series of lectures, as one of the editors of his collected works indicates.¹⁶

A few brief words about the translation are in order. I have tried to render Socinus's Latin into English as literally as possible, taking into consideration also the demands of modern English style. In some places, particularly where I have rendered an expression idiomatically, I have provided a footnote to the original Latin and indicated its literal reading. I have often found it necessary to divide Socinus's very lengthy sentences into two or more English sentences—again, in keeping with the sensibilities of modern English. At the same time, I have endeavored to retain the force of Socinus's logic and the interconnection of his ideas. The numbers that appear in square brackets are to the volume and page number in *Bibliotheca Fratrum Polonorum*, should the interested reader wish to study the matter further.

A Tract Concerning God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit

by Faustus Socinus

Translated from the Latin

by Alan W. Gomes

[BFP 1.811]

[Trinitarian] Argument:

GOD is only one, as many testimonies of Scripture establish. But in the Scriptures the Father is called God, and likewise the Son and the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one God, and consequently God is indeed one in essence but three in persons.

[Socinus's] Response:

THE WORD "GOD" can be taken in a two-fold way, especially in the Holy Scriptures. The first way is, when it signifies him who rules over and is in charge of all things, both in heaven and on earth, and who is the author and source of things. No one has superiority or primacy over him, nor does he depend on any. It is in this first way that God is said to be one. The other way is, when it signifies him who has some highest rulership or might or power from the one God himself, or is a partaker in some other way of the divinity of this one God. Hence, the one God, i.e., Jehovah, is called the "God of gods" (Ps. 50:1). It is in the latter way that the Son, or Christ, is sometimes called "God" in the Scriptures.

The entire matter is made clear from the words of Christ himself in John 10:35: "If," he says, "he called them 'Gods,' to whom the word of God was given (and the Scripture cannot be broken): why do you say of him, whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, 'He blasphemes,' because I said, 'I am the Son of God?'" Christ clearly shows in these words that the name "God" in the Holy Scriptures is also attributed to those who are greatly inferior to the one God. And these words show that he wished to call himself the Son of God, and in turn God,

in no other superior way than that he was sanctified by the Father and sent into the world. Therefore, Christ is indeed God but nevertheless not the one God. He is indeed God because he was set apart from others in a most excellent way by the one God and, having been abundantly furnished with heavenly gifts, was put in charge both of announcing and of truly bestowing eternal salvation on men. (The one God is altogether the same as the Father, as we shall prove later.) For this is his sanctification from the Father and his sending¹⁷ into the world.

Concerning the Holy Spirit, it¹⁸ is never distinctly and literally (as it were)¹⁹ called God in Scripture, but only, and by no means rarely, characteristics of God are attributed to it—or, what is attributed to the Holy Spirit somewhere²⁰ is found attributed to God either in the same place²¹ or elsewhere. The reason for this is that the Holy Spirit is the power and efficacy of God. For what is attributed to the power and efficacy of God is without a doubt attributed to God himself. But the power and efficacy of God is not therefore some divine person, just as neither the goodness of God, nor his justice, nor mercy, nor judgment, nor other effects or properties of God are some divine persons. Otherwise, there ought to be many more [persons] than three.

Besides, from the mere fact that it is clearly indicated that God is one, a person can rightly conclude that he is neither three nor two. For to be One and Three are mutually exclusive;²² likewise, to be One and Two. Thus, if God is three or two he cannot be one. For that distinction, “One in essence, Three in persons,” is never found in the Holy Scriptures, and clearly is at odds with most certain reason and truth. For it is absolutely certain that there are not fewer individual essences than there are persons, since a person is nothing other than an individual intelligent essence.

Now, the fact that this one God is none other than the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ—and not the Son of God and the Holy Spirit—is proven clearly in many ways, especially the following:

1. First, as was shown, if God is one, he cannot be three or two. Moreover, everyone agrees and the Scripture everywhere testifies,

that the Father of Christ is that God. Therefore, it necessarily follows that this one God is none other than the Father of Christ.

2. [BFP 1.812] Next, from those very passages in which it expressly conveyed that there is only one God, there are not a few where it is stated that this one God is the Father of all, or the Father of Jesus Christ. In Jn. 17:3 Christ himself states that his Father alone is that true God, even with respect to Christ himself. In fact, he names himself in that same passage and distinguishes himself from the Father. Indeed, he does this in such a way that it could not be said that he spoke about himself according to his human nature alone. For he refers to himself in so far as that very knowledge [of himself] comprises eternal life. Everyone sees that, in so far as he refers to himself, the reference is to the entire Christ. Although formerly some supposed that Christ's words should be taken to mean that the Father and Jesus Christ are that only true God, this is rejected today by nearly all Trinitarians, since neither the structure of the words nor the passage itself would appear to bear it. Not only that, but in this way [of understanding the text] the Holy Spirit would clearly be excluded from that sole, true divinity, the knowledge of which is necessary for attaining eternal life. Again, 1 Cor. 8:6 clearly teaches that our one God is the Father, from whom are all things and we in him—"him," I say, referring to the Father, because he is distinguished from Christ, in so far as Christ is that one Lord, through whom are all things, and we through him. Thus, just as in the earlier passage, here also it can in no way be said that these words were written about Christ only according to his human nature. Likewise, Eph. 4:6, which says that there is one God, distinctly affirms at the same time that that one God is the Father of all, and he is clearly distinguished from Christ in so far as Christ is the one Lord.

3. An invincible argument for proving that the Father alone is that one God is that over and over²³ the name "God," when it appears

by itself²⁴ and signifies that subsistence, assuredly refers only to God the Father, even as the adversaries²⁵ themselves are compelled to admit. Moreover, when the name “God” is placed [in the text] by itself,²⁶ as stated above, it never signifies, clearly and without any controversy, Christ or the Son alone, or the Holy Spirit alone. For although Christ sometimes is called God, as stated above, nevertheless then the name of God does not signify that very subsistence but only an attribute of the subsistence. Or, if you prefer, then the name of God does not function as a subject but as a predicate. For never in the divine writings will you find it written that God either did or said something, or any other thing to be affirmed about God, that should altogether and necessarily be referred to Christ as distinct from the Father.

4. Additionally,²⁷ (A) Christ is everywhere called “the Son of God” (as he truly is), and, (B) the Holy Spirit is called “the Spirit of God,” and (C) without a doubt he is that one God who is called “God” in passages of this sort. From these facts it follows that neither the Son nor the Holy Spirit is that one God. Otherwise, the Son would be his own son and the Holy Spirit his²⁸ own spirit.

5. Since it is absolutely certain that Christ is the son of this one God, it is equally certain that the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit are not at the same time that one God but only the Father is, since Christ is not the Son of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit all at the same time, but only is the Son of the Father.

But now, someone may still question whether Christ is that one God—or at least of the same essence with him—due to the altogether magnificent and thoroughly sublime things which are attributed to him in the divine scriptures. But such a one should consider²⁹ that there is nothing either more magnificent or sublime attributed to Christ in Scripture than the fact that everyone owes him divine worship. But Christ had this [right to be worshipped] from God the Father as a man.

Therefore, nothing can be found attributed to Christ in the divine testimonies so magnificent and so sublime that it cannot be consistent with him as a man (i.e., granting that something other than the sublimity and magnificence of the thing does not forbid it). Moreover, in the first place, the words of Christ himself prove that God the Father established that everyone owes divine worship to Christ as a man. In Jn. 5:22-23 he says that the Father does not judge anyone but has given all judgment to the Son, so that all should honor the Son just as they should honor the Father. From this judgment given by the Father to the Son, it becomes evident that divine worship should be given to him, owed to him by all. But Christ himself testifies himself in this same passage (i.e., a little later in v. 27) that the Father gave this judgment to the Son as a man, when he says that the Father gave the power of rendering judgment to the Son, because he is the Son of man. Next, the words of the Apostle Paul in Philippians chapter 2 prove this same thing, where he treats of the exaltation of Christ on account of his obedience unto the death of the cross. In verse 9 and following he states that on account of that obedience God so greatly exalted him, that at the name of Jesus every knee ought to bow. What else is this but divine worship, owed to him by all? But it is certain that Jesus was exalted as a man for the aforesaid reason. That is, obedience unto the death of the cross only falls on him as a man.³⁰ Paul's very words make it clear that he [Christ] himself was obviously exalted, who was obedient unto the death of the cross.

In brief, there is nothing either so sublime or so lowly attributed to Christ in the Holy Scriptures that it cannot properly pertain to that man Jesus of Nazareth. Wherefore, there was no reason for inventing in one and the same Christ two natures—that is, essences—divine and human. And since the excellence of the Father over Christ is most clearly attested in the Holy Scriptures, there is no reason to flee to that distinction of a divine and human nature, and of asserting that the Scripture in that case³¹ speaks not according to the divine but only according to the human nature of Christ. This is so: when Christ himself says that the Father is greater than he (Jn. 14:28); when the Son admits that he does not know the day and hour of the future divine judgment, but

only the Father knows (Mk. 13:32); when, now raised from the dead, he testifies that the Father is no less his God than the God of the disciples (Jn. 20:17), and which he—already translated into heaven and clearly glorified—affirms four times in one verse (Rev. 3:12); and finally when, to cite but a few instances,³² he states that he received from God the Father his doctrine, his words, his signs, all his works, together with his authority and power. Elsewhere, he said that those things are not his own but of him who had sent him, i.e., the Father. (See John 5:19, 20, 22, 23, 27, 30, 36, 43; 7:16; 10:25; 17:2.) Nor should I fail to mention the nearly countless testimonies that clearly confirm the eminence of the Father over the Son.

When the adversaries see in many of the aforesaid testimonies words that they think can in no way be taken per se according to the human nature of Christ, they seek refuge in two ways: (1) they refer those testimonies, which are related there, to eternal generation, through which the Son is produced³³ by the Father Himself. (2) [they explain them] through a certain figure of speech, which is called “the communication of attributes” (*communicatio idiomatum*), [teaching that] what is [characteristic] of only one nature is attributed separately to the other.³⁴

Now, in order for the sacred testimonies to be interpreted in this astonishing way, it is first necessary for the [doctrine of] eternal generation and the two-fold nature of Christ to be clearly proven on other grounds.³⁵ Otherwise, that interpretation is most rightly rejected and confuted merely by denying these [two] things.

Besides, that which has to do with that generation, since it is eternal (as they³⁶ wish), must also be natural and necessary. Consequently, in no way can anything be referred to it which is said either to have been given to Christ by the Father in time (as they say), or is said to have been given by free will, or certainly unto some goal and by some counsel. And it is just these sorts of things which are recounted in these very testimonies. For “eternity” and “in time” are altogether opposed to one another, and indeed “not natural” and “necessary” likewise oppose “from free will,” and “given unto some end and by some counsel.”

Now, regarding the communication of attributes: This cannot in

any way effect that what [is characteristic] of one nature [BFP 1.813] alone can be attributed separately to the other. However, it could perhaps effect that what is [characteristic] of one nature might be accommodated to the person *simpliciter*. For no one, for the sake of example, would say, "My soul is tall"; or "My soul is dressed in an ankle-length robe"; or "My soul is washed in a bath." This is so even though a man's soul is so conjoined to his body (to which the [previously mentioned] examples apply) that one and the same man consists of each. This is just as they would have one and the same Christ Jesus consist of a divine and human nature or, as others state it, of God and man. Add to these [observations] that in whatever way this communication of attributes might be admitted in passages speaking about Christ, this is nothing other than to make a mockery of the holy words and to leave the reader completely uncertain about the meaning of the passage and most often concerning the issue itself.

But they might say that there are certain things that are completely impossible to explain without acknowledging the communication of attributes and, in turn, the two natures in Christ. Such is the case when all things are said to have been created by God through Jesus Christ (Eph. 3:9), as indeed the Greek codices read. Likewise, [the communication of attributes and the two natures in Christ must be acknowledged] when it is said that the Son of man was in heaven before he ascended to it with his disciples looking on (Jn. 6:62), and also that he is "in heaven," even though he made the statement while yet on earth (Jn. 3:13).

I respond that there is no reason why these things should not properly be referred to the man Jesus of Nazareth. For when "all things" are said to have been created by God through Jesus Christ, one ought not to understand those "things" as referring to the creation of which Moses most diligently wrote in the beginning of his history. For there Moses, when relating the act of creating, makes no mention of any person who had any part in it beyond God himself. But here [i.e., in Eph. 3:9] it is necessary to note that there is God on the one hand, and on the other him who is understood by the name "Jesus Christ," since God is said to have created through Jesus Christ. Besides, Christ is never said to have

created universally and generally, but [it is said that] the creation was made through him. And so no mention was made of Christ, or of him who in Paul is understood by the name “Christ,” in the creation that Moses relates. For Moses made mention of God as creating and not, moreover, as the one through whom creation was made. Therefore, the passage of Paul should be received as concerning other created things, and the expression “all things” should be referred to all things that pertain to the new creation, which is agreed to have been made through the man Jesus of Nazareth. Paul says the same thing elsewhere, namely, that all things were made new (2 Cor. 5:17). Nevertheless, since it is certain that there are an infinite number of things which remained in the same state in which they were before, there the expression “All things” ought to be referred to all those things that pertain to God’s covenant with men and to religion, and ought to be restricted to those things just as we contend that it ought to be done in the passage above [i.e., Eph. 3:9].

Similarly, concerning the fact that the Son of man was in heaven before his visible ascension to it: this can and ought to be referred, truly and properly, to the man Jesus of Nazareth. For that man truly, after he was born of the virgin but before he announced the Gospel, was raptured into heaven. There he was taught by God himself those things which he was going to reveal to the human race. This has so much the appearance of truth that it seems it could not have happened otherwise. The force to be inferred in these words, therefore, is not without any cause, and indeed not contrary and opposed to all reason. But those things in this and in other similar passages ought to be taken at face value.³⁷ If this is done, the meaning will become plain.³⁸

Now, in Jn. 3:13, although it is commonly read “who is in heaven,” can nevertheless be read from the Greek as “who was in heaven”—just as Erasmus, Beza, and others have taught. And so this passage will become similar to the preceding one [i.e., Jn. 6:62]. But if, nevertheless, someone tenaciously wishes to retain the common³⁹ reading, it still would not follow that there was some other essence or nature in Christ besides a human one, according to which, evidently, he was then truly in heaven. For in that case, [the expression] “to be in heaven” would thus need to

be taken so that it can be consistent with his human nature, or to him as a man, to which these words distinctly refer. And no doubt the words found in that same passage, in which it is stated that the Son of man ascended to heaven and no one beside him, will also have to be taken in that sense. For these words cannot rightly be taken at face value⁴⁰ either according to the human or according to the divine nature, unless, perhaps, it is granted that that man truly ascended to heaven before he uttered these words. But, when this [fact]⁴¹ is not acknowledged (even though utterly true and, as I said, clarifying the entire matter), then these words will be taken as many others have interpreted them. That is, the “ascent into heaven” will be taken as meaning the penetration (as it were) into the knowledge of divine things. And, similarly, we shall interpret “to be in heaven” as referring to the knowledge of divine things already secured.

But there are those who think that the two natures in Christ—divine and human—can be inferred especially from the fact that he both is and is called the “Son of God.” It is through the communication of attributes that the man himself, Jesus of Nazareth, is said to be the Son of God. For otherwise, how, they ask, could a mere⁴² man, i.e., a man not joined with the divine essence itself, be the Son of God? Is it not necessary that, just as a human begets a human, in the same way God begets God?

I respond as follows. If it could be established that it were possible for God to beget from his own substance something similar to himself, just as humans and other animals do, it would seem that this argument would have some force. But not only can this not be established but the contrary is easily proven. For both from the very agreement of all Trinitarians, as well as from plain reason itself, it can be understood that the substance (i.e., the essence) of God can in no way be divided or multiplied. Moreover, what we already stated above evidently demonstrates that the entire, numerically one, and altogether same essence cannot be common in many persons. Clearly, it is necessary that there are no fewer individual essences than there are persons. Moreover, the Scripture sufficiently declares the way in which God generates something similar to

himself, affirming in many passages that pious men, but chiefly those having faith in Christ, are born of God and begotten by him. This is so to the extent that elsewhere it denies that these were born of men (e.g., Jn. 1:13). Why, then, do we not here [i.e., in Jn. 1:13] contrive two natures, divine and human, denying that mere men can be begotten and born of God, and denying [that those born of God] have been given birth from humans?⁴³ Therefore, we acknowledge here that one and the same man can be considered in a two-fold way—namely, by way of the spirit and by way of the flesh—and (accordingly) is or is not a Son of God or a Son of man. Even so, let us acknowledge that the very same man, Jesus of Nazareth, is the Son of man according to the flesh and is the Son of God according to the Spirit. Again, according to the flesh he is not the Son of God (if you please), and according to the Spirit he is not the Son of man—although, as we shall say later, Jesus of Nazareth is acknowledged by Scripture to be the Son of God even according to the flesh. Moreover, that very distinction in Christ himself is confirmed most clearly in the words of the Apostle Paul, who testifies in Rom. 1:3-4 that one and the same Son of God was begotten from the seed of David according to the flesh, but according to the spirit of sanctification was defined as the Son of God.

But someone might say that the sacred scriptures do not merely call Christ the Son of God but also the only begotten and proper⁴⁴ Son of God. Consequently, it is necessary [to conclude] that he was born of God in some singular way, beyond all other sons of God.

Here I freely confess and acknowledge that singularity. But I do not therefore grant that this singularity consists in the fact that Christ was begotten from the very substance of God while others were not. For it has already been shown that the substance of God can neither be divided nor multiplied, nor can the very same, numerically identical [substance] be common to many persons. The singularity of Christ's nativity from God consists in other things, which can be understood from the sacred testimonies themselves:

1. First of all, [this singularity] consists in the fact that Christ, at the

very moment he was born a man, was the Son of God, and thus is the Son of God by nature; other men are not sons of God in this way. And so, as the Scripture seems to say elsewhere in view of this reason, other people besides Christ ought not to be called “born” but rather “adopted” sons of God. For that man Jesus of Nazareth, who is called the Christ, was born the Son of God, because he was conceived in the womb of the virgin not from male seed but by the Holy Spirit and by the power of the Most High. [BFP 1.814] For this very reason the angel of God predicted to the virgin that what would be born from the virgin would be called the Son of God (Lk. 1:35). From this it appears that even according to the flesh he can deservedly be called the Son of God. And this has occurred and is so for no one else.

2. Next, in the case of other men God grants his spirit, by which they are sons of God, to a limited degree.⁴⁵ But he granted his spirit to the man Christ without measure, so that he was made a more eminent⁴⁶ Son of God than before, as in Jn. 3:35—assuming that Jn. 3:35 has reference to Christ. For that passage reads simply, “For God gives his spirit without measure,” with no mention made of Christ. These words also could aptly describe the entire ministry of preaching the Gospel, where God—not sparingly and restrictively but abundantly and lavishly—has granted his spirit to the human race. Whatever the case, it is certain from the divine writings themselves that God could have granted to other individuals many spiritual gifts that he did not give. But to the man Christ there is no spiritual [gift] that he could give that he did not give. Wherefore, it is rightly said that in a singular way he was born of God beyond others.

3. Additionally, the man Christ alone secured both immortality and the glorification of his body before all others, and shall have been constituted both heir and Lord of the universe,⁴⁷ in which matters especially his likeness with God (and, therefore, his divine

filiation) is comprised. From this it appears that he, in a singular way beyond all others, was born of God. And since it was absolutely certain from the very beginning that these things were going to occur, he was, for these very reasons, already deservedly called the only begotten and proper Son of God while he was yet abiding on earth.

I omit certain other things, on account of which the man Christ can rightly be called the only begotten and proper Son of God. But I only call to mind that Isaac, when he was offered to God on the mountain, was called the sole⁴⁸ and only begotten Son of Abraham (Gen. 22:2, 12; Heb. 11:17), even though Abraham at that time had another Son truly born from himself no less than Isaac, i.e., Ishmael. For the way in which, nevertheless, it is shown that Isaac could be called his sole and only begotten son is the same or similar to the way in which it will be demonstrated that the man Christ can be called the only begotten or proper Son of God, even though it is the case that others are similarly born of God.

So that this entire matter might be better understood, let all the passages of the sacred writings be examined, which explain either tacitly or openly the reasons Christ is called the Son of God. For nowhere will you find that cause expressed or indicated that he was begotten from the very substance or essence of God. But you will find that he is and is called the Son of God either on account of his mode of conception in the womb of his mother; or on account of the sanctification of God and in his being sent into the world; or on account of his resurrection from the dead, which certainly was followed by his glorification and exaltation over all created things; or on account of the eternal priesthood and reign, which he had from God; or on account of other things of this kind. Moreover, see the following passages, on the basis of which we have concluded some of those things stated above: Lk. 1:35; Jn. 10:36; Acts 13:33; Rom. 1:3, 4, 8; Ps. 2:6-7; Heb. 5:5.

Notes

1. Alan W. Gomes, "The Value of Historical Theology for Apologetics," chap. in *Reasons for Faith: Making a Case for the Christian Faith*, Norman L. Geisler and Chad V. Meister, eds. (Wheaton: Crossway, 2007), 169-181.
2. *Ibid.*, 179.
3. *Ibid.*, 178-9.
4. *Ibid.*, 179.
5. *Ibid.*
6. The full title is, *Argumenti pro trino & uno Deo, omnium potissimi, aut certe usitatissimi, examinatio, sive tractatus, de Deo, Christo, & Spiritu Sancto, cuius rei occasione tota de re, praecipue vero de Christi divinitate ac natura quaestio, breviter explicatur.* (*The strongest, or certainly most common, arguments of all for the triune God: an examination. Or, a tract concerning God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit, on the occasion of which matter the entire subject, but principally the question of the nature and divinity of Christ, is briefly explained.*) This tract is contained in the *Bibliotheca Fratrum Polonorum quos Unitarios vocant* (BFP) (Amsterdam: 1668) 1.811-814. (Note that the first two volumes of the nine-volume BFP comprise the *Opera omnia* [*Complete Works*] of Socinus.)
7. The single best treatment of the history of sixteenth-century Unitarianism is undoubtedly Earl Morse Wilbur's two-volume *History of Unitarianism* (Boston: Beacon, 1945). Wilbur, himself a Unitarian, presents a sympathetic portrait but his command of the primary sources and attention to detail is unequalled. For a short summary, Wilbur also has an article-length piece entitled "Faustus Socinus, Pioneer," *HibJ* 33 (1935): 538-48. Another standard work is David Cory's *Faustus Socinus* (Boston: Beacon, 1932). H. J. McLachlan, *Socinianism in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1951), 3-24, provides a compact summary of the background to Socinus. Brief discussions of Socinian history are also available in Alexander Gordon, "The Sozzini and Their School," *The Theological Review* 65 (1879): 293-322; Zbigniew Ogonowski, "Faustus Socinus," in *Shapers of the Religious Traditions in Germany, Switzerland, and Poland, 1560-1600* (ed. Jill Raitt; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 195-97; and George H. Williams, *The Radical Reformation* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962), 749-63. More recently, Lech Szczucki has written a helpful and concise article on "Socinianism" in the *Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation* (4 vols.; ed. Hans J. Hillerbrand; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 4:83-86. (Note: This footnote is a condensation and summary of a more detailed list of references that I have provided in a forthcoming article entitled "Some Observations on the Theological Method of Faustus Socinus [1539-1604]," *WTJ* 70 [2008].)

8. Regarding the personal correspondence of the Sozzini, see Giampaolo Zucchini, "Unpublished letters added to the letters of Fausto Sozzini, 1561-1568," chap. in *Socinianism and its Role in the Culture of the XVI-th to XVIII-th Centuries* (Warsaw: Polish Academy of Sciences, 1983), 17-24; Ralph Lazzaro, "Four Letters from the Socinus-Calvin Correspondence (1549)," chap. in *Italian Reformation Studies in Honor of Laelius Socinus*, ed. John A. Tedeschi (Florence: Felice Le Monnier, 1965), 215-230; and David Willis, "The Influence of Laelius Socinus on Calvin's Doctrines of the Merits of Christ and the Assurance of Faith," chap. in *Italian Reformation Studies*, 231-241.
9. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries Transylvania and Poland were among the most religiously tolerant countries in Europe. Accordingly, quite a few antitrinitarians settled there because their views were either not proscribed or at least not as vigorously persecuted as elsewhere.
10. I discuss Socinus's doctrine of scripture in considerable detail in my forthcoming "Some Observations on the Theological Method of Faustus Socinus (1539-1604)."
11. "Demonstratur, . . . nos Christum imitari posse, hancque esse aeternae salutis viam: ob idque Christum iurè Servatorem nostrum appellari" (Socinus, *De Iesu Christo Servatore*, 2.128).
12. Socinus advanced this rather quirky and possibly novel theory of Christ's literal, bodily ascent into heaven, which George H. Williams calls a "pre-ascension ascension," i.e., an ascension that took place before Christ's final, visible ascension after his resurrection. Socinus cites the Apostle Paul's rapture into the third heaven (2 Cor. 12:1-5) as a precedent. Besides the example of Paul, Socinus argues for this "pre-ascension ascension" particularly from Jn. 3:13 and 6:64, as well as from Moses' ascent on Mt. Sinai to receive the oracles of God (Ex. 19 and 24), pressing the typical likeness between Moses and Christ. This theory, among other things, allows him to reconcile his humanitarian Christology with the texts that speak of the Son of Man's descent from heaven, granting that his Christology denies Christ's preexistence. I have dealt with this unusual theory in considerable detail, with special attention to how it fits systemically into Socinus's overall theology, in a forthcoming article to be published in the *Harvard Theological Review* entitled "The Rapture of the Christ: The 'Pre-Ascension Ascension' of Jesus in the Theology of Faustus Socinus (1539-1604)." (The article is scheduled to appear sometime in 2008.)
13. Indeed, Socinus says that to deny religious worship to Christ is a sin more grievous than homicide! ("... multo gravius peccatum est Christum non adorare quam hominem occidere.") See Faustus Socinus, *Epitome colloquii Racoviae habiti anno 1601* (ed. Lech Szczucki

and Janusz Tazbir; critical Latin text printed in Warsaw, 1966), lines 789-91. For a good treatment of this internecine debate over the worship and invocation of Christ see George H. Williams, "The Christological Issues Between Francis Dávid and Faustus Socinus during the Disputation on the Invocation of Christ, 1578-1579," in *Antitrinitarianism in the Second Half of the 16th Century* (ed. Róbert Dán and Antal Pirnát; *Studia Humanitatis* 5; ed. T. Klaniczay; Leiden: Brill, 1982) 287-321.

14. Posnan is a city in west-central Poland.
15. *Assertiones theologicae de trino & uno Deo, adversus novos Samosatonicos*, in BFP 2.423-438. The term "Samosateans" refers to Paul of Samosata, a third-century Bishop of Antioch in Syria, who put forth a "dynamic monarchian" Christology. According to this view, Jesus was a mere man but one inspired by the power (*dunamis*) of God. Socinus and his followers were thus sometimes called "Samosateans," though on other occasions they were less accurately labeled "Arians." Note that the Arians believed in Christ's preexistence, even if not an *eternal* preexistence. Socinus, like Paul of Samosata, did not believe that Christ had any existence whatever before his early conception. (As already noted, he did believe this conception to have been virginal and therefore miraculous.)
16. See BFP 1.811. Actually, through a printer's error this tract appears *twice* (i.e., is duplicated) in volume one but, as the editor noted, it ought to have been placed in volume two, before page 423, i.e., ahead of the *Assertiones*, since the tract has reference to these.
17. *Missio*.
18. "Quod ad Spiritum sanctum attinet, is nusquam disertè atque ad literam (ut dicitur) in Scriptura Deus appellatur." I have translated the Latin masculine pronoun "is" as "it" rather than "he," in keeping with Socinus's denial of the Spirit's personhood. Socinus uses the masculine pronoun, as he must on grammatical grounds, because the antecedent "Holy Spirit" (*Spiritus sanctum*) consists of a masculine noun and adjective.
19. "...ad literam (ut dicitur)..."
20. I.e., in some passage of Scripture.
21. I.e., in the same passage of Scripture.
22. "Opposita sunt enim inter se Unus, & Trinus" = (lit.) "One and Three are opposed among themselves."
23. "Millies" = "on 1000 occasions," "1000 times."
24. "...simplici Dei nomine..." = (lit.) "with the simple/single name 'God.'"
25. The term "Adversaries," of course, refers to his Trinitarian opponents.
26. "...simplex Dei nomen est positum...." See note 24.

27. I added the separate enumeration of these points (as “A,” “B,” and “C”) to aid in clarifying the structure of Socinus’s argument.
28. I have used the masculine pronoun in my translation here because Socinus is presenting his argument on Trinitarian terms.
29. Or, “...let such a one consider...”
30. Lit., “...only falls against that very man.”
31. “In that case” = in the case of statements that make the Father more excellent than the Son.
32. “...ne singula recenseam...” = “Not that I might enumerate/review each individual [instance].”
33. “Habuerit.”
34. “Alterum, quod per figuram quandam sermonis, quae Idiomatum communicatio appellatur, quod unius tantum naturae est, alteri separatim tribuatur.”
35. “...on other grounds...” = “ex aliis,” lit., “from other things.”
36. I.e., the Trinitarians.
37. “...sed ea, ut sonant, accipere...oportet.” = (Lit.) “...but those things ought to be taken as they sound....”
38. “Et sic plana erunt omnia” = “And thus all things will become plain.”
39. Or, “Vulgate” (*vulgatam*), i.e., the Latin translation of the Bible.
40. “...ut ipsa verba sonant...” = (lit.) “as the words sound.”
41. I.e., of a literal, spatial rapture of Christ, as stated above.
42. Purus.
43. “...nec ex ipsis hominibus ortum ducere” = “...nor to have been born from humans themselves.”
44. Proprius = “proper,” “special,” “particular.”
45. “Ad mensuram.”
46. *Sublimior*.
47. “Universorum,” which could also be taken as “of all things.”
48. Unicum.

Cross-Examination: Socinus and the Doctrine of the Trinity

Robert M. Bowman, Jr.

Faustus Socinus published his *Tract concerning God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit* 425 years ago. Galileo had just discovered the pendulum, Shakespeare was a few years from his first play, and Elizabeth I was Queen of England. It would feel a bit like taking unfair advantage to critique a work of theology published so long ago, were it not for a surprising fact: the arguments of anti-Trinitarians have changed very little in that time. Contemporary anti-Trinitarians use most (not quite all) of Socinus's arguments, and indeed many of the most important arguments that they use have precedent in Socinus's work. I am not asserting that Socinus is the origin of these arguments, at least some of which anti-Trinitarians were using over a century earlier.¹ What is clear, though, is that contemporary anti-Trinitarian theology has its own stream of tradition, of which Socinus was a significant and highly representative figure.

The religion best known for strident opposition to the doctrine of the Trinity is the Jehovah's Witnesses, a sect that emerged from the anti-Trinitarian wing of the Adventist movement in the late nineteenth century. Some of their arguments against the Trinity echo arguments used hundreds of years earlier by Socinus.² The theology of Jehovah's Witnesses differs in some ways from that of Socinus. Most notably for our purposes, Socinus was a Unitarian, whereas Jehovah's Witnesses

are basically Arian in their theology.³ The basic difference between their views is that Unitarians⁴ deny that Christ preexisted his human life as a heavenly being, whereas Arians affirm this much about Christ, though denying that the preexistent Christ was God.

In this article I wish to draw special attention to the work of a scholar in another anti-Trinitarian offshoot of Adventism, the Church of God General Conference (also known as Church of God, Abrahamic Faith).⁵ Anthony Buzzard is an English scholar with Master's degrees in languages and theology. For over a quarter-century Buzzard has been the leading theologian of this little denomination, teaching at what is now the Atlanta Bible College. His book, *The Doctrine of the Trinity: Christianity's Self-Inflicted Wound*, is one of the better attempts in recent memory to refute the Trinity.⁶

Buzzard is a modern-day Socinus. The biblical texts on which he leans most heavily in his critique of Trinitarianism are the same as those cited in Socinus's tract. Most of Socinus's arguments are laid out explicitly in Buzzard's book. Buzzard apparently never mentions Socinus in his book, although he devotes a chapter to the history of anti-Trinitarianism,⁷ suggesting again that the argumentative strategies they have in common are simply elements of a long-flowing stream of anti-Trinitarian tradition.

Although Socinus offers a battery of arguments against the Trinity, I will focus on the following claims, which are crucial to establish his Unitarian doctrine:

1. The Trinity is both unbiblical and unreasonable.
2. The Holy Spirit is not a divine person, but the power of God.
3. The Father alone is God in the absolute sense.
4. Christ is God in a derivative sense.
5. Christ did not exist before his conception as a human being.⁸

I will examine Socinus's arguments for each of these claims in turn.

General Objections to the Trinity

As do all anti-Trinitarians, Socinus regards the doctrine of the Trinity as both unbiblical—since the Bible contains no reference to the doctrine—and unreasonable. He contends that the distinction between one divine essence and three divine persons “is never found in the Holy Scriptures, and clearly is at odds with most certain reason and truth.” Critics of the doctrine routinely make the observation that it cannot be found in the Bible. Anthony Buzzard, for example, writes: “There is no passage of Scripture which asserts that God is three. No authentic verse claims that the One God is three persons, three spirits, three divine, infinite minds, or three anything. No verse or word of the Bible can be shown to carry the meaning ‘God in three Persons.’”⁹

The Bible does not spell out the doctrine of the Trinity in so many words. Nor does it articulate a distinction between essence and person. Trinitarians have always acknowledged that the terminology and conceptual distinctions of the doctrine are post-biblical theological formulations.¹⁰ More than a century before Socinus, Calvin discussed the use of extrabiblical terminology with regards to the Trinity at length in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. The following comment typifies his response:

Arius says that Christ is God, but mutters that he was made and had a beginning. He says that Christ is one with the Father, but secretly whispers in the ears of his own partisans that He is united to the Father like other believers, although by a singular privilege. Say “consubstantial” and you will tear off the mask of this turncoat, and yet you add nothing to Scripture.¹¹

The fact is that the early church developed the doctrine of the Trin-

ity as a way of systematically articulating what the Bible clearly teaches about the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The doctrine safeguards the following elements of the biblical revelation¹²:

1. There is one God, the LORD (Deut. 4:35, 39; 6:4; 32:39; Is. 43:10; 44:6-8; 45:21; Mark 12:29; Rom. 16:27; Gal. 3:20; 1 Tim. 1:17; James 2:19; Jude 25).
2. The Father is this God, the LORD (John 17:3; 1 Cor. 8:6a; Eph. 4:6; 1 Thess. 1:9-10).
3. The Son is this God, the LORD (John 1:1; 20:28; Rom. 10:9-13; 1 Cor. 8:6b; Phil. 2:9-11; Eph. 4:5; Tit. 2:13; Heb. 1:8-12; 2 Pet. 1:1).
4. The Holy Spirit is this God, the LORD (Acts 5:3-4, 9; 2 Cor. 3:16-18; Eph. 4:4).
5. The Father is not the Son (Matt. 3:17; John 8:16-18; 16:27-28; 1 John 4:10; 2 John 3).
6. The Father is not the Holy Spirit (John 14:15; 15:26).
7. The Son is not the Holy Spirit (John 14:16; 15:26; 16:7, 13-14).

Correlating these teachings in a way that is faithful to the biblical context, other than through something along the lines of the doctrine of the Trinity, is difficult if not impossible. Frankly, most orthodox Christian theologians would happily dispense with the technical language of person and essence, of consubstantiality and Trinity, if only everyone professing to believe in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit did so in a way that was faithful to these explicit biblical teachings. As Calvin pointed out, what drove the church to use such language was the distortion of those biblical truths by false teachers.

Socinus's problem with Trinitarianism is ultimately not its use of extrabiblical terms and concepts but the theological position that Trinitarianism uses those terms and concepts to articulate. In his estimation, that position—specifically its distinction between persons and essences—is philosophically untenable: “For it is absolutely certain that there are not fewer individual essences than there are persons, since a person is nothing other than an individual intelligent essence.” Socinus considers this point about persons and essences (or persons and beings) to be as important as it is certain, later repeating: “Clearly, it is necessary that there are no fewer individual essences than there are persons.” More bluntly, Socinus declares: “To be One and Three are mutually exclusive.”

Everyone familiar with the subject will recognize these types of criticisms as a staple of anti-Trinitarianism. There are at least two problems with all such criticisms.

First, these rational objections to the Trinity rest on presuppositions about what is or is not ontologically possible for the infinite, transcendent Creator. Just how does Socinus know that the metaphysical generalization that “a person is nothing other than an individual intelligent essence” applies to God?

Second, the philosophical objection to the distinction between person and essence ignores the fact that Trinitarian theologians have regularly stipulated that they are using the term person analogically. That is, Trinitarian theology refers to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as “three persons” in a special, limited use of the term person to denote what distinguishes one from the other two. To put the matter another way, to say that the Father and the Son are two persons is a way of saying that the Father is not the Son (see point #5 above).

Classic Christian theism openly acknowledges that descriptions or definitions of God's attributes and being unavoidably involve analogical use of language. We have difficulty conceiving of knowledge apart from perception or the acquisition of information, yet we affirm that God has all “knowledge”—and that he does not need to acquire or learn anything. We speak of God's “love” even though love for human beings is bound

up changeable emotions whereas we know God's love is not changeable or variable. (Classic theism denies that God even has "emotions"; modern evangelical theologians who affirm that God has emotions are careful to qualify that those emotions are in important ways unlike human emotions.) Christian theism affirms that God is omnipresent while hastening to explain that God is not physically located or present in all places—leaving even the most sophisticated theologians stretching to explain what this "presence" means. The difficulty in Trinitarian theology of comprehending what it means to affirm the unity of the divine essence or being while affirming that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three persons in the one God is not qualitatively different from these other difficulties.

An obvious retort is that there is no need for such difficulties if the Bible does not teach such paradoxical claims in the first place. This is precisely where the issue must be decided. If the Bible teaches that God is love and yet not subject to changeable emotions, or that God has all knowledge but never learns anything, or that God is omnipresent but physically located nowhere, we must change our assumptions about what is metaphysically possible to fit what God has revealed about himself. The same principle applies to the doctrine of the Trinity: If it teaches that there is one God, that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are each this God, and yet distinguishes among these three in a personal way, then we must abandon the assumption that a single divine being (God) could only be a unitarian (one-person) being.

That's a big *IF* in the view of Socinus and other anti-Trinitarians, of course. We will therefore need to consider their specific biblical objections and countermeasures to the doctrine.

The Holy Spirit

Anti-Trinitarians generally devote most of their efforts to debunking the belief that Jesus Christ is God, and likewise Trinitarians generally devote most of their efforts in responding to anti-Trinitarians to

defending the deity of Christ. This focus on the person of Christ is perfectly understandable because the New Testament focuses on Christ from cover to cover and because the notion of a man actually being God incarnate is so provocative. Nevertheless, we would do well to give more attention than is customary in these discussions to the third person of the Trinity. If the Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit is a person distinct from the Father, Unitarianism in all its forms is false. From a Unitarian perspective, if there are two persons in God, there might as well be three; the merits of Unitarianism (as well as its definition) depend on its apparent simplicity in affirming that God is a single person. The question of the Holy Spirit is in at least one respect simpler to address than that of the Son, because in the case of the Holy Spirit none of the paradoxes arise that result from the incarnation of the Son as a finite human.

Furthermore, it turns out that anti-Trinitarians have a hard time giving a coherent account of the Holy Spirit. If the Holy Spirit is not a divine person, then, who or what is it? Anti-Trinitarians have four choices. (a) The Holy Spirit is a reality and is God. On this view, the Holy Spirit is simply another name or title for God (i.e., the Father). (b) The Holy Spirit is a reality and is not God. On this view the Holy Spirit is something real that exists, whether personal or impersonal, but that is ontologically distinct from and other than God. (c) The Holy Spirit is a reality that is part of God. Those who favor this view regard the Holy Spirit as a force or energy that emanates from God's very being. (d) The Holy Spirit is an abstraction pertaining to God. On this view the Holy Spirit is not something that exists but is a way of describing some characteristic or activity of God (as when we speak of the justice or providence of God). Anti-Trinitarians have tried all four of these views; indeed, in some cases an anti-Trinitarian will actually resort to more than one of these explanations. However, they are mutually exclusive; if one of them is true, the other three cannot be true. Worse still, all four of these views have problems.

According to Socinus, the Holy Spirit "is never distinctly and literally (as it were) called God in Scripture."¹³ His careful qualifications ("distinctly and literally") reflect awareness that in fact the Holy Spirit

is sometimes called God (e.g., Acts 5:3-4). Furthermore, Socinus argues that since the Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of God, “it follows that . . . the Holy Spirit is [not] that one God.” There is an obvious reason, not mentioned in Socinus’s work, why he would not favor the explanation that the Holy Spirit is simply another name for God the Father: the New Testament, especially in John 14-16, clearly distinguishes the Holy Spirit from the Father who sends him (John 14:15; 15:26).¹⁴ These statements are just as problematic for the remaining three views, however, because the Johannine texts indicate some kind of personal distinction between the Father and the Holy Spirit. Although the Arians typically solved this problem by regarding the Holy Spirit as a created being, few if any anti-Trinitarians take this approach today.

According to Socinus, “The Holy Spirit is the power and efficacy of God.” We are used to hearing from various anti-Trinitarians today that the Holy Spirit is a force that emanates from God,¹⁵ and the description “the power and efficacy of God” could be taken that way. However, Socinus argues that the power of God is no more a person than the goodness, justice, or mercy of God—otherwise there would have to be many more than three persons in God. This argument appears to treat “the power of God” abstractly, as God’s ability to do things. Such an interpretation also fits better Socinus’s use of “efficacy” as another synonym for the Holy Spirit. It appears, then, that Socinus took the fourth view, regarding the Holy Spirit as an abstraction referring to God’s power or ability.

The New Testament is replete with passages that are extremely difficult if not impossible to reconcile in a plausible way with Socinus’s view of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit has a name (Matt. 28:19). He is “another Advocate” (John 14:16),¹⁶ that is, someone who would come to support and strengthen believers after the Son is no longer physically present with them (cf. 1 John 2:1).¹⁷ The Holy Spirit is sent by the Father and the Son, in Jesus’ name, to speak to and teach the disciples, convict people of sin, and bear witness to and glorify Christ (John 14:26; 15:26-27; 16:7-13). People can lie to him—although it’s not recommended! (Acts 5:3-4)—and he can make decisions or judgments (Acts 15:28).

He intercedes with the Father on our behalf, just as Christ does (Rom. 8:26).¹⁸ We read throughout the New Testament about the Holy Spirit speaking (John 16:13; Acts 1:16; 8:29; 10:19; 11:12; 13:2; 16:6; 20:23; 21:11; 28:25-27; 1 Tim. 4:1; Heb. 3:7-11; 10:15-17; 1 Pet. 1:11; Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). In one especially vivid narrative text, the Holy Spirit is quoted as speaking of himself in the first person—"the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart *for me* Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them'" (Acts 13:2, emphasis added). So pervasive is this sort of language regarding the Holy Spirit in the Book of Acts that one biblical scholar has written a full monograph exploring the "character" of the Holy Spirit in the book's narrative.¹⁹

The notion that the Holy Spirit is a mere abstraction may well be the Achilles' heel of Socinus's argument against the doctrine of the Trinity.

Absolute and Derivative Senses of "God"

If there is one interpretive claim that is central to Socinus's case against the doctrine of the Trinity, it is his contention that Scripture calls Christ "God" only in a derivative sense. He begins his critique of the Trinity by asserting that the term *God* can mean either "him who rules over and is in charge of all things, both in heaven and on earth, and who is the author and source of all things," or "him who has some highest rulership or might or power from the one God himself, or is a partaker in some other way of the divinity of this one God."²⁰ For the sake of convenience, I will refer to the former definition as the *absolute* sense and the latter definition as the *derivative* sense. Socinus allows that Scripture calls Christ "God" but only in the derivative sense of someone whose position or power derives from God.

Much of Socinus's case against the Trinity consists in a development and defense of this crucial claim. He argues, on the one hand, that the Father alone is God in the absolute sense, and on the other hand,

that the Son is God only in a derivative sense.

Socinus considers John 17:3 to be proof that the Father alone, in contradistinction from Jesus Christ, is God in the absolute sense: “And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.” He points out that the attempt of older writers to reinterpret John 17:3 to refer to the Father and Jesus Christ as the one true God is exegetically untenable and had been abandoned “by nearly all Trinitarians.” Anthony Buzzard, who makes the same point, cites John 17:3 more than any other biblical text (some 25 different pages throughout his book).²¹ Modern anti-Trinitarians clearly think that John 17:3 delivers a *coup de grâce* to the belief that Jesus Christ is God, and therefore to the doctrine of the Trinity. But does it?

In fact, what John 17:3 actually says is perfectly consistent with the doctrine of the Trinity. Trinitarianism *affirms* that the Father is the only true God. After all, if there is only one true God, and the Father is that God, then the Father must be the only true God. It is also consistent with the Trinity to affirm that the Father sent Jesus Christ. So what’s the problem? Anti-Trinitarians think that the sentence creates a disjunction between “the only true God” and “Jesus Christ,” implying that Jesus Christ is *not* the only true God. But this is not quite correct. John 17:3 does distinguish between the Father (“you”) and “Jesus Christ,” and in this same statement identifies the Father as “the only true God,” but this does not necessarily imply a denial that Jesus Christ is also true God.

To understand why, consider a couple of other biblical texts using the word “only” (Greek *monos*). After the Flood, according to Genesis, “Only Noah was left, and those that were with him in the ark” (Gen. 7:23). The Septuagint translation uses the word *monos*, as in John 17:3. From a woodenly simplistic grammatical analysis, it may appear that “those who were with him in the ark” are distinguished from the “only” one who “was left” (the verb is in the singular form, indicating literally that only one person was left). But such an inference is clearly contrary to the intent of the statement as a whole in context. The statement singles out Noah as the one who “alone” was left alive after the Flood, yet its intended meaning is clearly not to exclude “those that were with him

in the ark” as also having survived. The same idiomatic way of speaking occurs in the passage about the woman caught in adultery, which says that Jesus “was left alone [*monos*], and [*kai*] the woman who was in the midst” (John 8:9, my translation).²² The point is that one must consider what is actually being said in context and not treat the apparent grammatical disjunction in a woodenly literal way.

The same caution also applies to John 17:3. The verse affirms that eternal life consists in knowing the Father and Jesus Christ. Now this is a startling statement if Christ is just a creature, no matter how great. Eternal life is all about knowing God—that is, about having a relationship with him in which we know him personally, in which we enjoy life with him forever. John 17:3 expands this observation to say that eternal life consists in knowing both the Father and Jesus Christ. In this context, Christ’s reference to his Father as “the only true God” does not exclude himself from that status. Rather, Christ is honoring the Father as God while trusting the Father to exalt him at the proper time. Thus, Jesus immediately goes on to affirm that he had devoted his time on earth to glorifying the Father (v. 4) and to ask the Father in turn to glorify him (v. 5).

That John 17:3 is not denying that Jesus Christ is God is clear from the fact that the same Gospel refers to Christ three times as God (John 1:1, 18; 20:28).²³ It won’t do to claim that these verses are referring to Christ as God in a secondary or derivative sense. John 1:1 indicates that Christ existed before creation as the divine Word who was himself God; it doesn’t make sense to assert that someone’s deity is derived if he has had it forever. (Socinus’s attempts to deny the preexistence of Christ fail, as I shall argue later in this article.) Thomas’s confession of Jesus as “my Lord and my God” (John 20:28) is an unreserved, unqualified expression of devotion. If John 17:3 did mean that the Father was the only true God to the exclusion of Jesus Christ, then it would not make any sense for John in other passages to affirm that Christ is God. If there is only one true God, and Jesus is not that God, then he is not truly God at all. Yet John explicitly calls Jesus “God,” and does so in contexts that make it clear that he is God no less than the Father.

Socinus thinks that a disjunction between the Father as the “one God” and Jesus Christ as the “one Lord” in Paul’s writings (especially 1 Cor. 8:6; Eph. 4:6) also excludes Jesus from the category of being the absolute God.²⁴ The problem with this argument is that it implies that the Father is not the “one Lord.” Yet biblically, the “one Lord” is Yahweh or Jehovah, the LORD of the Old Testament. What Paul is doing in these verses is drawing on the language of the *Shema*, the most basic confession of Judaism, “The LORD our God, the LORD is one” (Deut. 6:4 NASB), and identifying both the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ as this divine God and Lord.²⁵ Like the other New Testament writers, Paul usually used the divine title “God” for the Father and the divine title “Lord” for Jesus Christ. Usually—but not always: he calls Christ “God over all” (Rom. 9:5) and “our great God and Savior” (Titus 2:13).²⁶ It is simply not plausible to interpret these passages as meaning that Jesus Christ is a divine being but not the highest, absolute God.

Thus, Trinitarians are not bothered by the fact, pointed out by Socinus, that the unqualified title *God* in the New Testament almost always refers to the Father.²⁷ Indeed, this is how orthodox Christians also typically speak. When a Trinitarian says “God” without qualification, he typically means the Father, and when he says “the Lord” without qualification, he most often means the Son—yet he has no trouble saying, as appropriate, that the Father is Lord or that Jesus Christ is God.²⁸

Socinus’s main proof text for his claim that Christ was God only in a derivative sense is John 10:34-36.

Jesus answered, “Is it not written in your law, ‘I said, you are gods’? If those to whom the word of God came were called ‘gods’—and the scripture cannot be annulled—can you say that the one whom the Father has sanctified and sent into the world is blaspheming because I said, ‘I am God’s Son’?”

This is the first biblical text to which Socinus gives more than a passing reference. Modern anti-Trinitarians also tend to lean very heavily on this passage.²⁹

In current biblical scholarship, this is one of the most controversial passages in the New Testament—and not because of its supposed difficulty for Trinitarian theology. Scholars debate the identity of those “to whom the Word of God came” (v. 35)—were they the Israelites at Mount Sinai, corrupt judges during the period of the monarchy, or angelic beings given oversight of the nations (to mention just the most common explanations)? What was the meaning of the line “I said, you are gods” in the context of the Psalm that Christ quoted (Ps. 82:6)? What was the point Jesus was making in commenting that “the scripture cannot be annulled”? Just what sort of argument form is Christ using here?³⁰

I cannot hope to address, let alone settle, all these questions here, so I will have to be content with making a few brief, simple observations. First, we have good reason to think that in context Christ was indeed claiming to be God. He had just asserted that he was the good shepherd who gives eternal life to his “sheep” and that “no one will snatch them out of my hand” (v. 28). He then says the same thing about the Father: “no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand” (v. 29). These parallel statements allude to Old Testament texts in which the Lord God speaks of his divine power over life and death: “See now that I, even I, am he; there is no god besides me. I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; and no one can deliver from my hand” (Deut. 32:39). “I am God, and also henceforth I am He; there is no one who can deliver from my hand” (Is. 43:13). Jesus is thus claiming an exclusively divine power in words clearly alluding to two of the strongest monotheistic statements of the Old Testament. He then follows up this claim with the famous saying, “The Father and I are one” (John 10:30). In this context, Jesus’ claim to be “one” with the Father appears very likely to be an allusion to the classic monotheistic statement of the Old Testament, the *Shema* (Deut. 6:4), in effect including himself with the Father in the oneness of God. This makes it quite understandable that his Jewish opponents would seek to stone him for blasphemy because they understood him to be making himself out to be God (John 10:33).

Second, whatever the exact nature of Christ’s response, it did not alleviate the Jews’ impression that he was claiming to be God. After

Christ finished his response by saying, “the Father is in me and I am in the Father,” the Jewish authorities “tried again to arrest him” (vv. 38-39). Evidently, Jesus’ answer did not convince them that he was not blaspheming. If Jesus was not claiming divine equality or identity, it would have been easy enough to have said something like, “I’m not God; I’m just his Son, one of his creatures.” He never did so.

Third, Jesus’ argument from Psalm 82 is not that he is God in a derivative sense. Such an interpretation assumes that Jesus was saying that he was a “God” (or “god”) in the same sense as those called “gods” in Psalm 82. If that were the point, it is peculiar that he did not say so (“If they can be called gods, then I can be called a god, too”). Indeed, Jesus did not call himself God, but rather, by referring to himself as “one” with the Father, implied that he was God’s Son in some unique sense. This is made clear once again when Jesus speaks of himself as “the one whom the Father has sanctified and sent into the world” (John 10:36). Whatever the precise nuance of Christ’s argument was, he was clearly placing himself in a category of one—not arguing that he belonged in the same category as the so-called “gods” of Psalm 82. Jesus was not, as his critics claimed, a man who was “making himself” God; he was God’s Son whom the Father had sent to be a man.

No Preexistent Son

While some opponents of the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity, such as Jehovah’s Witnesses and Mormons, affirm that Jesus Christ existed prior to his human conception and birth in heaven as a divine being of some kind, Socinus rejected the idea of the Son’s preexistence. Socinus offered two kinds of explanations for texts that seemed to speak of Christ as existing before his human life.

First, Socinus argues that texts speaking of Christ’s role in creation actually refer to his role in the *new* creation. For example, Paul’s statement that God “created all things through Jesus Christ” (Eph. 3:9 NKJV)³¹ does not refer to the creation of all things in the beginning of

time, but to the new creation effected by Christ in redemption (cf. 2 Cor. 5:17). It is exceedingly difficult to make this explanation work for *all* of the relevant passages that speak of Christ's role in creation (John 1:3, 10; 1 Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:2, 10-12).³² The passages in John and Hebrews credit Christ with the work of creation "in the beginning" (John 1:1-3; Heb. 1:10), clearly referring to the beginning of Genesis 1:1.

Second, Socinus explains some of the New Testament texts—particularly those in the Gospel of John—that appear to speak of Christ coming into the world from heaven as referring to a heavenly visit by Christ during his human life. The description of Jesus as "the one who descended from heaven" (John 3:13) is understood to refer to Christ's descent back to earth after his brief visit to heaven (similarly John 6:62). For those who cannot accept this supposedly obvious explanation, Socinus allows another: this "ascent into heaven" may be figurative language "meaning the penetration (as it were) into the knowledge of divine things." This latter interpretation is the one that Buzzard favors. He dismisses in passing the idea of a visit by Jesus to heaven since "the Gospels nowhere record such an event." Instead, he takes the view that the language about Jesus ascending into heaven "is a figurative description of Jesus' unique perception of God's saving plan."³³

Both of these explanations strain the Johannine texts to the breaking point. "Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God" (John 13:3). "I came from the Father and have come into the world; again, I am leaving the world and am going to the Father" (John 16:28). "So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed" (John 17:5). Those who deny that John taught the preexistence of Christ must engage in the most implausible exegetical contortions to circumvent the obvious implication of these texts. Buzzard can only complain that some English versions wrongly translate "going *back*" in John 13:3 and 16:28—a debatable complaint, though the idea of Christ's preexistence is plain enough without the word "back," as the NRSV quoted above demonstrates.³⁴ That the

Son existed before becoming a man is evident not only from these passages in John, but from texts scattered throughout the New Testament (Matt. 9:13; 20:28; 23:34, 37; Mark 2:17; 10:45; Luke 4:43; 5:32; 12:49, 51; 13:34; 19:10; Rom. 8:3; 1 Cor. 10:4, 9; Gal. 4:4-6; Phil. 2:6-7; Jude 5).³⁵

Conclusion

What makes Unitarianism attractive is its apparent simplicity: God is one person; Jesus was a man, though a perfect one through whom God makes himself known; the Holy Spirit is just a way of speaking of God's immanent activity, his energy or power acting in the world. In order to defend such a seemingly simple doctrine, though, Unitarians proffer convoluted interpretations of numerous biblical passages. Professing to eschew all unbiblical distinctions, in fact they trade the theological distinctions of orthodox theology (one Divine Being, three divine Persons) for their own unorthodox distinctions (such as absolute versus derivative deity), resulting in a doctrine that is not faithful to the teaching of Scripture. The doctrine of the Trinity, as difficult as it is for our finite minds to comprehend, is still the best theological framework for maintaining a faithful witness to the biblical revelation of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Notes

1. At least a few of Socinus's arguments appeared in a book by Servetus that scholars have only recently translated into English: *The Restoration of Christianity: An English Translation of Christianismi restitutio, 1553* by Michael Servetus (1511-1553), trans. Christopher A. Hoffman and Marian Hillar (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2007).
2. The most sophisticated defense of Jehovah's Witness beliefs on the subject, ironically, was produced by a man who has since left the Jehovah's Witnesses, though he remains an anti-Trinitarian: Greg Stafford, *Jehovah's Witnesses Defended: An Answer to Scholars and Critics*, 2d ed. (Huntington Beach, Calif.: Elihu Books, 2000). (A third edition has been delayed,

perhaps because of Stafford's defection.)

3. That is, Jehovah's Witnesses hold to the same basic views on God and Christ as did the Arians. The Arians seem to have held that the Holy Spirit was a created being, not a force emanating from God, as the Jehovah's Witnesses and most other anti-Trinitarians today maintain.
4. My focus here is on classic Unitarianism, which was originally a far more conservative movement—affirming the inspiration and authority of the Bible, accepting the Virgin Birth and Resurrection, and the like—than the Unitarian-Universalist Association, a denomination so liberal that now only a minority of its members even professes to be Christians. Socinianism did differ in some ways from the English and American movement called Unitarianism, but its view of God is fairly described as Unitarian.
5. See the web site shared by the denomination and by the Atlanta Bible College, <http://www.abc-coggc.org/>.
6. Anthony F. Buzzard and Charles F. Hunting, *The Doctrine of the Trinity: Christianity's Self-Inflicted Wound* (Lanham, MD, New York, and Oxford: International Scholars Publications, 1998).
7. Buzzard and Hunting, *Doctrine of the Trinity*, 243-69.
8. Socinus also argues that Christ does not have a divine nature; that he receives divine worship but only as a human; and that the title "Son of God" applies to Jesus as an exalted man, not as a divine person incarnated. A definitive critique of Socinus would need to address these arguments, although they are actually supplementary to his primary arguments for Unitarianism.
9. Buzzard and Hunting, *Doctrine of the Trinity*, 4.
10. See the classic statement by B. B. Warfield, "Trinity," in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. James Orr (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1939 reprint of 1915 ed.), 5:3012.
11. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles; Library of Christian Classics 20-21 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 127 (1.13.5).
12. The biblical citations given here are representative, not exhaustive.
13. So also Buzzard and Hunting, *Doctrine of the Trinity*, 234.
14. Oneness Pentecostalism, which rejects the Trinity in favor of a Pentecostal variety of monarchianism, is problematic at this point, since it affirms that Jesus is the Father and the Holy Spirit—as well as the Son!
15. Cf. Buzzard and Hunting, *Doctrine of the Trinity*, 226, describing the Holy Spirit as God's "energy."

16. All biblical quotations are from the NRSV except as otherwise noted. The word *paraklētos* commonly referred to someone who stood by a person in trouble—for example, someone accused, or alone—to provide support or defense.
17. The most popular argument in contemporary evangelicalism for the personhood of the Holy Spirit may be one of the weakest arguments, namely, the appeal to masculine pronouns in John 14-16 in reference to the Holy Spirit (*ekeinos*, John 14:26; 15:26; 16:8, 13, 14; *auton*, John 16:7), despite the fact that “Spirit” (*pneuma*) is grammatically neuter. As Dan Wallace has shown, the pronouns in question are masculine because their antecedent is *paraklētos* (“Helper”), a masculine noun: Daniel B. Wallace, “Greek Grammar and the Personality of the Holy Spirit,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* (2003): 97-125. That having been said, these texts are still strong evidence for the personhood of the Holy Spirit, since he is given the personal designation *paraklētos* and is described as performing personal functions (speaking, hearing, glorifying, teaching, etc.).
18. On the person of the Holy Spirit in Paul, see especially Gordon D. Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994).
19. William H. Shepherd, *The Narrative Function of the Holy Spirit as a Character in Luke-Acts*, SBLDS 147 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994).
20. Similarly Buzzard and Hunting, *Doctrine of the Trinity*, 124-25.
21. See especially *ibid.*, 38-40. Sidney Hatch comments in his Foreword, “If there is a key text to the book, it is John 17:3” (xiii).
22. I agree with the consensus of biblical scholars that the passage (John 7:53-8:11) is not part of the original Gospel of John, but it does show how Greek writers of the period used such language.
23. On these verses, see Robert M. Bowman, Jr., and J. Ed Komoszewski, *Putting Jesus in His Place: The Case for the Deity of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007), 138-44, 325-30, and other works cited there.
24. Likewise Buzzard and Hunting, *Doctrine of the Trinity*, 94-100, 157, 161, 177-78, 182, 274, 283, 311, 313, 315, 333. 1 Corinthians 8:6 is one of the most frequently cited verses in Buzzard’s book. Servetus had also cited 1 Corinthians 8:6 and Ephesians 4:6 to the same effect (Servetus, *Restoration of Christianity*, 39, 46).
25. See Bowman and Komoszewski, *Putting Jesus in His Place*, 163-66.
26. See *ibid.*, 146-48, 150-54, 332-34.
27. Cf. Buzzard and Hunting, *Doctrine of the Trinity*, 124 n. 14, 126.
28. Socinus claims that when Christ is called God, “then the name of God does not func-

tion as a subject but as a predicate”; that is, that Scripture never says that God said or did something that refers “to Christ as distinct from the Father.” However, Acts 20:28 appears to be an exception to this sweeping claim; see Bowman and Komoszewski, *Putting Jesus in His Place*, 144-46.

29. E.g., Buzzard and Hunting, *Doctrine of the Trinity*, 45-46, 87, 125, 220, 291-92, 309. See earlier Servetus, *Restoration of Christianity*, 20, 23-24.
30. Besides the commentaries on John, see Richard Jungkuntz, “An Approach to the Exegesis of John 10:34-36,” *Concordia Theological Monthly* 35 (1964): 556-65; Jerome H. Neyrey, “‘I Said: You Are Gods’: Psalm 82:6 and John 10,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 108 (1989): 647-63; W. Gary Phillips, “An Apologetic Study of John 10:34-36,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 146 (1989): 405-19. Anthony Tyrrell Hanson, *The Prophetic Gospel: A Study of John and the Old Testament* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1991), 135-49.
31. Ironically, almost all modern translations omit the words “through Jesus Christ,” which text-critical scholars regard as a later expansion of the original wording of the text.
32. Some biblical scholars today do argue for a new-creation role of Christ in 1 Cor. 8:6b, but such an interpretation finds few if any supporters for the other relevant texts.
33. Buzzard and Hunting, *Doctrine of the Trinity*, 205, 206; see further, 206-9.
34. *Ibid.*, 328. According to the United Bible Societies’ Greek-English Dictionary, the Greek verb *hupagei* (used in John 13:3) sometimes means “go home; go back, return,” a meaning that clearly fits the context in John 13:3.
35. See Bowman and Komoszewski, *Putting Jesus in His Place*, 81-101.

The Straw Man

Strikes Back:

When Gödel's Theorem is Misused

Winfried Corduan &

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There can be no doubt that most philosophy since Descartes has attempted to emulate the success of natural science and mathematics, though there have also been movements, such as romanticism or existentialism, that tried to stem this tide. Given various developments in the hard sciences in the twentieth century, emergent postmodernism found itself straddling a thin fence in this regard. In common with earlier movements, postmodernism extended its hermeneutic of suspicion to science along with other supposedly dogmatic forms of knowledge. However, postmodern writers have also had the luxury of conscripting certain conclusions of science and mathematics to support their cause, thus seeking to use formal knowledge to undermine formal knowledge.

There are two such conclusions in particular to which postmodernists frequently appeal in order to show that reason itself collapses under its own weight. One is Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, which states that one can ascertain either an electron's position or its velocity, but never both. Now, one might think that this is not much of an obstacle for most of our knowledge since few of us ever bother about trying to nail down the precise parameters for subatomic particles, but some writers (including Heisenberg himself¹), have extended this restriction in physics to question all of knowledge.²

A similar scenario has occurred with regard to an even more difficult principle, Kurt Gödel's Incompleteness Theorem, the topic of this paper. We will describe this principle in detail below. For now, let us simply state that it arose in connection with the attempts by Bertrand Russell and Alfred North Whitehead to generate a complete axiomatic system of arithmetic (as described in the nineteenth century by Giuseppe Peano³) from pure logic. Gödel showed that this task is not possible. Any such system will contain true statements that cannot be derived from the system.

The property of completeness, along with soundness, is what makes reasoning within any particular system possible. Soundness is the property that a statement within a system has to be consistent with all of the other statements in the system. Completeness demands that all of the statements within a system are subject to the same rules, viz. that each must follow the same laws of inference as all of the others. In other words, any statement within a system is either given as an axiom or can be derived within the system (completeness) and cannot contradict any other statement in the system (soundness).

To clarify these two properties, let us imagine a system in which there is a single axiom, namely that

- (1) A figure with n angles has exactly n sides.

We can then infer within this system that

- (2) A figure with four angles has exactly four sides.

But we would violate the property of soundness if we concluded that

- (3) A figure with four angles has exactly five sides.

And the property of completeness would become a casualty if we stated within that system:

- 4) A figure with five angles has the shape of the U.S. Department of Defense.

This last statement may be true, but it is not included with the statements that can be accommodated to the system. If any extraneous information can be brought into a system at any time, there would be no point in attempting to derive conclusions by following the inferential rules of the system. An incomplete system makes reasoning within that particular system pointless.

And so Kurt Gödel came along and showed that Russell and Whitehead's attempt to derive Peano's arithmetic from pure logic could never lead to a complete system.⁴ His proof was so compelling that Russell and Whitehead immediately dropped their projects. Gödel's theorem (hereafter: *GT*) also undercut the work of Gottlob Frege and David Hilbert, who were on similar quests. On the other hand, Ludwig Wittgenstein, who routinely waved off what he did not understand, dismissed it as a "logical parlor trick."⁵

Let me clarify here that Gödel's theorem (*GT*) is not a paradox. The fact that formal logic can lead to paradoxes has been well known for a long time. A popular book makes it appear as though Russell ceased working on the *Principia Mathematica* (hereafter: *PM*) when he came up against a paradox that he could not resolve;⁶ but, in fact, the entire work was conceived with the paradox in mind and a strategy to resolve it.⁷ However, Gödel's discovery was of a very different kind. It did not offer a way out, but shut the whole project down without the possibility of appeal.

Now, again, one might react by yawning. Since few of us commit too much time to deriving Peano's arithmetic from logic, this limitation hardly seems to be all that serious. But again, other writers have seen far more serious consequences radiate from *GT*, questioning the very fabric of knowledge. The question is whether these alleged broader implications to *GT* have serious merit.

Let us look at how the postmodern philosopher Jean-Francois Lyotard makes this application. It would be naïve to think that Lyotard

would not have embraced his post-modern position if it had not been for Gödel; he used other factors to substantiate his claims as well. Nevertheless, it so happened that Lyotard's understanding of *GT* played right into his agenda.

First, Lyotard applies Gödel not just to the derivation of arithmetic from logic but to the very system of arithmetic:

Now Gödel has effectively established the existence in the arithmetic system of a proposition that is neither demonstrable nor refutable within that system; this entails that the arithmetic system fails to satisfy the condition of completeness.⁸

As we shall see below, this is already an overstatement of the impact of *GT*. But Lyotard is not content to leave it at that. What may have been little ripples from mathematical logic turns into a veritable tsunami breaking forth over all of knowledge.

Since it is possible to generalize this situation, it must be accepted that all formal systems have internal limitations.⁹

This is a giant leap for humankind. And in Lyotard's view, what applies to all formal systems must then also extend to ordinary language if it is to be based on formal systems.¹⁰

This applies to logic: the metalanguage it uses to describe an artificial (axiomatic) language is "natural" or "everyday" language; that language is universal, since all other languages can be translated into it.¹¹

Astoundingly, this generalization actually assumes the success of a project even bigger than the Russell-Whitehead project, namely the reduction of all language to logical formalization, something that, given the connotative side of language, could never be brought off. Still, Lyotard carries on with his assessment:

[Metalanguage] is not consistent with respect to negation—it allows the formation of paradoxes.¹²

Aside from continuing the sweeping generalizations, this sentence seems to demonstrate a confusion between paradoxes and *GT*. Still, once we've gone this far, it's only a small step for one to declare:

This necessitates a reformulation of the question of the legitimation of knowledge.¹³

And thus, Lyotard concludes that Gödel's refutation of Russell and Whitehead has contributed to the downfall of all of human knowledge if it is construed in a modern, rationalistic, way.

Now, keep in mind that for Lyotard this is a good thing. Modern human knowledge, with its emphasis on rigid reasoning and quantifiability, has led to the self-destruction of humanity. It is not coincidental for Lyotard that the time of the greatest advances in science and mathematics is also the time of genocide and holocausts. Hugo L. Meynell summarizes Lyotard's perspective in this way:

The real issue in modernity is an insatiable and inexorable will-to-power imposing itself by way of rational calculation. The horrifying events of the twentieth century, of which the bombing of Hiroshima and the camp at Auschwitz are outstanding examples, have utterly discredited the project of modernism so far as Lyotard is concerned.¹⁴

In short, mathematical precision was a major driving force in the oppressive and genocidal mindset of modernism. Fortunately, Gödel has supposedly demonstrated the unreliability of quantificational thinking and, thereby, of all modern thinking.

In the rest of this paper, we will show more precisely what Gödel actually did, and how far his theorem can actually be applied. It will not surprise our readers that we believe the postmodern thinkers who

have recruited Gödel to fight for their cause have placed their fate in the hands of a straw man. GT has extremely limited applicability.

Summary and Purpose of GT

GT (or, more accurately, Gödel's *First Incompleteness Theorem*)¹⁵ states that *a formal system of arithmetic (whose axioms include those of Peano) is either omega-inconsistent or incomplete.*¹⁶ Further additions have generalized this theorem, which, if nothing else, allow us to reduce the above statement to something a little more understandable. Gödel showed that the theorem works for other formal systems in mathematics; in fact, it works for any system in which the natural numbers can be defined.¹⁷ A generalized version states that *mathematics based on a formal system is either inconsistent or incomplete.*

The key to understanding the nature of Gödel's objective lies in the above phrase "*based on a formal system.*" Once we understand what this phrase means, we can realize that Gödel was not at all interested in promoting skepticism concerning logical or mathematical systems *per se*. The crucial point is the adjective "formal" as applied to systems. "Formal" here has a very specific meaning, and it does not refer to regularity of structure. In the argot of the philosophy of mathematics, "formal" means "generated by human beings on the basis of logical inferences."

The contrary to a "formal" understanding of mathematics is a "Platonic" interpretation (with "intuitionism" being halfway in between). In a Platonic view, numbers and logical relationships are real in themselves; the mathematician simply discovers what has always been true, regardless of anyone's awareness. All mathematical and logical knowledge is fixed by the underlying reality. In the "formal" view, on the other hand, mathematics is a construction built upon commonly accepted axioms, whose status is never more than heuristic. There is no objective reality which mathematical conclusions express; the whole task of mathematics is one of derivation, not discovery.

Gödel was a confirmed Platonist.¹⁸ He believed that mathematics

and logic could be absolute and certain because they mirrored the true reality of the mathematical world. His objective was to nullify the formalism of Russell, Whitehead, Hilbert, *et. al.* so as to demonstrate the truth of the Platonic view. Consequently, to use *GT* as a means of arousing skepticism concerning the subject matter of mathematics is to look at it backwards from Gödel's perspective. *GT* should lead us to skepticism concerning formal systems and to an appreciation of the finitude of the human mind so that we can accept the Platonic understanding, which, according to Gödel, alone grants certainty.

We can clarify Gödel's intent by looking at it as an example of transcendental methodology, viz. to assume that a given phenomenon is true and certain and then to ask what the necessary conditions are for the phenomenon to be true and certain. In this particular case, the phenomenon in question involves the given fact that mathematical knowledge is certain. Who would doubt the truths of arithmetic or, thereby, the truth of Peano's axioms, which are simply principles underlying arithmetic? Then, given such undisputed certainty, we can ask under what conditions mathematical knowledge can be certain? Gödel's answer is that it cannot be so within the formalist framework because such a system will always remain incomplete. Nor can we rely on intuition because it will always be suspect. However, we can find the requisite certainty in a Platonic framework. Therefore, as we proceed to scrutinize Gödel's theorem, we need to keep in mind that he was, in fact, committed to the completeness of logical and mathematical systems, but he opposed the effort to derive this completeness by the criteria of formalism.

Formal Systems

A formal system deals with a set of symbols that do not have any meaning in themselves. These symbols are then manipulated according to pre-set rules. By putting the symbols in a certain order, one can get a "sentence". Sequences of "sentences" formed according to the

rules of inference are steps in a “proof”; all “sentences” in every such sequence are considered proven provided that the sequence starts with a “theorem” (a previously proven “sentence”) or an “axiom” (a “sentence” assumed as proven from the start). “Sentences” may be well-formed or ill-formed.

An example may help with the above. We will create an arbitrary system. For the “axiom,” we’ll use the “sentence” $(11 + 1) = 111$. Next, we’ll allow ourselves two rules of inference. Lower case letters stand for a sequence of zero or more symbols of the same type: thus, x could stand for 1, 11, 111, 11111, and so on, but not $11+11$. These rules of inference are:

- 1) If $(x + y) = z$ is a “theorem”, then so is $(x1 + y) = z1$.
- 2) If $(x + y) = z$ is a “theorem”, then so is $(y + x) = z$.

Let us start deriving “theorems” starting from our “axiom”. Since $(11 + 1) = 111$ is a “theorem” (as all “axioms” are automatically “theorems”), so is $(111 + 1) = 1111$ by the first rule of inference. By the second rule and the previous “theorem”, $(1 + 111) = 1111$ is a “theorem” as well. The next few “theorems” would include $(11 + 111) = 11111$, $(111 + 11) = 11111$, and so on.

The most important part of this formal system, and the reason for the overabundance of quotation marks above, is that the system has no inherent meaning. One can play around with it, manipulate the symbols according to the rules, and come up with some interesting arrays of symbols, but these symbols do not have any meaning until they are interpreted. This step of interpretation is how one can have a formal system representing logic or arithmetic. For ease of language in this paper we will refer to the meanings of “sentences”; this is really to say “the meaning of the interpretation of the ‘sentence’ under the standard interpretation.” For the same reason we will also drop the use of the quotation marks.

Going back to the above system, one particular interpretation

which just so happens to jump out would be that of addition. For example, the sentence $(11 + 1) = 111$ could be interpreted as “ $2 + 1 = 3$.” The first rule of inference could be “if $x + y = z$, then $(x + 1) + y = (z + 1)$ ”, with the second as “if $x + y = z$, then $y + x = z$.” An important thing to note, however, is that we must stay within the system and not let our interpretations run away with us. Even if “ $1 + 1 = 2$ ” is a true statement, this does not mean that the sentence $(1 + 1) = 11$ is a theorem in our formal system; we cannot create it with only our axiom and rules of inference.¹⁹

Gödel's Proof

A closer look at an outline of the proof of this theorem will show what assumptions are necessary in order for the theorem to hold. As we have clarified above, it applies to formal systems, and specifically mathematical formal systems. In order to remain within a mathematical framework, Gödel used a coding by which each symbol in the formal system was identified with a number. Sentences can then be converted into sequences of numbers according to their symbols, and proofs wind up as combinations of the numbers representing the sentences which make up each step of the proof.²⁰ All of these numbers are unique to the given symbols, sentences, and proofs (the given numbering scheme is irrelevant insofar as the above hold). The formal system can then, in a way, make statements about itself.²¹

Another important aspect about this coding scheme is that it uses recursive functions. Gödel spends a good amount of his paper laying out the precise formulation of various relations which he needs in order to come up with his “provability” relation. By showing that these relations are all recursive and that all recursive relations are definable within the system, Gödel proves that he can a) use his theorem, b) use it independently of any specific interpretations, and c) generalize his theorem.²²

Once Gödel has defined his code and shown that one can create

valid sentences in the formal system which states things (upon interpretation) such as “This sentence has the Gödel number x ,” his next step is to create a self-destructive sentence like “This sentence does not have a proof in the current system.” If it is true, then there is no proof of it in the current system; this makes the statement true, however, and so the system is incomplete. If it is false (or, equivalently, its denial is true), then there is a sentence which can be interpreted as “there is a proof of me in the current system”, although every given set of sentences will not constitute a proof of the sentence in question. This is what is known as “omega-inconsistency”: there is no direct inconsistency of the form “ x and not- x ,” but an indirect one which cannot be detected in a finite number of steps within the system.²³

The following suppositions are therefore necessary for the proof to show that a given system falls prey to either incompleteness or fatal inconsistency (i.e. inconsistency such that it entails that all the sentences—including contradictions—in the system are true):

1. it only applies to formal systems;
2. it only applies to Gödelizable (i.e. encodable) systems;
3. it needs two truth values: true and false;
4. it needs a finite number of formalizable axiom schemata.

In addition, the following point is germane:

5. The Gödel sentence (viz. the sentence that turns out to be undecidable) has limited applicability.

In the rest of the paper, we will argue for each point individually to show that one cannot apply GT to reason by itself. We do not think that

it can be used to refer to human reason *per se* at all, certainly not without bringing in a host of additional metaphysical assumptions. In particular, we think that if *GT* were to hold for human reason, one would have to be committed to a Platonist framework, but then, paradoxically, it would no longer matter because then there would be an intrinsic rationality to the universe independent of our thinking.

1. Formal Systems

In order to come up with his inconsistent sentence, Gödel relies on the fact that he is operating within a system that can be formalizable, where every mode of inference can be catalogued and detailed, and where every axiom can be labeled. Every aspect of the system must be able to be recorded and manipulated in symbolic format according to specific, deterministic rules.

The question that comes up then is, can human reason be formalized? Remember that “formalizable” entails the derivation of intrinsically empty symbols from heuristic axioms on the basis of stipulated rules of inference. One cannot assume that the content of our minds is formalizable unless one takes specific metaphysical stances on issues concerning materialism, determinism, and strong AI. While some will not consider this to be a problem, there is no way around the fact that one must adopt a particular metaphysics in order to apply the theorem in such a manner. Therefore, the use of *GT* to characterize human reasoning is not merely a matter of mathematical logic.

Even if one is a determinist regarding human reason, a formal system is a closed system with a complete set of axioms and rules of inference already given. Reason, on the other hand, is an open system which can always take on more data, experiences, etc. from outside itself, creating a potentially endless supply of axioms, rules of inference, and basic symbols—unless one wishes to follow Gödel in stipulating a Platonic framework.

2. Gödelizable Systems

One of the most important parts of Gödel's proof is that one can create a code so that there is a way to talk about the system within the system. In that system, there are definitions for natural numbers and operations using them. As natural numbers are definable and usable within the system, and the symbols are able to be encoded by numbers, one can make statements about the sentences (at least upon interpretation).

Thus, *GT* only applies if one can manage to take elements that the system (upon interpretation) describes and encode the symbols of the system by those elements. There may very well be more such symbols than necessary, but without this step one cannot use Gödel. Are there any grounds to believe that human reason refers to anything in the way that *PM* refers to numbers? Perhaps reason refers to ideas like numbers are referred to by *PM*. Unless such an encoding could be found, human reason is non-Gödelizable.

There are several conditions necessary for any such encoding. One is that one must be able to specify what the system is and what the interpretation is. Furthermore, these two aspects must be distinct. As seen above, $(11 + 1) = 111$ is separate from the interpretation of " $2 + 1 = 3$ ".²⁴

The other condition needed for the theorem to apply is an isomorphism between the system and the interpretation: there must be a one-to-one correspondence between symbols in one and objects in the other (or whatever can be substituted for "symbols" and "objects"). Starting from this base, reason can be either the system or the interpretation of some other system. Assuming these conditions, can the necessary isomorphism be constructed?

Now, this is a tricky question because, as we mentioned above, Gödel's own Platonic understanding of mathematics already contains an isomorphism because that is the central content of a Platonic view. However, in that case the system is also complete because it has its own reality. In order to be vulnerable to *GT*, human reason must constitute

a formal system (in the technical sense explained above), and so the question is whether the requisite isomorphism can be *constructed*.

One possible formal system to be the counterpart to reason might be language, liable to some artistic (or in this case, logical) license. If language could be understood to refer to things (empirical objects, abstract objects, pure thought, or anything else), then one could match up these referents with the words that describe them and thus have a new Gödel code. But this possibility only leads us to a form of realism: words which denote abstract concepts must have a real referent, and this is not possible in a formal system which deliberately eschews such a Platonic assumption.

Anyone attempting to construct a formal system based on the use of language itself must reckon with the fact that words can have multiple meanings. Consider the matter of equivocal speech. In the sentence "Cinderella went to the ball," "went to the ball" can refer to attending a gala event or attempting to gain control of the object of a soccer match. Thus, some symbols would have multiple referents which can be accommodated by a Platonic view in which words express thoughts, and thoughts exemplify uniquely real ideas, but in a formal system this is not possible. And if we stipulate that there could be an extremely complex encoding scheme which could take care of all potential equivocations, then either a) we have unintentionally recreated a Platonic universe or b) we have created a problem in the other direction by eliminating the reality that we often use different words to refer to a single object.

The other obvious option for encoding would use brain states as the system and reason again as the interpretation. We could even assume that all brain states would be restricted to such states as would be involved with reason (which could include senses, memory, reasoning faculties themselves, and others as desired). This suggestion seems to require the assumption of physicalism with respect to the nature of persons, at least to an extent, so that, yet again, we would have to go beyond the logic itself to metaphysics. In addition, every brain-state would need to correspond uniquely to a specific thought or piece of reason. However, it has been demonstrated that upon injury the brain

can sometimes recover lost functions. If the new brain state (taking into account the damage) can be interpreted as the same thought as the previous, undamaged brain state, then the isomorphism under consideration breaks down.

There are only a finite number of brain states, no matter how large this finitude may be. If they already potentially encode every conceivable piece of knowledge, then Socrates was correct in believing that the slave boy already knew how to double the square,²⁵ and we are once again committing ourselves to a Platonic view, just where Gödel would like us to be.

One could, of course, simply assume that reason is a formalizable system and thus liable to *GT*. Hofstadter mentions that if *GT* is true of reason, we might not be able to know it, just as *PM* can't decide that it is a formal system within itself.²⁶ But this is merely an appeal to ignorance. It is certainly possible that this could be the case, *ceteris paribus*, but it shuts the door to actual argumentation. It seems that the only way to conclude that *GT* applies to reason is to buy into a set of presuppositions that amounts to a Platonic view, in which case *GT* will not apply.

3. Truth Values

In the formal system which Gödel uses, there are only two truth values: true and false. 'Alternatively, a sentence may not be "well-formed": it simply does not make sense. Such a sentence does not need to be considered true or false as it is not saying anything. What would happen in a system with a larger array of truth values, where Gödel's sentence could be something other than true, false, and nonsense?

Now, let us shift from a hypothetical ideal knowledge of reality, which can only be bivalent, to the certitude with which we actually cling regarding our various beliefs. We do not hold all of our opinions with a probability of 1; some are more probable than others. I may not be certain that *P* is true; I may think that there is a .736 chance that it is true (more or less) and a .264 chance that it is false. That is to say,

while I accept its truth and not its falsehood, I still am leaving some room that it may be false. All probabilities brought up here are levels of confidence, not the actual truth-values of the beliefs. Most of the time (or even all of the time) we use less precise measures of probability: this belief is more probable than that one, that belief doesn't seem very probable, etc. Some beliefs are simply incomparable with others. For still other beliefs, we have no idea whatsoever what their probability would be. From an epistemological standpoint, we may not always consider a proposition to have the inverse probability of its denial. For example, I may think that there is good evidence supporting both the truth and falsehood of the Riemann Hypothesis²⁷, leaving it so that I am not sure whether it is true or not and at the same time allowing me to have a satisfactory level of confidence in whatever opinion on which I may settle. Pure deductive reasoning must adhere to the law of the excluded middle and probabilistic variants, but in everyday reasoning we are much looser with the rules.

Is *GT* still applicable when brought up inside a system where Gödel's sentence is regarded as "partly true with a chance of falsity?" It no longer states "This statement cannot be proven" but becomes "This statement may not be able to be proven." One must look at an infinity of cases and beyond instead of "true" and "false." Does the statement carry the same force in reasoning where one can accept a half-way view?

GT (in generalized form) states that the given formal system is either inconsistent or incomplete. One inconsistency entails that all propositions within the system are true, making inconsistency a generally undesirable thing; just because the cat is on the mat shouldn't imply that it isn't. If human reason is complete and susceptible to *GT* in any way that makes a difference, then inconsistency would spell disaster for it in the same way in which it would for a formal system.

Does typical human reasoning count as logically consistent? With the broad array of probability levels to assess truth that we use in ordinary life, it seems that we would not pass this test. As we said above, a person can believe that a proposition and its denial both have good evidence, and thus give them both a strong chance of veridicality, even

though the person realizes that one must be true and the other false (again, we are not intending to show that the law of the excluded middle does not hold on an ontological level or within a rigidly defined logical system). Such a state is not intended to be permanent, as the person will most likely try to figure out which proposition really is true and so relieve the tension of the contradiction.²⁸ But in the meantime there is no point in denying that we are frequently afflicted with ambivalence.

However, if human reason can be inconsistent at times, there is no necessity that it is incomplete on a theoretical level. What is more, human reason does not fall prey to the logical problem of every proposition being true. I can be in a state of contradictive tension by believing that Gödel was right, but accepting the possibility that he was wrong, without thereby inferring that invisible pink bunny rabbits are jumping on my bed. It still remains the case that it may not be possible for reason to be complete and consistent at the same time and thus to know all truths and only truths through reason. Such a contradiction is not as dangerous to reason in general as it is to math and deductive logic.

We can avoid strict inconsistency because not all opinions will be held at the level of “100% true”; we can believe every true proposition more strongly than its negation, even a good deal more strongly, and thus be close enough to knowing the complete truth through reason without worrying about strict inconsistency. In theory, we could cling to every truth but one with a subjective probability of 1 and the one exception with a subjective probability of .99 (and to its falsity at .01), and such a system of reasoning would not be considered consistent in the required sense to be vulnerable to GT.

4. Axioms

4.1 Finite Axiom Schemata

Another condition which is necessary for the proof to work is that the formal system has to have a finite number of axiom schemata. The system may have an infinite number of axioms, but they can be grouped together under a single pattern. An example of an axiom schema is one which Gödel himself uses:

$$(4) \quad (\mathbf{x}) (\mathbf{b} \vee \mathbf{a}) \supset (\mathbf{b} \vee (\mathbf{x})\mathbf{a})$$

where x is any variable, a is any formula, and b is any formula which does not have x as a free variable.²⁹ For example,

$$(5) \quad \text{If, for every natural number } n, \text{ either } 7 + 5 = 12 \text{ or } n + 1 > 0, \\ \text{then either } 7 + 5 = 12 \text{ or for every natural number } n, n + 1 > 0$$

would be a valid instantiation of the schema. Outside of the formal system, it's hard to see why (4) is a schema rather than a full-blown axiom, but that is because it is easy for us to simply plug in the necessary variables and formulae. There is no way within the system, before stating (4), to tell whether or not a given formula has x as a free variable or not; even if there were, there would still be issues regarding quantification over quantified propositions, entailing that higher-order logic would need to be used, even in places where *PM* only requires first-order logic. Thus, there would need to be a separate axiom for every pertinent pair of formulae, which means an infinite number of such axioms. A schema is much nicer to use.

Does human reason rest on a finite number of axiom schemata? Any possible formalizing would place them within a system. We could hold the belief "All Gödel sentences are true and not provable except by axioms not in the system in which they were stated." Or, perhaps, "All denials of Gödel sentences are true, and there only exist proofs of them outside the system in which they were stated." More complex formulations could be developed: "The first Gödel sentence is true, the second is false, and so on." If we could formalize and schematize this statement then we could build a formal system that fulfills all of the requirements of *GT*. There would then be a new Gödel sentence not covered by the schema. This would render the schema false, but by definition the schema is provable within the system (as all axioms are). Therefore, if such a schema were formalizable, then it would only be so within an inconsistent system. As there is no particular reason to assume that there cannot be at least one of these schemata which is consistent with other

truths, it is more likely that they are not formalizable.

Note that these schemata do not assume that one can know what the Gödel sentence is in a given system. Even in mathematics, we know what the Gödel sentence is and what it means only because we are looking on from outside the system. We can interpret the system and see the truth, but it would not necessarily be evident from within the system. However, we could know that if human reason were affected by *GT*, there would be a Gödel sentence somewhere. We could go from there without knowing how to explicitly state the sentence.

Even aside from these dubious reasons, what would constitute an axiom for human knowledge? Every experience which one has, every sense impression, every memory, every demonstration from logic would constitute the axiom schemata of this system. If one looks at the potential types of experience, there would be a large number of experiences, and thus axioms. However, not all of these experiences would be considered legitimate; other beliefs would affect the legitimacy of an experience. In addition, one must decide whether the conflicting belief or the experience should be decisive. This process can go on for many levels and include many interactions; there is an infinity of possibilities. One may be able to argue that a given schema covering the above is generally accurate; but what is necessary for the applicability of *GT* is one which is perfectly accurate and complete. Even if a schema could be given, it is still an open question as to whether it could be completely formalized.

4.2 *Stable Systems*

GT only applies to one system at a time. If one is working with one set of axioms now and another set later, at each point in time one's reason could be incomplete. It would, however, be incomplete in different ways.

One could simply take the union of the sets of axioms of the different sets and create a new system with this union (which, as we are taking a finite union of finite sets, would be finite). Assuming that it would

be consistent, it would be susceptible to *GT* and thus incomplete. The non-provable statements in this new system would then be non-provable in any of the original systems. If it were inconsistent, the person would not need to keep all the parts of old systems around, ditching from the old what would be contradictory with the new.

Even in this case, the incompleteness of the system changes. One cannot simply produce a single Gödel sentence and have it apply for all time; a Gödel sentence for a present system can be added as an axiom, and a Gödel sentence for a future system cannot be used until one reaches that system (as it may only be able to be expressed in that system). So even if human reason is incomplete, there do not need to be statements which are forever outside of its grasp based on *GT*. The important thing is that there is no truth which is intrinsically outside of our grasp. Even if no person could have complete knowledge, every truth is potentially provable as we can develop our “systems” of reasoning in different directions as need be.

5. Applicability of Gödel’s Sentence

In spite of the above arguments, perhaps there are some who still think that *GT* can be applied to reason. If so, what would it show? That human reason is either inconsistent or incomplete. If it is inconsistent, then why not try to fix the inconsistency? If one thinks that there is no problem with inconsistency, then inconsistency does not seem to have the same sort of problems in human reasoning which it would in math and so the theorem loses its bite.

Assuming the consistency of reason, what does incompleteness show? If human reason is, at any given finite time, incomplete, this is hardly a revolutionary thought. Even if it shows that human reason is theoretically incomplete no matter what, this is no different from stating that there could be things forever outside of our experience. This notion may be something interesting to think about, but many schools of thought across the ages have said things of this sort in much more

profound ways. Even assuming that human reason is incomplete (which seems to be a likely situation), how does this entail that it is bankrupt? To say that metaphysics cannot know the mind of God is not to say that metaphysics is worthless and unfruitful, or that we could dispense with it.

But would the incompleteness generated from *GT* even show this much? In the mathematical system in which Gödel proves his theorem, his sentence only says that "This sentence cannot be proven."³⁰ It is not a deep truth which cannot be proven; it is not some interesting fact which we have been trying to obtain. It is a specially constructed sentence which was created for the sole purpose of being self-referential. It may very well be that *GT* has no practical result in mathematics, even assuming that mathematics could be completely formalized; everything which we wished to have proven can still be proven, just not pathological cases like Gödel's sentence. It simply serves one purpose, which is to demonstrate the impossibility of the formal projects attempted by Russell, Frege, Hilbert, and others, but it does not hinder mathematicians in their work. It points us to something curious about human reason which is important in one particular situation without actually showing that anything we wished to know on the basis of reason cannot be known.³¹

Conclusion

GT has its place in mathematics as the theorem which proves that no formal system can ever be perfectly complete. Within this context it works well; outside of it, it flounders. If a given system is not formalizable, encodable, bivalent, and stable, then it cannot be subject to the incomplete/inconsistent dichotomy as established by Gödel. If human reason is inconsistent, then this need not result in the terrors which it would for deductive logic (though some formulations of inconsistency can still be bad enough; we are not advocating pell-mell irrationality). Likewise, in all probability human reason is indeed incomplete, but this

need not ruin any of our philosophical travel plans due to Gödel's formulation of the problem. We may not wish to subscribe to a Platonic understanding of mathematics, as Gödel did, but as Christian philosophers we do believe that God is rational and that his rationality is displayed in the universe he created, including its mathematical features.

Notes

1. Werner Heisenberg, *Physics and Philosophy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1958).
2. So, communications professor Eric Mark Kramer states dogmatically concerning Heisenberg and his associates, "They all agree that classical logic, which prejudices thinking by positing axioms and theorems that restrict the world to an either/or closed systematics must be abandoned or fundamentally 'modified.' It may 'feel good' and dispel uncertainty, but it is false." Ignoring the fact that those who make assertions such as this obviously give themselves exemptions from their own conclusions, we see how they are intentionally using an idea derived from science to call science into question. Eric Mark Kramer, *Modern/Postmodern: Off the Beaten Path of Antimodernism* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1997), p. 176.
3. The point of Peano's axioms is, of course, not just to calculate how much $2 + 2$ comes out to. This information is probably still best uncovered by taking two apples, adding two more apples, and then counting the entire collection. (Hint: The answer is 4.) Peano produced five axioms that defined the nature of natural numbers. A quick survey of basic textbooks will reveal that different authors present these axioms in different formats, sometimes using 1 as the starting number and sometimes 0, depending on whether one considers 0 to be a natural number, as Peano did. Let n stand for the number 0 (or 1) and let the subsequent integers be considered n 's successors. Then any number m is a successor to n . For example, if we start with 0, the number 1 is the first successor to n , also designated as $(n+1)$.

- 1) n is a natural number.

$$(\exists x)x=n$$

- 2) Each natural number has a successor.

$$(x)(\exists y)y+1=x$$

- 3) The number 0 (or 1) is not the successor of any natural number.

$$\sim(\exists x)n=(x+1)$$

4) If the successor of x is the successor of y , then x equals y .

$$(x)(y)((x+1)=(y+1)) \supset x=y$$

5) Given the following conditions:

a. n is a member of a set A of natural numbers;

b. If x is a member of set A , then $x+1$ is also a member of set A ;

then c) set A contains all natural numbers.

4. "Über formal unentscheidbare Sätze der Principia Mathematica und verwandter Systeme," *I. Monatshefte für Mathematik und Physik* 38 (1931): 173-98. One English translation: *On Formally Undecidable Propositions of Principia Mathematica and Related Systems*, trans. by B. Meltzer (Mineola, N.Y. : Dover, 1992). In the past, the phrase, "and related systems," has been used to show that an application of Gödel's theorem beyond the *PM* is possible. In this paper, we will show that being "related" also involves numerous restrictions.
5. Rebecca Goldstein, *Incompleteness: The Proof and Paradox of Kurt Gödel* (New York: Norton, 2005), p. 117.
6. William Dunham, *The Mathematical Universe* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1994), pp. 213-223.
7. The Russell paradox begins by recognizing that some sets appear to be members of themselves, e.g., the set of all the ideas in the world is itself an idea, while others are not, e.g. the set of all mothers in the world is not also a mother. Now imagine a set R , composed completely and exclusively of all the sets that are not members of themselves and ask yourself whether R is a member of itself or not. If it is not, then it must be a member of itself, in which case it is. But then, if it is, it cannot be a member of itself, and so it is not. Then, however, it must be a member of itself, and we keep going around the vicious circle. Russell sought to avoid this paradox by proposing the theory of types, which decrees unilaterally that no set can be a member of itself (appearances notwithstanding). Thus, for example, the set of ideas should not be thought of as an idea in the same sense as the ideas that compose the set. Whether we might think of this as an acceptable solution or not, Russell considered it to be adequate. Alfred North Whitehead and Bertrand Russell, *Principia Mathematica* to *56 (London: Cambridge University Press, orig. 1910, 1962), p. 37 *et passim*.
8. Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), pp. 42-43.

9. Ibid, p. 43.
10. Lyotard himself opted out of the idea of an ideal language, of course, and chose to understand language along a line similar to Wittgenstein's language games.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. Hugo L. Meynell, *Postmodernism and the New Enlightenment* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1999), p. 103.
15. In the same paper, Gödel published his second incompleteness theorem (or Proposition XI) as well, which states that were an arithmetical system to prove its own consistency, then it would be inconsistent. The first incompleteness theorem (or Proposition VI) is actually a step towards proving this result.
16. Gödel's original theorem states that, "To every omega-consistent recursive class c of formulae there corresponds recursive class-signs r such that neither $v \text{ Gen } r$ nor $\text{Neg}(v \text{ Gen } r)$ are in $\text{Flg}(c)$, where v is the free variable of r ," where "Neg x " is the encoded negation of x , " $v \text{ Gen } r$ " is the encoded generalization of the variable v in the sentence r , and $\text{Flg } c$ is the set of consequences of c ." Kurt Gödel, *Sätze*, p. 187; Meltzer translation, p. 57.
17. This consequence is due to the fact that any system which can define the natural numbers must be able to support mathematical induction, and from this all recursive relations can be shown to be decidable. If all recursive relations are decidable, then all of the relations which Gödel defines are creatable in the system. Given this fact, he can prove his theorem. Furthermore, Rosser shortly thereafter showed that the proof of the theorem can be modified so that it proves that the given system is either inconsistent or incomplete. B. Rosser, "Extensions of some theorems of Gödel and Church." *Journal of Symbolic Logic*, 1 (1936), pp. 87-91.
18. Rebecca Goldstein, *Incompleteness: The Proof and Paradox of Kurt Gödel* (New York: Norton, 2005), pp. 44-51.
19. Douglas R. Hofstadter, *Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid* (New York: Basic Books, 1979), pp. 33-63, gives a good introduction to formal systems, upon which this example is based.
20. Thus, according to Gödel's encoding on p. 179 of his original paper, the symbol "(" is 11, ") " is 13, " x " is 17, " ~ " is 5, and " v " is 7, . Then, the sentence $(x \ v \ \sim x)$ is further encoded as $2^{11} \times 3^{17} \times 5^7 \times 7^5 \times 11^{17} \times 13^{13}$, where consecutive prime numbers represent the position within the sentence and the exponents of these numbers represent the sym-

bol at the position. Proofs can be encoded in a similar fashion, with the Gödel number of the proof being 2 to the power of the number for the first sentence multiplied by 3 to the power of the number for the second sentence, and so on.

21. One can, for example, take the number $2^{11} \times 3^{17} \times 5^7 \times 7^5 \times 11^{17} \times 13^{13}$ which is the Gödel number of $(x \vee \sim x)$. This number then has properties such as “being divisible by 2^{11} ”. This particular property would be a way of stating “this sentence has ‘(as its first symbol)’.”
22. Gödel, *Sätze*, pp. 179-186; Meltzer translation, pp. 49-56.
23. Rosser’s revisions take a slightly different route to establish either incompleteness or inconsistency, though using similar principles. Rosser, “Extensions,” p. 89. In particular, Rosser notes an equivalence between the predicate “is provable” and “is provable and for an existing proof there is no other sentence with a smaller Gödel number which would also be a proof.” This equivalence is not demonstrable within the system, as it requires an assumption of consistency which cannot be proven; however, when looking from outside of the system and assuming consistency, it is obvious. Rosser then proceeds to use this beefed-up provability predicate to produce his undecidable sentence. We might also mention that similar conclusions were reached with different methods by others, most notably perhaps, by Alan Turing whose “machine” was a forerunner of the modern computer.
24. Gödel’s theorem works because the seemingly paradoxical statement is a statement concerning what an interpretation of the system says about the system, not a statement of what the system says about itself or what the interpretation says about itself. “This sentence is false” is a paradox and can be dismissed as meaning nothing; Gödel’s theorem cannot be dismissed so handily as there are no directly self-referential statements. This is what allows it to transcend the safeguards erected by Russell and Whitehead in *PM*, where the theory of ramified types was intended to avoid these types kinds of referential problems.
25. Plato. *Meno*, trans. by Benjamin Jowett. (<http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/etext99/1meno10.txt>, 1999)
26. Hofstadter, *Gödel, Escher, Bach*, pp. 559-85.
27. The Riemann Hypothesis, first formulated by Bernhard Riemann in 1859, is an important unsolved problem in mathematics. For more on it, see E. C. Titchmarsh, *The Theory of the Riemann Zeta-Function*, revised by D. R. Heath-Brown (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

28. For more on this, see J. R. Lucas, *Minds, Machines, and Gödel*, in Alan Ross Anderson, *Minds and Machines*, (Englewood Cliffs, N. J. : Prentice-Hall, 1964), pp. 43-59
29. Gödel, p. 44.
30. Proposition IX on p. 66 of Gödel's paper shows that there are undecidable propositions besides the one which Gödel constructs in Proposition VI, but by Proposition X the satisfiability of such propositions is equivalent to the satisfiability of the earlier one. Also, in footnote 55 on the same page Gödel mentions that "every formula of the restricted predicate calculus . . . is either demonstrable as universally valid or else that a counter-example exists", though such a counter-example cannot always be shown within the formal system.
31. One possible problem that would remain is that if *GT* applies to reason, then other theorems (such as his second incompleteness theorem or Church's theorem) could apply. As these would have to be covered one by one, they will not be dealt with here; however, anything building off of *GT* will only have impact insofar as it can build off the foundation which *GT* gives.

Sankara's Two-Level View of Truth: Nondualism on Trial

Douglas Groothuis

Sankara (788-820 AD) was the principle ancient expositor of impersonalist Advaita Vedanta Hinduism, the nondualistic or monistic school. Since many in the West today, such as the prolific author Ken Wilber, advance this kind of metaphysics, a careful analysis of Sankara's ideas is pertinent. Sankara interpreted the sacred Scriptures as teaching that Brahman was the one supreme reality and that all that is, is Brahman. The supposedly ultimate Self (Atman) is really identical with the universal Self (Brahman). The world of duality, diversity, and individuality is fundamentally unreal or illusory (*maya*); only ignorance (*avidya*) allows us to grant it full reality

However, against the Buddhists, who denied the reality of external objects, Sankara argued that the world of *maya* is a world of subjects apprehending external objects. He argues:

The non-existence of external things cannot be maintained because we are conscious of external things. In every act of perception we are conscious of some external thing corresponding to the idea, whether it be a post or a wall or a piece of clothe or a jar, and that of which we are conscious cannot but exist.¹

How can a nondualist seriously utter such things? After all, Brahman alone is truly real—the sole Being. Sankara tries to reconcile his understanding of the objective world of individuated things perceived by individual beings with the final reality of nondualism by virtue of a two-level theory of truth. For the unenlightened the plural world seems to be the ultimate reality. But those who practice *jñana marga* (the way of knowledge) and attain a “cognition of the infinite” transcend this lower level to attain to spiritual release (*moksha*) by gaining knowledge (*vidya*) This two-level view can be explicated in four interrelated dimensions.²

1. Rationality (epistemology):
 - a. Ordinary: rational, discursive, conceptual
 - b. Absolute: intuitive, immediate, mystical knowledge or realization
2. Reality (metaphysics):
 - a. Empirical reality: phenomenally real objects
 - b. Absolute reality: non-dual, non-differentiated
3. Theology (metaphysics):
 - a. Saguna Brahman: qualified, duality (Personal Lord; Isvara; worship, hymnody)
 - b. Nirguna Brahman: unqualified, non-dual (“Not this, not that” (*neti, neti*); no relationship)
4. Morality:
 - a. Conventional: karmic level; ethical disjunctions
 - b. Non-dual: transcendence of ethical realm

The “A” level has only a provisional or relative reality while the “B” level is ultimate. Therefore, Deutsch comments:

The whole of perception and reason [the “A” levels above] is negated the moment there is a dawning of the truth of [Nirguna] Brahman [the “B” levels]. *If Brahman alone is real*, then clearly there cannot be another order of truth that subsists in some kind of finality. From the standpoint of Brahman, all other knowledge is *false*.³

Notice the qualifying phrase “from the standpoint of Brahman.” Sankara wants to argue that from the standpoint of the “A” level there are subject/object/consciousness relationships. However, they are not “ultimately real” or “finally true.” The great question then becomes, “What is the difference between the ‘ultimately real’ and the lesser versions of ‘reality’?”

Madhva (1197-1276) was a Hindu teacher who founded a school, called *Dvaita*, that intentionally opposed monism and non-dualism. He argued that Sankara’s levels-of-truth doctrine was incoherent. There is either a world of plural selves or there is not. You cannot have it both ways. Madhva appealed to the unity of truth and assumed the law of excluded middle. A declarative statement (one that expresses a proposition) is either true or false; not neither truth nor false and not both true and false. To claim that the statement “There are many selves” is true for one level but not true for another “ultimate” level just doesn’t make sense to Madhva. His critique is cogent because ontological claims either correctly describe states of affairs or they fail to do so. It is difficult to rank levels of truth when the higher level contradicts the lower level. Consider the following statements:

1. The Atlanta Braves lost the 1993 baseball playoffs in four games.
2. The Braves lost the 1993 baseball playoffs in six games.
3. The Braves didn’t make it to the 1993 baseball playoffs.

Only statement (2) is true because the Braves lost the playoffs in six games to the Philadelphia Phillies. Both statements (1) and (3) are false because they fail to describe the objective state of affairs accurately. Neither of the two false statements are “true” from any perspective. They are false. If someone believes either (1) or (3) to be true, he is in error. There is no question of “levels of truth” here in the sense Sankara wants

to defend. One might say that (1) is “closer to the truth” than three because the Braves were in the 1993 playoffs, even though they lost in six games instead of four. Nevertheless, when one knows that (2) is true, (1) and (3) are falsified; they are not true in a lower level of reality nor can either statements (1) or (3) be true on any supposedly higher level of reality either.

Consider other kinds of statements concerning differing perspectives on states of affairs:

1. On earth, things appear separate from one another, whether people or cities or nations.
2. From outer space the earth appears as one orb; separations are not visible.

Can these statements be arranged in a way analogous to Sankara’s levels of truth? Statement one is not negated by two; rather, one and two are complimentary descriptions of the same state of affairs. The statements do not contradict each other. We are members of one planet; but we are individuals who are, nevertheless, separable from each other in numerous ways: genetically, ethnically, sexually, geographically, politically, etc.

Now consider types of scientific descriptions to see if a two-level view of truth will emerge.

1. Newtonian physics accurately describes and predicts the motion of medium-sized objects.
2. Einsteinian physics accurately describes and predicts not only the motion of medium-sized objects but also that of the very small and the very large.

But this kind of example won’t work for Sankara’s purposes because both scientific theories relate to the same reality, the cosmos; whereas

Brahman and *maya* describe different orders of being. The reference- or explanatory-range of Einsteinian physics is greater than Newtonian physics, but the former does not, it can be argued, contradict the latter (as Brahman contradicts *maya*) but expands upon Newtonian physics by showing its limitations. Sankara, on the other hand, wants to claim that *maya* and Nirguna Brahman are two entirely disparate fields of reference with contradictory properties.

Sankara's attempt to rescue logic through a two-level view of truth seems to fail because the ultimate reality of Brahman ends up negating and contradicting the appearance of duality (however real it may *seem*). Consider his statement about Brahman:

The same highest Brahman constitutes . . . the real nature, i.e. that aspect of it which depends on *fictitious* limiting conditions, is not its real nature. For as long as the individual self does not free itself from [ignorance] in the form of duality—which [ignorance] may be compared to the mistake of him who in twilight mistakes a post for a man [superimposition]—and does not rise to the knowledge of the Self, whose nature is unchangeable, eternal Cognition—which expresses itself in the form “I am Brahman”—so long, it remains the individual soul.⁴

If there is one supreme and nondual reality of Brahman then any determinative attributes pertaining to duality, individuality, and finitude (whether respecting selves, the physical world, or Suguna Brahman) cannot obtain; they cannot truly describe actually existing conditions. An object cannot both be finite and infinite in the same respect at the same time (courtesy of the law of noncontradiction). Yet this is exactly what the two-truth theory gives us: The individual self is limited and part of a plurality of selves, but the Brahman Self is unlimited and absolutely unitary. How can the word “self” be used in the same or a similar way so as to convey any intelligible meaning in both instances? It is only used in an equivocal sense such that the referents “self” and “Self” cannot be the same entity because they possess mutually contradictory properties:

infinite/finite, one/many, eternal/temporal, etc. To refer to the individual self as “real” on only a lower level seems to solve nothing logically. Instead, it simply veils a deeper confusion.

The logical enigmas engendered by nondualism become painfully evident with respect to the doctrines of ignorance (*avidya*) and illusion (*maya*). What is the explanation for the ever-so-real-appearing world of the senses? There is none because the realm of Brahman consciousness is incommensurate with *maya*; that is, there is no logical relationship between the two. Deutsch explains that the questions of the “ontological source” of ignorance and illusion cannot be “intelligibly asked” according to Sankara because “knowledge and ignorance cannot co-exist in the same individual, for they are contradictory, like light and darkness.”⁵ Deutsch comments on this statement by Sankara:

Knowledge destroys ignorance, hence, from the standpoint of knowledge, there is no ignorance whose origin stands in question. And when in ignorance, one . . . [cannot] describe the process by which this ignorance ontologically comes to be.⁶

There are only three logical sources for *maya*. And it seems entirely appropriate to search for an ontological source since the two-level view of truth attempts to grant some sense of reality to the lower level of *maya*.

1. *Maya* originates from Brahman.
2. *Maya* originates from individual selves.
3. *Maya* originates from nothing.

Concerning option one, Sankara claims that *maya* mysteriously results from the play (*lila*) of Brahman. Brahman, in a sense, engages in *magic* to produce *maya* (the two words are related in Sanscrit). But this option clearly fails since Brahman cannot be the ontological source of that

which contradicts its essence. If there is no duality or principle of difference in “the One without second” (as the sacred text puts it), Brahman cannot be the source of *maya*. Given nondualism, there is no ontological “space” for such a reality. One might counter that the God of monotheism is in a similar pickle with respect to evil that exist in God’s creation. An all-good God could not generate the opposite of goodness—evil. But the analogy fails for two reasons. First, monotheism is predicated on the idea of an ontologically real creation that is distinct from and contingent upon its Creator. In this (finite) ontological space things may occur that do not express the essence of God’s (infinite) character. Second, monotheists in the Augustinian tradition attribute evil to the defective management of a good creation by corruptible creatures. Evil is not directly caused by God, but by creatures.

Option two explains nothing since individual selves are part of what is to be explained in the first place. Illusion cannot explain illusion. Option three is logically difficult to sustain since the ancient Greek maxim *ex nihilo nihil fit* (from nothing nothing comes) eliminates this alternative. “Nothing,” by definition, has no generative powers.

Sankara’s multifaceted conundra may be encapsulated in a prayer attributed to him.

Forgive me, O Siva, my three great sins. I came on a pilgrimage to Kasi forgetting that you are omnipresent; in thinking about you, I forget that you are beyond thought; in praying to you I forget that you are beyond words.⁷

If the analysis given in this paper is correct, Sankara’s metaphysics and epistemology of nondualism is logically untenable at the deepest levels, because it fails to give a plausible account of the relationship of Brahman to *maya*. If so, even prayer will be to no avail in its defense.

Notes

1. *Commentary on Bhhad-aranyaka Upanishad*, IV,4,6 quoted in Eliot Deutsch, *Advaita Vedanta: A Philosophical Reconstruction* (Honolulu, HI: The University Press of Hawaii, 1969), 95.
2. I derive these categories from Stuart Hackett's find study, *Oriental Philosophy: A Westerner's Guide to Eastern Thought* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1979), chapter four.
3. Deutsch, op. cit., 90; emphasis mine.
4. From *The Vedanta Sutras of Badarayana with the Commentary of Sankara*, trans. George Thibaut, 2 parts (New York: Dover, 1962), 1.3.19; quoted by David Clark and Norman Geisler, *Apologetics in the New Age: A Christian Critique of Pantheism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1989), 165; emphasis mine.
5. Quoted in Deutsch, 85.
6. Ibid.
7. Radhakrishnan, *The Brahma Sutras*, 37-38; quoted in Troy Wilson Organ, *The Hindu Quest for the Perfection of Man* (Athens, OH: Ohio University, 1970), 191.

Assessing Modern Psychic Phenomena

Ron Rhodes

A recent Gallup poll revealed that 32 percent of Americans believe in some sort of paranormal activity. The same poll revealed that 38 percent of Americans believe ghosts or spirits can come back and visit people on earth.¹ That means over one third of Americans—over 100 million Americans—believe in ghosts. Moreover, 73 percent of America’s teenagers have participated in psychic related activities, with more than seven million claiming to have personally encountered a spirit entity.² No longer can the paranormal be considered a fringe idea.

Understanding the World of Psychic Phenomena

Today’s paranormal landscape is littered with unique words that may seem like a foreign language to many people. It therefore makes good sense to briefly define some key terms.

The word *occult* comes from the Latin word *occultus* and literally means “hidden,” “secret,” or “concealed.” The term refers to hidden or secret knowledge, to that which is beyond the range of ordinary human knowledge.³ The word *paranormal* is similar, referring to that which goes *above or beyond* the normal, beyond what a person can sense with his five senses.

A *psychic* is a person who can allegedly perceive and interpret the

high-speed frequency world of the spirits. As a backdrop, psychics believe the spirit world vibrates at a faster frequency than the material world. These spirits allegedly send communications faster than living people are accustomed to. Psychics claim to have the ability to discern these rapid-fire messages.

A psychic *medium* is an individual who claims the ability to reach through the alleged thin veil that separates the spiritual and physical worlds, attune to the fast vibrations of the spirit world, and communicate messages from individual spirits on the Other Side to people on earth. Psychic John Edward says, “As I speed up and they slow down, across the great divide between our two worlds we meet somewhere in the middle and communicate.”⁴ The term *medium* suggests that the person is a “go-between”—that is, a *mediator* or *middleman* between the spiritual and physical worlds.

Psychics often utilize various forms of *divination*. This word refers to the attempt to foresee or foretell future events, thereby discovering hidden or secret knowledge. Divination was commonplace in biblical times (Deut. 18:11; 1 Sam. 28:3,9), often taking the form of witchcraft (Num. 22:7; 23:23; Josh. 13:22), interpreting omens (Gen. 30:7; 44:5), or astrology (Dan. 1:20; 2:2,10,27; 4:7; 5:7,11,15). Modern psychics often claim to have a variety of paranormal powers, including:

Telepathy—the receiving or sending of thoughts to another person.

Precognition—involving a supernatural knowledge of the future.

Clairvoyance—literally, “clear vision,” the ability to see something beyond natural means about the past, present, or future.

Clairaudience—literally, “clear hearing,” the ability to hear, via the “psychic ear,” various sounds, names, and voices that vibrate on a higher frequency in the spirit realm.

Clairsentience—literally, “clear feeling,” the ability to perceive a pro-

jected emotion from nearby or from another (spiritual or astral) dimension, and experience that emotional sensation within the medium's actual body.

Psychometry—the ability to psychically sense the history of an object—a brush or a photograph, for example.

Automatic handwriting—the ability to write words without apparent awareness, the source allegedly being a dead person's spirit or a paranormal entity from the etheric dimension.

As we explore the psychic attempt to contact the dead, additional unique terms emerge. *Spiritism* embraces the belief that the human personality continues to exist after death, and that these personalities can be contacted in whatever spiritual plane or dimension they are in.

Another word for spiritism is *spiritualism*. From a historical perspective, Spiritualism as a religion is perhaps the oldest religious cult in existence. Every known civilization has practiced it to one degree or another. Historical studies reveal mediums being mentioned in many ancient sources, including the Bible and the literature of the Egyptians, Babylonians, Chinese, and Greeks.⁵

Most spiritists believe that each human being on earth has a *spirit guide* who provides wisdom from the great beyond. Psychics claim to be in conscious contact with their spirit guides. Lesser attuned human beings say their spirit guides typically manifest their presence via a hunch or sudden inclination to do something.

Most psychics explain spirit guides in terms of the process of reincarnation. The idea is that when a person dies, he or she goes to the *Other Side* (through a tunnel, into the "white light," roughly equated with heaven) where communion with other spirits is enjoyed. After an indeterminate time—ten years, 100 years, 500 years, or whatever—each spirit allegedly incarnates into another human body. Before incarnating into another body, the person allegedly asks someone he or she trusts on the *Other Side* to be his or her spirit guide.

Some spirits—ghosts—do not enter the Other Side. Psychics claim that at death the majority of spirits proceed through a tunnel into the “white light” (the Other Side) following the moment of death. Some, however, allegedly refuse to enter the tunnel and choose instead to remain on earth, hanging around for any variety of reasons. For example, psychics say ghosts may think they are still alive, and hence choose to live on earth. Or ghosts may stay behind to avenge their murder, or perhaps to initiate contact with living loved ones. In any event, many people today claim to have encountered a ghostly apparition, or at least to have uncovered evidence that their house is haunted.

The Psychic View of the Afterlife

Psychics claim that following the moment of death, there is no judgment and no punishment. There is, however, a *life review* that takes place in which people see how they affected other people, whether it be positive or negative. Psychic James Van Praagh writes: “When someone passes over, they first attend a life review, during which they relive every single moment of their life, both the good and the bad. After this, many spirits feel a sense of regret over some of their actions or things that they said during their lifetime.”⁶

Psychics claim there are different levels (or planes) of heaven, and that people go to these different levels depending on how they lived their lives on earth. Those who excel in life and attain high spiritual awareness will allegedly reside on a higher level in heaven, whereas lesser evolved souls will reside on a lower level. There is a reciprocal relationship between life on earth and the afterlife.⁷

A common theme of psychics is that all religions are welcome in heaven. Indeed, in heaven there are said to be beautiful temples, churches, and synagogues that share the countryside, with altars of every religion, all coexisting in peace and respect.⁸ Psychic Sylvia Browne exults: “Methodists and Buddhists happily and knowledgeably pray side by side at Judaic services, Catholics and Muslims are utterly comfortable sing-

ing hymns of praise with the Shinto monks and the Baha'i. Joining to glorify God hand in hand is natural, necessary, and nurturing, as essential to our survival as the beating of our hearts."⁹

As believers in reincarnation, psychics teach that eventually all souls reincarnate into another body. The backdrop is that psychics believe that earthly life is a school. Part of our education on earth involves the law of karma. In simplest form, this law states that if one does good things in this life, he or she will build up good karma and hence be born in a better condition in the next life. If one does bad things in this life, he or she will build up bad karma and hence be born in a worse state in the next life. This means that what may appear to be an accident or even a natural disaster on earth is, in reality, not a chance occurrence.¹⁰ All things are based on karmic obligations. Everything happens for a purpose. "Your illness, or loss, or predicament is a part of your soul's growth," Van Praagh affirms.¹¹

Psychics tell us that every time we incarnate into a new body from the Other Side, we decide *when*, *where*, and *why*. We allegedly choose to incarnate and come to earth in order to learn very specific lessons—to grow spiritually.¹² Before incarnating, every person discusses his or her soul's growth with a highly evolved group of beings known as the Etheric Council. Through advice from these highly evolved beings, we decide on specific lessons to learn and the karmic debts we want to balance during this lifetime, which are then recorded on a psychic chart. Once we incarnate, our Master guide—a spirit guide—makes sure we stay on track.¹³

Immediately before we leave the Other Side to incarnate on earth, we allegedly have a personal meeting with the Messiah of our choice—whether Jesus, Buddha, Muhammad, or some other religious leader. They offer final spiritual counsel prior to our departure.¹⁴

Once we incarnate, we allegedly go through life living out what is contained on our chart, learning important lessons along the way. Once the process is complete and we die, we cross over to the Other Side yet again, where we eventually make preparations for *yet another* incarnation

to learn *even further* lessons. On and on the process goes, as we evolve to ever higher levels of spiritual attainment.

The Comforting Goal of Modern Psychics

Almost without exception, modern psychics claim that the primary reason the spirits want to make contact with the living is in order to assure their living loved ones that they are okay. The dead can allegedly see their loved ones mourning over their deaths, and so they want to bring comfort by conveying that death is not the end, and that they are in a good place.¹⁵ Once living people hear from their dead relatives or friends via a psychic medium, everything changes in their perspective. “With the knowledge of no death, they are free to live life. In an instant, a life overwrought with grief becomes a life ready to live each day and each moment with newness.”¹⁶

Psychics claim that “the biggest fear mankind has is of death. If we can abolish the fear of death, we can begin to live life to the fullest.”¹⁷ Van Praagh says that “most people who come to me want closure with a loved one that has passed over or need proof that there is life after death. What I supply is the evidential detail. That’s what helps them realize there is no death.”¹⁸

Psychic Sign Language

Psychics often claim they receive only thoughts, feelings, and images from the spirits—something that may be likened to “psychic sign language.” Often these thoughts, feelings, and images are symbolic. The more fluent the psychic medium becomes in understanding the symbols, psychic John Edward claims, the easier it is for him or her to understand what the spirit is seeking to communicate.¹⁹ For example, if during a reading Edward senses a tightness in his chest, he may interpret that as meaning that the person died from a heart attack. If during a

reading Edward senses blackness in the chest area, he may interpret that as meaning that the person died of lung cancer.²⁰

Edward says he never hears conversational language. He says people sometimes get the wrong idea that he is simply repeating what he has verbally heard from a spirit. In reality, he claims he is interpreting and delivering symbolic information as fast as he can keep up with it. "I get scenes in my head without the sound. I so wish I were hearing voices, but I don't. They're thoughts."²¹

Edward claims that if he were able to hear conversational language, he would be a lot more accurate than he is.²² He says that if there are mistakes in communication, it is only because he is misinterpreting the thoughts, feelings, and images.

The "Fishing" Technique of Some Psychics

My personal investigation of psychics emboldens me to say that deception is very, very common among them. More specifically, there is substantial evidence that many psychic mediums today "fish" for information during psychic readings. For example, a psychic might ask a television studio audience something like this: "Do any of you have a grandmother whose name starts with S? Or R? Or maybe D?" (They keep mentioning common letters until they elicit a response.) Another common fishing line might go like this: "I am sensing a female figure. It's either a mom or a mother figure who has crossed over to the Other Side." It does not take a rocket scientist to recognize that a huge percentage of the American public has a mom or mother figure who has died.²³ Or the psychic medium might say, "I am sensing the presence of a male who is older than you." (Everyone knows an older male who has died.) Such lines are bound to generate significant response in a large studio audience. Once the psychic has received a response, he can then fish for other pertinent information.

For example, a psychic medium might fish for information relating to how a person died. When speaking to a client about the death of the

client's father, the psychic medium might say: "I'm sensing a pain in the chest area." If he receives a positive nod, he may ask if the father died of a heart attack. (Obviously, many people in the United States die of a heart attack.) If the psychic is wrong about a heart attack, he may say he senses a shadow in the body, and then ask if the father died of cancer. Or he might ask about the head area—perhaps a stroke. Because heart attacks, cancer, and strokes are statistically the most common causes of death in our culture, the psychic stands a good chance of success in nailing a person's cause of death in this way.²⁴ Many people today seem gullible to such deception.

In Some Cases—Genuine Contact

Sometimes I talk to Christian critics of psychic mediums who say all psychics are frauds. I've spoken to others who are sure that all psychics are in contact with demonic spirits. I suggest that the more balanced assessment is that both fraudulent activity *and* demonic activity best explains what is really going on in the broader world of psychics.

On the one hand, there can be no doubt that many psychic mediums often utilize a fishing technique to derive information from clients. Moreover, I think it is hard to deny that some psychic mediums cheat, passing off information as derived from heaven when in reality it was derived via research prior to the session (some psychics even utilize the services of private investigators). Based on what I've been able to discover, I would guesstimate that well over half of what goes on among psychic mediums is fraudulent in some way.

On the other hand, it would be wrong to conclude that *all* psychic phenomena involves hoaxes. I am convinced that some psychics engage in genuine contact with spirit entities—but the spirit entities *are not* departed human beings, as psychics claim, but rather *demonic* spirits.²⁵ My old colleague Walter Martin is, I believe, correct in his assessment that "not *all* psychic or spiritistic phenomena can be exposed as fraudulent. There is a spiritual dimension that cannot be ignored. Authentic spirit-

ists draw their power from the one the Bible calls ‘a roaring lion’ who seeks ‘whom he may devour’ (1 Peter 5:8), who is Satan.”²⁶ One psychic I spent several hours observing in person, Kevin Ryerson (Shirley MacLaine’s psychic), gave rather convincing evidence of genuine spirit contact—that is, contact with an *evil* spirit. From such spirit contact come many “revelations,” including that there is no sin, no death, no hell, and that all people of all religions are welcome in heaven (see 1 Tim. 4:1; 1 John 4:1).

Let us not forget that in 2 Corinthians 11:14 the apostle Paul sternly warned that “Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light.” There is substantial scriptural evidence that Satan is a masterful counterfeiter. For example, Satan has his own *church*—the “synagogue of Satan” (Rev. 2:9). He has his own *ministers*—ministers of darkness that bring false sermons (2 Cor. 11:4,5). He has formulated his own *system of theology*—called “doctrines of demons” (1 Tim. 4:1; Rev. 2:24). Satan has his own *throne* (Rev. 13:2) and his own *worshippers* (13:4). He inspires *false Christs* and self-constituted *messiahs* (Matt. 24:4,5), employing *false teachers* to introduce “destructive heresies” (2 Pet. 2:1). He sends out *false prophets* (Matt. 24:11) and sponsors *false apostles* who imitate the true (2 Cor. 11:13). In view of this, while some psychics may genuinely think they are in contact with departed humans, there is good biblical reason to suspect they are in contact with deceptive demonic spirits, especially since many doctrines communicated by these spirits directly contradict the Bible (1 Tim. 4:1).

The Accuracy Rate of Psychic Predictions

The history of psychic predictions is riddled with failure. For example, not a single psychic foresaw what must be considered the most important and defining event of 2001: the terrorist attacks on the Twin Towers in New York City. Since then, there has been a preponderance of false predictions. In 2004, major psychics made many false predictions, including that our troops would be out of Iraq that year, Martha Stewart

would not go to jail, and North Korea would launch a nuclear attack. In 2005, major psychics made many other false predictions, including that our troops would be out of Iraq *for sure* that year, the giants would win the series against Cleveland in game seven, and that all the miners associated with the 2005 West Virginia miner's tragedy would live (all but one died). They had a similar dismal record for 2006.

In one highly publicized case, Sylvia Browne was asked by despondent parents the state of their missing child. They asked if the child was still alive. "No," Sylvia said. As the mother broke down in tears, Sylvia informed the parents that young Shawn was buried beneath two boulders. They wept inconsolably, utterly crushed with grief. Four years later, Shawn was found alive and well with his abductor, Michael Devlin, in Kirkwood, Missouri.²⁷

Of course, on their television shows, many psychics seem spot-on accurate. Viewers are generally unaware, however, that each half-hour episode of John Edward's *Crossing Over* TV show requires six hours of taping. Why so? Because the editors of the program must carefully pluck successes from a whole mass of misses that are set forth during the taping.²⁸ Further, for several hours prior to the actual taping, some of Edward's assistants socialize with audience members, leading some critics to suspect that they are engaged in information-gathering.

What about those times when psychics *do* seem to be accurate in a prediction? Several observations are in order. First, an occasional "hit" in a sea of "misses" is not impressive. Second, some accurate "hits" are due to the cards being stacked in the psychic's favor—such as a psychic who predicted continued Palestinian hostility toward Israel. Third, some accurate hits are nothing more than lucky guesses. For example, I could "predict" that American troops will be out of Iraq in 2009, *and it could happen*.

Ready with Excuses

When psychics make a wrong prediction or set forth inaccurate in-

formation during a psychic reading, they always seem to have an excuse ready at hand. For example, when psychic Char Margolis appeared on *Larry King Live*, she made a number of obvious errors. Covering herself, she said these errors may be due to “trickster energy” (trickster spirits).²⁹

When psychic James Van Praagh had some major misses on a different *Larry King Live* broadcast, psychic John Edward (also on the show) suggested that the information must be meant for someone else, either in the listening audience, a friend, coworker, or relative, someone in another building nearby, or perhaps someone in the past or in the future, known or unknown. With this kind of latitude, psychics can apparently never be wrong.³⁰

In quite a number of cases, psychics describe dead loved ones in ways that seem foreign to the memories of the living. Psychics have their excuses ready. They claim that people undergo changes once they “cross over” to the Other Side. When a person dies, he or she sheds the human body along with all worldly limitations. Physical weaknesses are gone. Emotional burdens dissolve. Our negative aspects soften, and our positive aspects become highlighted. For this reason, psychics advise their clients not to expect their loved ones to be exactly as they were while alive on earth. This is a very handy excuse, since psychics often get personal details wrong about those on the Other Side.

A Christian Assessment

There are quite a number of points that can be made in assessing modern psychic and ghost phenomena from a Christian viewpoint. Because of space limitations, I will summarize only the most important of these. Those interested in a more substantive treatment may consult my book, *The Truth Behind Ghosts, Mediums, and Psychic Phenomena*.³¹

The Truth About Ghosts

A thorough investigation into ghostly phenomena, involving years of research, leads me to suggest the following:

Ghost Phenomena Is Predominantly Experience-Based. One cannot help but note that much of the so-called evidence for ghost phenomena is based on experience and feelings, not on objective data. It is fair to demand that if one is going to make extraordinary claims, one must back up those claims with extraordinary evidence, not mere feelings or experiences.

Many ghost reports involve a person's peripheral vision. Experts tell us that peripheral vision is very sensitive to motion. Peripheral vision, of course, does not focus on specific shapes but rather simply detects motion. Some people, when they sense a random motion outside of their focused view, jump to the conclusion that a ghost just went by. In reality, it may be as simple to explain as a car driving by that caused a brief reflection of light to shine into the house. *Experience can be deceiving.*

Another problem is that people's experiences may not necessarily be accurately reported. There is an all-too-common tendency for people to embellish what they have experienced, often adding sensational details to make their stories seem more interesting and fascinating. (This tendency has been documented in relation to the UFO reports of Roswell citizens.³²) This tendency makes it very difficult to trust many of the accounts people have given through the years of alleged encounters with ghosts.

Awakening from Sleep and Ghost Phenomena. A key factor that would seem to undermine many reports of ghost activity is that they often involve a person coming out of a deep sleep state. When a person wakes up from sleep, his cognitive and perceptual abilities may be on the weaker side, and he may think he is experiencing something which is in fact not real. It is even possible for a person to wake from a dream, and still think he hears voices in the house. Once the person completely wakes up, such strange experiences vanish.

Night Fears. Some people might have a night fear and wrongly at-

tribute it to ghostly or paranormal phenomena. During a night fear, people can experience a variety of symptoms, including shortness of breath, rapid breathing, irregular heartbeat, sweating, nausea, a sense of detachment from reality, and overall feelings of dread. A night fear involves an intense fear of something that poses no actual danger. Some people, in such a state, may wrongly interpret their experience as a ghost haunting their house.

Misinterpretations Are All-Too-Easy. A number of people have claimed house hauntings when in reality they have probably just misinterpreted the data. Claiming a ghostly intrusion simply because an item seems to be missing from the refrigerator or because a painting in the living room is suddenly hanging a little crooked is unconvincing.

The Power of Suggestion and Conditioning. An interesting psychological phenomenon is that people tend to see what they have been conditioned to see. At the height of the European witch craze that took place in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries—a situation in which people had become *programmed* to see witches—there were virtually thousands of reports of flying witches. “I wouldn’t have *seen* it if I hadn’t *believed* it” seems a fitting twist on an old maxim.

In like manner, because of the many movies, television shows, and books that people have been exposed to about ghostly phenomena, one could argue that people have become *programmed* to expect the paranormal. Hence, when a person’s peripheral vision detects movement, or perhaps a person experiences feeling a chill, that person may jump to the conclusion that a ghost may be present.

Fraudulent Claims. Researchers have uncovered a number of fraudulent claims, especially as related to ghost photography. I have personally showed alleged ghost photographs to a professional photographer, who immediately commented on how gullible people can be. He noted it would take little skill to accurately reproduce such “ghost” photographs using common photographic techniques.

The Connection to Occultism. One might get the idea from reading the above that I dismiss *all* alleged ghost encounters as either fraudulent, a misinterpretation of the data, sheer subjectivism (“I feel like I’m being

watched”), or something experienced upon awakening from deep sleep. This is not the case, however.

While I believe there is good reason to suspect that *many* alleged ghost encounters can be explained in this way, I also believe there are cases in which people are genuinely encountering a spirit entity—though, as noted previously, *not a dead human*. I believe some people are encountering *demonic* spirits (see 1 John 4:1; 1 Tim. 4:1-3). It is highly revealing that many who claim to have encountered such spirit entities have some prior involvement in the occult, such as spiritism, necromancy, séances, or perhaps even playing with a Ouija board. I have observed over many years that such occultic involvement invariably leads to spirit contact.

Dead Humans—Not Available for Earth Visits

The Bible sets forth substantial evidence that dead humans are not available for earth visits as “ghosts.” Death for the believer involves his or her spirit departing from the physical body and immediately going into the presence of the Lord in heaven (Phil. 1:21-23). This is why, when Stephen was being put to death by stoning, he prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit” (Acts 7:59). Second Corinthians 5:8 confirms that to be “away from the body” is to be “at home with the Lord.” The point is, *departed Christians are not still on earth but are with the Lord in heaven, where they remain in intimate perpetual fellowship with Him.*

For the unbeliever, death holds grim prospects. At death the unbeliever’s spirit departs from the body and goes not to heaven but to a place of great suffering, *where they are involuntarily confined*, and not permitted to contact the living (Luke 16:19-31). Second Peter 2:9 tells us that the Lord knows how “to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment.” The point is, *the departed unrighteous are not still on earth, nor do they have access to earth!*

Hence, whatever people think they are encountering at alleged haunted houses and hotels is most certainly *not* the spirits of dead peo-

ple walking around. If a person is encountering any spirit entity at all, it is a *demonic* spirit.

Heaven—For Believers Only

Heaven is the splendid eternal abode of the righteous—that is, those who have trusted in Christ for salvation and have therefore been *made* righteous by His atoning sacrifice. Only those who believe in Christ are “heirs” of the eternal kingdom (Gal. 3:29; 4:28-31; Titus 3:7; James 2:5). The righteousness of God that leads to life in heaven is available “through faith in Jesus Christ *for all those who believe*” (Rom. 3:21, emphasis added). Clearly, heaven is for believers in Jesus Christ, not for all human beings indiscriminately.

Other religions *do not* lead to God or to heaven. The one sin for which God judged the people of Israel more severely than any other was that of participating in heathen religions. Again and again the Bible implies and states that God hates, despises, and utterly rejects anything associated with heathen religions and practices (e.g., Dan. 1:20; 2:2,10,27; 4:7; 5:7,11,15). Those who follow such idolatry are not regarded as groping their way to God but rather as having turned their backs on Him, following the ways of darkness. The *only* means of salvation, and entrance into heaven, is faith in Jesus Christ (John 14:6; Acts 4:12; 1 Tim. 2:5).

Judgment Follows Death

Contrary to the comforting idea taught by psychics that all people will face a non-threatening “life review” after death, Scripture soberly warns that all people—both Christians and non-Christians—will face God’s judgment. More specifically, Christians will one day stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ (Rom. 14:8-10; 1 Cor. 3:13-15; 2 Cor. 5:10), at which their lives will be examined in regard to the things done while in the body. This judgment has nothing to do with whether or not the

Christian will remain saved, but rather has to do with the reception or loss of rewards based on how one lived as a Christian.

The horrific judgment unbelievers face is the Great White Throne judgment, which leads to their being cast into the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:11-15). Christ is the divine Judge, and those that are judged are the unsaved dead of all time. Those who face Christ at this judgment will be judged on the basis of their works (vss. 12-13), not only to justify their condemnation but to determine the degree to which each person should be punished throughout eternity in hell.

Reincarnation—A False Doctrine

Reincarnation, a foundational belief of psychics, is problematic on many levels. For example, if the purpose of karma is to make human nature better, why has there not been a noticeable improvement in human nature after all the millennia of reincarnations?

One could also legitimately argue that the teaching of reincarnation and karma tends to make people passive toward social evil and injustice. In reality, belief in reincarnation serves as a strong motivation *not* to be a “good neighbor” and lend a helping hand. After all, if one encounters a suffering person, it must be assumed this person is suffering *precisely because* he or she has not yet paid off the prescribed karmic debt for the sins committed in a previous life. If one should help such a suffering person, it will only serve to guarantee that the person will be born in a worse state in the next life to pay off the karmic debt that was supposed to be paid off in the present life. Further, the “good neighbor” would also accumulate more bad karmic debt for interfering with the law of karma in the suffering person’s life. It is a no-win scenario.

Certainly reincarnationists grossly underestimate the seriousness of the sin problem (Matt. 9:12; 12:34; 15:14; 23:16-26; Mark 1:15; 7:20-23; Luke 11:13,42-52; 15:10; 19:10; John 3:19-21; 8:34; 12:35-46). Indeed, the reincarnational belief that man can solve his own sin problem with a little help from karma (throughout many lifetimes) is itself a manifesta-

tion of the blindness that is part and parcel of human sin. We do not need a mere *karmic tune-up*; we need a *brand new engine* (new life from Jesus—John 3:1-5).

Scripture indicates that each human being *lives once* as a mortal on earth, *dies once*, and then faces *judgment* (Heb. 9:27). He does not have a second chance by reincarnating into another body. Scripture indicates that at death believers in the Lord Jesus go to heaven (2 Cor. 5:8) while unbelievers go to a place of punishment (Luke 16:19-31). Moreover, Jesus taught that people decide their eternal destiny in a single lifetime (Matt. 25:46). This is precisely why the apostle Paul emphasized that “now is the day of salvation” (2 Cor. 6:2).

All Forms of Occultism—Condemned

While some psychic mediums, such as Sylvia Browne, claim they have a gift from the Holy Spirit, the utter folly of such a claim is evident in the fact that the Bible harshly condemns *all* forms of occultism, divination, and sorcery. Leviticus 19:26 commands, “Do not practice divination or sorcery.” Leviticus 19:31 instructs, “Do not turn to mediums or seek out spiritists, for you will be defiled by them.” The Old Testament is clear that a person who consorts with familiar spirits is cursed by God (Lev. 19:31; 20:6). So heinous was this sin against God in Old Testament times that sorceresses were to be put to death (Exod. 22:18). We read in Leviticus 20:27, “A man or woman who is a medium or spiritist among you must be put to death. You are to stone them; their blood will be on their own heads.”

Second Kings 21:6 tells us that Manasseh “consulted spiritists and mediums. He did much evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke Him to anger.” By contrast, “Josiah got rid of the mediums and spiritists, the household gods, the idols and all the other detestable things seen in Judah and Jerusalem. This he did to fulfill the requirements of the law. . . .” (2 Kings 23:24).

In 1 Samuel 28:3 we are told that Saul rightly “expelled the medi-

ums and spiritists from the land.” Later, however, we read that “Saul died because he was unfaithful to the LORD; he did not keep the word of the LORD, and even consulted a medium for guidance” (1 Chron. 10:13).

In Scripture, God categorically condemns *all* spiritistic activities as a heinous sin against Him. Deuteronomy 18:10–11 is clear: “Let no one be found among you . . . who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead. Anyone who does these things is detestable to the LORD.” Scholar Stafford Wright, in his book *Christianity and the Occult*, examined all such Old Testament passages on spiritism and concluded: “It is beyond doubt that the Old Testament bans any attempt to contact the departed. This is true of the law, the historical books, and the prophets. Is there the slightest sign that the New Testament lifts the ban?”³³

The Danger of Trances and Altered States

Psychic mediums often go into an altered state of consciousness when opening themselves up to spirits on the Other Side. Researchers have noted that such altered states can lead to harmful consequences. Indeed, Christian scholar Kenneth Boa has documented an increasing number of reports regarding people who have been harmed by such altered states.³⁴ Leon Otis of Stanford Research Institute has likewise documented that some who engage in altered states of consciousness develop increased anxiety, confusion, and depression.³⁵ It has also been found that the severity of symptoms is directly correlated with the length of time the person was in an altered state.³⁶ Researcher Gary Schwartz has documented that too much deep meditation—leading to an altered state—can hinder logical thought processes.³⁷ Researcher Arnold Ludwig found that “as a person enters or is in an ASC [altered state of consciousness], he often experiences fear of losing his grip on reality, and losing his self-control.”³⁸ These facts alone ought to be enough to dissuade people from wanting to increase their psychic skills, as today’s primetime psychics encourage them to do in their bestselling books.

What About the Medium of Endor?

Psychics and spiritists sometimes argue that support for their practices may be found in the Bible. They often refer to King Saul's experience with the medium at Endor as a proof that spiritism is acceptable (1 Sam. 28).

The biblical account of the medium at Endor is quite controversial, and Christians have expressed different views. A minority believe the medium worked a miracle by demonic powers and actually brought Samuel back from the dead. In support of this view, there are certain passages that seem to indicate that demons have the power to perform lying signs and wonders (Matt. 7:22; 2 Cor. 11:14; 2 Thes. 2:9,10; Rev. 16:14). This view is unlikely, however, since Scripture also reveals that death is final (Heb. 9:27), the dead cannot return (2 Sam. 12:23; Luke 16:24–27), and demons cannot usurp or overpower God's authority over life and death (Job 1:10–12).

A second view is that the medium did not really bring up Samuel from the dead, but a demonic spirit simply impersonated the prophet. Those who hold to this view note that certain verses indicate that demons can deceive people who try to contact the dead (Lev. 19:31; Deut. 18:11; 1 Chron. 10:13). This view is unlikely, however, because the passage affirms that Samuel did in fact return from the dead, that he provided a prophecy that actually came to pass, and that it is unlikely that demons would have uttered God's truth, since the devil is the father of lies (John 8:44).

A third view is that God sovereignly and miraculously allowed Samuel's spirit to appear in order to rebuke Saul for his sin. Samuel's spirit did not appear as a result of the medium's powers (for indeed, no human has the power to summon dead humans—Luke 16:24–27; Heb. 9:27), but only because God sovereignly brought it about. This view is supported by the fact that Samuel actually returned from the dead (1 Sam. 28:14), and this caused the medium to shriek with fear (see vs. 12). The medium's cry of astonishment indicates that this appearance of Samuel was not the result of her usual tricks.

That God allowed Samuel's spirit to appear on this one occasion should not be taken to mean that mediums have any real power to summon the dead. God had a one-time purpose for this one-time special occasion. This passage is therefore *descriptive*, not *prescriptive*. That is, it simply *describes* something that happened historically. It does not *prescribe* something that people should expect in the future.

Psychics Beware!

Contrary to what psychics may claim, they are playing with fire when they engage in contact with spirit entities. Even psychics and spiritists themselves acknowledge that there are evil spirit entities or "evil energies" out there. That is why they try to take steps to protect themselves.

Marcia Montenegro, a personal acquaintance of the author, is a former psychic and occultist who is now a Christian. From her many years of involvement in occultism, she recalls the dangers:

As this writer's psychic abilities expanded, so did the frightening experiences. Many of this writer's friends and associates in the occult often had similar experiences. In fact, it is common practice for a psychic to call on benevolent protective forces or to visualize "white light" (supposedly for protection) before practicing a psychic technique, doing a reading or spirit contact. What do they think they are protecting themselves from? By doing this, the psychics acknowledge the existence of evil or harmful beings, but how do they know these beings are not disguising themselves as benevolent spirits or guides? What law says a white light is a barrier to evil entities? Why would such a light keep out any spirits? Maybe the evil entities have been laughing all these years at this flimsy "protection" as they fed false information to the psychics and pretended to be helpful.³⁹

I think Montenegro is right on target. Psychics are being duped by evil spirits. These spirits have had virtually thousands of years of practice in duping human beings, and they know how to put on a good disguise. Their goal is to lead the living to believe that death is not to be feared, that death is a simple transition, that all people—regardless of what religion they subscribe to—cross over into the Other Side, and that one need not trust in Christ for the joys of heaven (1 Tim. 4:1).

Make no mistake about it, the powers of darkness *hate* Jesus Christ with a seething hatred, and they will do anything they can to deceive people away from believing in Him. *The deception is enormous, it is hideous, and its scope continues to escalate with every passing day!*

Notes

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Book Reviews

How Well-trod The Divide: A Review Article

Millet, Robert L., and Gerald R. McDermott. *Claiming Christ: A Mormon–Evangelical Debate*. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2007. ISBN 1-58743-209-9; 238 PAGES; PAPERBACK, \$16.99

Millet, Robert L., and Gregory C. V. Johnson. *Bridging the Divide: The Continuing Conversation between a Mormon and an Evangelical*. Foreword by Craig L. Blomberg and Stephen E. Robinson. Rhinebeck, NY: Monkfish Book Publishing, 2007. ISBN 0-97668-436-5; xxxii, 185 PAGES; PAPERBACK, \$14.95

Cordial dialogue between evangelicals and Mormons, or Latter-day Saints (LDS), is a laudable exercise. This does not mean that the way such dialogue has occurred has been without controversy. In 1997, New Testament scholars Craig Blomberg (evangelical) and Stephen Robinson (LDS) co-authored a book entitled *How Wide the Divide? A Mormon & an Evangelical in Conversation* (InterVarsity) in which they explored their theological differences and agreements. At the time, many evangelical critics of the LDS religion expressed concern that the book conceded more common ground than actually exists. In 2005, Eerdmans published a book by LDS theologian Robert L. Millet (a professor at Brigham Young University) entitled *A Different Jesus? The Christ of the Latter-day Saints*, in which Millet presented an apologetic for the LDS view of Christ. Again, many evangelicals were critical of Eerdmans, a Christian publishing company with a broadly evangelical heritage, for publishing a book defending Mormonism.

Millet has emerged in recent years as the leading LDS scholar writing and speaking to defend Mormon beliefs against evangelical criticisms. In 2007 Millet (long a prolific writer) had three books published in this vein. He is the sole author of *The Vision of Mormonism: Pressing the Boundaries of Christianity* (Paragon), in which he defends Mormonism as an authentic form of Christianity. His other two 2007 books, both co-authored with an evangelical, are the subject of this review. *In*

Claiming Christ: A Mormon–Evangelical Debate, Millet represents the LDS perspective while Gerald McDermott (religion scholar at Roanoke College in Virginia) represents the evangelical side. In *Bridging the Divide: The Continuing Conversation between a Mormon and an Evangelical*, we read what is presented literally as a conversation between Millet and Gregory Johnson, a former Mormon who converted to evangelicalism and became a Baptist pastor in Utah.

Many evangelicals are likely to view *Claiming Christ* as the most troubling of the “LDS–evangelical” books to appear so far. For one thing, McDermott distances himself from the evangelical tradition on various issues, notably in his slighting of biblical inerrancy and his outright rejection of *sola scriptura*—the belief that Scripture is the sole infallible standard for doctrine and practice in the church (9, 16-19). In the context of a debate with a Mormon scholar, the repudiation of *sola scriptura* is a huge concession. He asserts that “some Mormon emphases are, in fact, theological improvements to some contemporary evangelical beliefs” (56) and repeatedly argues that evangelicals can learn much from Mormons theologically (especially 224-25). Millet, for his part, neither distances himself in any way from the LDS tradition nor offers similar concessions of what Mormons might learn from evangelicals.

McDermott also makes controversial concessions regarding the soundness of LDS theology and religion. According to McDermott, Mormons agree “that Jesus was fully God” (16) and therefore, unlike the Jehovah’s Witnesses, affirm the “deity of Jesus Christ” (63). The reality is that Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses both affirm the “deity” of Christ but then redefine what that *means*. Mormons view Jesus as the first of God the Father’s procreated spirit sons and as having attained the status of a God; Jehovah’s Witnesses view Jesus as the first of God’s created spirit sons and as such the greatest of many subordinate gods. At one point, McDermott expresses delight that Millet agrees “that Jesus is God and is the only way to salvation (although evangelicals and Mormons disagree on what these things mean)” (60). But if we use the same words while meaning two different things, we don’t really agree after all. Most troubling to conservative evangelicals will be McDermott’s conces-

sion that Millet and other Mormons “participate in orthodox Trinitarian love of the one God among the three persons,” even though “this is not the way [Millet] would think about it” (88).

Despite these controversial claims, the book offers some useful contrasts between orthodox and LDS positions on crucial issues. After Millet professed to believe that Christ is “the Eternal God” (46, 47), McDermott’s cross-examination forced Millet to explain that in Mormonism “Eternal” can mean merely for a very long time (61-62). McDermott rightly argues that Mormons believe in “a different God,” in Jesus as “one of (at least) several gods,” and that humans are of the same species as God (64-72). Such trenchant criticisms make his generous assessment of the spirituality of Mormons that much harder to understand.

In *Bridging the Divide*, Millet and Johnson put into print form a conversation they report having had many times both privately and publicly. Johnson, it turns out, had facilitated the initial exchanges between Robinson and Blomberg that led to their book *How Wide the Divide*. That book sparked further discussions between evangelical and LDS scholars. Millet’s book *A Different Jesus*, published by the non-LDS firm Eerdmans, was one outcome of these discussions. In 2001, Johnson left his pastorate to found Standing Together, a ministry focused on fostering respectful dialogue between evangelicals and Mormons. Millet and Johnson began holding public meetings together in which they would ask each other questions and present their own views before live audiences. To date, they report having such public conversations more than fifty times.

Bridging the Divide presents a dialogue in the same format as those public meetings. After an introductory conversation (Part I, 1-32), “Bob” and “Greg” take turns asking each other questions and offering their responses. These questions include such matters as the LDS claim to be the “only true church,” what is an evangelical, their views on grace and works, and the nature of God and man (Part II, 33-60). The longest part of the book is a selection from the authors’ answers to questions from their audiences on their view of Scripture, evidences for the Book of Mormon, the Trinity, baptism for the dead, whether Mormons believe

in “a different Jesus,” and the like (Part III, 61-124). After a brief conclusion, Millet offers an appendix explaining why LDS theology is often difficult to pin down (131-48), while Johnson offers a lengthy appendix defending his advocacy of a “missional,” relational approach to Mormons in place of a “confrontational,” counter-cult apologetic approach (149-80). The book concludes with 25 “Guiding Principles of Constructive Conversation” (181-85).

In theory, *Bridging the Divide* is an attempt to help evangelicals and Mormons understand each other better. In fact, the book focuses more on evangelicals viewing Mormons more sympathetically. In both Parts II and III, Millet does the majority of the talking, and much of what Johnson says is concessive: evangelicals need to be nicer to Mormons (70-71, 107-8, 124), evangelicals have often misunderstood Mormons (66), evangelicals can learn something from Mormon practices (100-101), evangelicals have some unfortunate divisions (45, 86-89), some evangelicals exalt faith and grace at the expense of works (47-49), and so forth. Again, Millet rarely makes such concessive statements (see 77, 87, 127 for the closest Millet comes to making such statements).

Especially in this book, Millet shows himself a master at glossing over difficulties with LDS beliefs and practices. Consider, for example, the criticism that Mormonism encourages its members to base their faith on subjective experience by telling them to pray for a revelation confirming that the Book of Mormon is true. Millet responds by asking how some poor little old evangelical woman in Montgomery, Alabama, can ever have faith in Christ, if such faith must be based on knowledge of objective evidences. (The stereotypical assumptions here are arguably offensive, but let that pass.) Millet thus leads Johnson to agree that the woman could know the Bible is true by the witness of the Spirit—leading Millet to conclude that they believe the same thing about faith and reason after all (25-27). Millet’s argument here nicely avoids the real issue, namely, that Mormons routinely appeal to their “testimony” to deflect reasoned objections to the Book of Mormon (or to any other aspect of Mormonism).

There is no denying that evangelicals need to do a better job of

speaking in love to Mormons, and need to avoid some of the caricatures and virulent rhetoric that LDS associate with all “anti-Mormons.” Johnson has some good things to say on this point. Nevertheless, we also need to develop a strong, cogent apologetic response to Mormonism, especially in view of the success LDS scholars are having in getting their perspective heard. We do not need to choose between “relational” and “confrontational” approaches, or between “missional” and “apologetic” models—nor should we. Rather, we need to be both tough-minded and tender-hearted, both relational and forthright, speaking the truth in love. And if those of us who are apologists have problems with the way that McDermott or Johnson or others have engaged LDS scholarship, it is incumbent on us to do better.

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A World of Difference: Putting Christian Truth -Claims to the Worldview Test

Kenneth Richard Samples. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007.
ISBN 978-0-8010-6822-5; 300 PAGES, PAPERBACK, \$17.99.

This book is an introductory-level exercise in what may be called cumulative case apologetics. For the scope and depth of its coverage it may be the best available apologetics text representing that methodology. Cumulative case apologetics essentially tests worldviews abductively, comparing and contrasting their respective merits in light of various epistemological and aesthetic criteria. In this book, Kenneth Samples argues that the Christian worldview passes these tests better than any of its competitors.

The book is divided into three parts. In part one, Samples addresses various prolegomena to his task. Chapter one defines the concept of a worldview. It is “a cluster of beliefs a person holds about the

most significant issues of life,” or, following Ronald Nash, “a conceptual scheme by which we consciously or unconsciously place or fit everything we believe and by which we interpret and judge reality” (p. 20). In accordance with the typical discussions of worldviews, Samples states that each worldview contains beliefs about: theology, metaphysics, epistemology, axiology, humanity, and history. (I think this list is adequate, but I would have included beliefs about plight and solution.)

Chapter two discusses the criteria by which worldviews may be tested. Here Samples offers a list that is somewhat more extensive than is found in other texts. Whereas other books list five or six test criteria, Samples gives these nine: (1) Coherence: Is the worldview logically consistent? (2) Balance: Is the worldview simpler (though adequately explanatory) than alternatives? (3) Explanatory Power and Scope: Does the worldview adequately explain a wide range of facts? (4) Correspondence: Does the worldview correspond to well-established empirical and experiential facts? (5) Verification: Is the worldview empirically testable (verifiable or falsifiable)? (6) Pragmatic: Is the worldview practically livable? (7) Existential: Does the worldview address the internal needs of humanity? (8) Cumulative: Is the worldview supported by multiple, converging lines of evidence? and (9) Competitive Competence: Can the worldview successfully compete in the marketplace of ideas? I think that Samples’s expanded list is helpful, though it seems to me that (4) is redundant with (3), and (8) simply makes a methodological point about the use of the other criteria.

Chapters three and four constitute a primer on logic, the former discussing the laws of logic and the various forms of reasoning (deductive, inductive, abductive), while the latter explains several common informal fallacies. Though these chapters are well-written and will prove informative to readers, they seem largely unnecessary to the author’s purpose for the book. Given the abductive nature of cumulative case apologetics, it would have served Samples better to eliminate the chapter on informal fallacies altogether, abbreviate the discussions of deduction and induction, and give a much-expanded treatment of abduction (as it is, he spends less than one page on abduction).

Part two contains seven chapters exploring the nature of the Christian worldview. Chapter five presents a Christian perspective on truth, knowledge and history, providing critiques of relativism and skepticism, and grounding our ability to know the existence and nature of God. Samples also briefly discusses the noetic effects of sin, and argues for the compatibility of faith and reason. Concerning history, Samples underscores the Christian belief in God's sovereignty over the course of history, and surveys the stages of redemptive history. The material in this chapter is presented clearly and persuasively. Yet, Samples does commit a serious gaff in his discussion of epistemology when he describes *modest* foundationalism as affirming that properly basic beliefs are "either self-evident. . . , logically necessary, inescapable, or incorrigible. . ." (p. 81). What he describes here is not modest, but *classical* foundationalism—a view that most philosophers consider untenable.

The rest of part two could be considered a mini-systematic theology. In chapter six, Samples outlines the main contours of Christian belief via a commentary on the Apostles' Creed. At various points he helpfully intersperses, in a catechetical format, remarks on the worldview implications of Christian doctrines. Chapters seven through ten subsequently treat the Christian belief in the inspiration, authority, and canonicity of Scripture (including a detailed defense of *Sola Scriptura*); the nature of the triune God; the incarnation of Jesus; the Person and Work of the Holy Spirit; creation and providence (with brief discussions of the kalam cosmological argument and God's permission of evil); the creation of man in God's image; man's fall and original sin; as well as man's significance and meaning in the world. Samples does an excellent job in these chapters explaining and clarifying important Christian beliefs. Any person who is not already familiar with Christian theology would greatly benefit from reading them. As a work of apologetics, though, I wonder if these chapters could have been shortened or condensed somewhat to allow room for other things that are not treated in such depth (see below).

Part two wraps up with a chapter on Christian morality. Samples defends the dependence of morality on God, responds briefly to the

Euthyphro Dilemma, outlines the unacceptable implications of moral relativism, and explains that God alone can endow his creatures with meaning and significance.

In part three, Samples subjects several worldviews to the tests elaborated on in part one. Naturalism, though simpler than theism, fails the test of coherence. Samples provides brief discussions of the argument from reason and Plantinga's evolutionary argument against naturalism to show that naturalism is self-defeating. Further, naturalism cannot adequately explain important phenomena such as the origin of the universe, the existence of moral and aesthetic values, and consciousness. Lastly, naturalism fails the existential test because it cannot provide an objective basis for human meaning and significance, or a hope for life after death, or ultimate justice.

Postmodernism also fails the test of coherence in that its central claims—that there are no objectively true metanarratives, that there can be no knowledge of reality, and that all truth-claims are a matter of perspective—are self-defeating. It also proves unlivable, at least in its literary expression (deconstructionism), because not even postmodernists can live as if meaning does not reside with authorial intent. Postmodernism also provides no basis for objective morality or human meaning, thus failing the existential test. It further fails the competition test because, given its relativistic stance, it offers no answers to any of life's ultimate questions, unlike other worldviews which at least attempt to do so.

Samples argues that pantheistic monism also fails the test of coherence for several reasons, most of which are standard fare among Christian apologists. For example, its identification of atman (self) and Brahman (God) is ultimately self-defeating as is its distinction between illusion and reality and its belief in reincarnation. Moreover, pantheism cannot explain the origin of personhood and personal consciousness, failing the test of explanatory power. Samples also argues that pantheism fails the correspondence test because its assertion that people suffer "metaphysical amnesia" and that the world is an illusion are counterintuitive and unexplainable. In addition, pantheism fails the pragmatic and existential tests for reasons similar to those of other worldviews.

Ultimately, it does not “offer individuals a viable reason to live and die” (p. 244).

Perhaps unique to a book of this type, Samples offers an evaluation of Islam. Because Islam is a theistic religion it does not suffer from some of the same problems facing the other non-Christian worldviews. Nonetheless, Samples contends that it does fail the coherence test regarding its view of the alleged revelation of God in the Qur’an. It is unclear, however, exactly what Samples thinks the incoherence is. As he initially explains it, “On the one hand, Islamic theology teaches that Islam is part of and dependent upon the truth of the biblical revelation. . . . But on the other hand, Islamic theology considers biblical revelation inadequate and untrustworthy” (p. 257). He goes on to explain how the Muslims defend these apparently conflicting claims by arguing that the Bible has been corrupted in transmission. Of course, once one adds this latter assertion, there would be no incoherence in the Muslim view. And challenging the Muslim claim that the biblical text is corrupt is a factual matter, not strictly a matter of coherence. I am not sure if this is what Samples intended, but it seems that a clearer candidate for a possible incoherency is to argue that Islam (1) affirms the truth of the biblical revelation and (2) contradicts the biblical revelation in some of its central tenets as contained in the Qur’an. The Muslim claim that the Bible is corrupted can then be seen as an attempt to cover up this inconsistency. In fairness, this may have been what Samples intended to argue, but it is not clear from what he writes. Nevertheless, Samples does provide a lucid defense of the Bible’s textual reliability and appropriately challenges the reliable transmission of the Qur’an. He also challenges Islam on the basis of the existential and explanatory power tests.

The book’s last chapter puts the Christian worldview to the test. Samples walks through the nine worldview criteria that he outlined in part one and attempts to demonstrate that Christianity succeeds on all counts. Though I agree with his conclusions in each case, I found this to be the most disappointing part of the book. The book’s subtitle is “Putting Christian truth-claims to the worldview test,” which suggests

that this is the major focus of the book. Yet Samples devotes all of 12 pages to the task. And there are important challenges to Christianity vis-à-vis several of the nine criteria that Samples does not, in my opinion, address adequately, and some he does not address at all. For example, he defends the coherence of the trinity by remarking, rightly, that Christians do not claim that “God is one and not one and that God is three and not three” (p.267). And he makes the appropriate distinction between one substance and three persons. Yet, the challenge to the trinity posed by critics of Christianity is more complex than this and seeks to undermine the very distinction that Samples relies on to establish coherence. Though this is an introductory text, it would serve even the novice reader to understand the challenges to the trinity a bit more deeply and be aware of the resources that some contemporary Christian philosophers (e.g., J.P. Moreland, William Lane Craig, and Michael Rea) have provided in addressing this problem. Similar concerns beset his discussions of the incarnation and the problem of evil. (In fairness, Samples does cite more thorough treatments of these issues in the endnotes.) Also, Samples completely ignores some of the most common challenges to the coherence of theism, namely, attacks on the coherence of the divine attributes (e.g., omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence). Moreover, his section on the correspondence test would have been improved much by a discussion of the challenge of macro-evolution, and his treatment of the resurrection was also undeservedly short. My suggestion for future editions of the book would be to significantly reduce part two and significantly expand this last chapter. This would make the book a much more usable textbook and give unbelievers who read it a more robust defense of Christianity.

Despite its shortcomings, I think *A World of Difference* is a welcome addition to contemporary apologetic literature. Not only is the presentation clear and engaging, but as indicated earlier, Samples gives us probably the most thorough single-volume defense of the faith from the cumulative case school. Moreover, he includes some useful pedagogical tools that make the book practical such as study questions, informative sidebars, and an account of his own experience with suffering that runs

throughout each chapter and allows him to illustrate many of his points in a poignant way.

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At the Origins of Modern Atheism

Michael J. Buckley, S.J. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987.
ISBN-13: 978-0300-0489-71; 460 PAGES; PAPERBACK, \$40.00.

Michael Buckley is a Jesuit professor of theology who has held academic positions at Notre Dame, Boston College, and now at Santa Clara University. His twenty-year-old book, *At the Origins of Modern Atheism*, is held to be a contemporary classic in some (rather restricted) circles, but it has gotten very little attention in mainstream apologetics conversations. It is my claim in this review that the “Buckley Thesis” needs to be more widely engaged by apologists for the Christian faith today.

Buckley’s thesis is that the theologians of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries treated atheism as if it were a philosophical problem rather than a religious one, and in so doing denied the relevance of the person of Jesus Christ in answering skeptics and atheists of the time. Instead, they tried to defend an idea—the “god of the philosophers” as it has come to be known—rather than the Christian Trinity. This led to deism and ultimately to the atheism that characterized much of the French intelligentsia of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and continues to dominate academia today.

The remarkable thing is not that d’Holbach and Diderot found theologians and philosophers with whom to battle, but that the theologians themselves had become philosophers in order to enter the match. The extraordinary note about this emergence of the denial of the Christian god which Nietzsche celebrated is that

Christianity as such, more specifically the person and teaching of Jesus or the experience and history of the Christian Church, did not enter the discussion. The absence of any consideration of Christology is so pervasive throughout serious discussion that it becomes taken for granted, yet it is so stunningly curious that it raises a fundamental issue of the modes of thought: How did the issue of Christianity vs. atheism become purely philosophical? To paraphrase Tertullian: How was it that the only arms to defend the temple were to be found in the Stoa? (33).

This lengthy quotation is representative of Buckley's writing. At times the language reaches the kind of rhetorical flourish associated with the superficial writings of the New Atheism, but there is careful discussion and documentation throughout Buckley's substantial book.

The principal figures of the sixteenth century to whom Buckley points as beginning the slide toward atheism are Lessius and Mersenne. Leonard Lessius was a Jesuit theologian teaching at the University of Louvain in Belgium. In 1613 he wrote a treatise called, "Against the Atheists and Politicians of These Days." Profession of atheism was a crime in Europe at the time, so while Lessius was sure there were people professing it in secret, there were not public declarations of atheism that he was confronting. Instead, he turned to attack the thought of public atheists from the pre-Christian era like Democritus and Lucretius. "Atheism is taken as if it were simply a matter of retrieving the philosophical positions of the past, rather than a profound and current rejection of the meaning and reality of Jesus Christ" (47). The centrality of Christ to understanding Christian theism is relegated to a non-essential and even overly restrictive component of theism. Natural theology, for Lessius, is divorced from metaphysics (to which Christology might have something to contribute) and instead looks to the new scientific developments. Natural theology becomes just, "an effort to provide a preamble to Christian convictions about god which does not include Christ" (55).

Similarly, Buckley charges that the better-known and well-connected Father Mersenne responded to atheism philosophically rather than religiously. In 1624 he published *The Impiety of the Deists, Atheists, and Libertines of these Times*. He did round up some contemporary or relatively recent figures to attack: the skeptic Pierre Charron, the determinist Geronimo Cardano, and the rationalist Giordano Bruno. None of these may have been atheists, strictly speaking; but their ideas of God harken back again to pre-Christian times, corresponding to the skeptical academy of Careades, the peripatetic school of Aristotle, and the rationalism of the Stoics. These were species of atheism or forerunners of atheism, according to Mersenne, and he engaged them philosophically, but not religiously.

Buckley summarizes the situation: "In the absence of a rich and comprehensive Christology and a pneumatology of religious experience Christianity entered into the defense of the existence of the Christian god without appeal to anything Christian" (67).

To their defense, Buckley notes two factors that led to the methodology these theologians adopted. First, skeptics like Charron were vehemently claiming that certainty could not be achieved through philosophical reasoning, and good Catholics could only be so through a kind of fideistic reliance upon revelation. To Lessius and Mersenne, then, to respond to the threat of atheism with revealed truth would seem to side with the skeptics against reason. Secondly, Aquinas's *Summa Theologica* had become the principal text (replacing Lombard's *Sentences*) in university study; it elaborates a doctrine of God which is philosophical, but was set in a thoroughly theological context. Buckley maintains, however, that it encouraged a habit of mind such that when challenges were made from outside of the context Aquinas had in mind, the natural response to them was philosophical (66).

The rest of the book continues down the road that was begun with Lessius and Mersenne. Descartes would write in the dedication of his *Meditations* that he had always been of the opinion that the question of the existence of God should be demonstrated by philosophy rather than theology. And for Newton, the existence of God was a conclusion

demanded by his system of mechanics. In both of these instances, the “god” in question bears less and less resemblance to the Trinitarian God of Christian confession. And so the story would go until the only theology countenanced was natural theology, and natural theology became just a species of natural philosophy. “Theology gives way to Cartesianism, which gives way to Newtonian mechanics. The great argument, the only evidence for theism, is design, and experimental physics reveals that design” (202). Science dictated what kind of “god” was needed to make the system work—until LaPlace would famously quip, “I have no need of that hypothesis.”

Buckley’s book raises very important questions about the relationship of theology and philosophy in the apologetic enterprise. The issue here is not to find some sort of strict line of demarcation between the two disciplines and to stay away from all things philosophical. Neither is there the claim that there are no good philosophical responses that are relevant for Christian apologetics. Rather, Buckley wants us to see that the rejection of Christian theism is first and foremost a religious problem—not a philosophical problem. This is what the Christian theologians of the sixteenth century failed to appreciate.

Much of Christian apologetics today is the heir to the modern project of responding to atheists and agnostics with philosophical argumentation. There is no doubt at all that this has been successful in some quarters. It would behoove us, though, to bear in mind the story that Buckley tells and ask, “What is the place of revelation in our apologetic?” Is theism without revelation necessarily a non-Christian theism? What does it mean to answer challenges to theism by presenting the person of Jesus Christ? We may not always come to the same answers that Buckley does, but his questions are well worth consideration and careful reflection—perhaps more so today than when they were first penned.

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