

NOT CLASSICAL, COVENANTAL

## CLASSICAL APOLOGETICS

Generally:

p. 101 "At their classical best, the theistic proofs are not merely probable but *demonstrative*".  
Argument for *certainty*. By that is meant that the arguments are scientifically *demonstrated*.

## DEMONSTRATIVE?

"... a different understanding of the proofs than is found among the medieval doctors: the *rhetorical* form indicates, among other things, that the *primary force of the proofs is not so much to demonstrate as to persuade* the opponent of the existence of God. The Reformed orthodox version of the proofs, therefore, neither operates at a primarily theoretical level *nor serves to ground their theological systems in a rational foundation*. The proofs are directed primarily against those who, for a variety of reasons, ignore the reality of God's power and grace in human life and act as if God were an absent deity." Muller

## REASON AND DEMONSTRATION

"The form and the function of the proofs of God's existence in the Reformed orthodox systems, thus, also provide evidence against the claim that this theology is a form of rationalism. On the one hand, *these proofs do not function as the necessary and proper foundation of the doctrine of God*. They do not typically serve, as they did in Aquinas' *Summa*, as a demonstration of the ability of reason to point toward the same conclusion as is given by revelation, and *therefore of the ability of reason to venture into theological discussion*. Their primary purpose is to attack skepticism and atheism *on the basis of a fundamental, but non-saving natural knowledge, including the innate knowledge of God or immediate sensus divinitatis shared by all people*. This approach does not indicate the creation of an independent and/or prior natural theology..."

Muller

## A “BIBLICAL A PRIORI”

"The a priori order of the typical orthodox Reformed theological system rests on the testimony of God to his own existence—*on a biblical a priori*—and not on the ability of the theologian to argue the existence of God. (This model contrasts with Burman’s Cartesian approach and, in the course of the development of orthodoxy, with the *fully rationalist* approach found in the eighteenth-century Wolffian systems, in which the doctrine of God in “supernatural theology” *must be preceded by the demonstration of God’s existence* in “natural theology.”

## SELF-AUTHENTICATION/ATTESTATION OF SCRIPTURE

*Classical Apologetics*, 141, "Getting away from these circles we resume our linear thinking. The Word first testifies to the Spirit before the Spirit testifies to the Word. There is no circle here because when the Word testifies to the Spirit it has already been established as the Word of God by apologetics. It is *virtually* granted that the Bible (not assumed to be inspired) contains *generally* reliable history."

Geisler:

Presuppositionalists claim that the Word of God is self-authenticating. It needs no proof. It is the basis for all other conclusions, but it has no basis beyond itself. But what they fail to see is that while all of this is true of the Word of God, nonetheless, it is not thereby true of the Bible. For there must be some evidence or good reasons for believing that the Bible is the Word of God.

Presuppositionalists argue [that] the Word of God stands on its own, with no need of proof beyond it...The fact is, that any such truth claim demands evidence and good reason — the kind provided by Classical Apologetics.

## GISBERTUS VOETIUS (1589-1676)

Martin Becanus, *The Calvinist Circle*:

The circle of Calvinist theology...consists in first proving the Divine authority of the Bible by referring to the subjective testimony given by the Holy Spirit, and then attempting to prove that this inner acknowledgement comes indeed from the Spirit of God by referring to the Bible...

Voetius: No other principle or external means whatsoever that is distinct from Scripture and prior, superior (either in itself or with respect to us), more certain and better known, exists or can be invented that is suitable to certainly and infallibly demonstrate to us the authenticity and trustworthiness of Scripture, or to radiate by a clearer light than Scripture itself radiates.

## JOHN OWEN (1616-1683)

"We cannot," say the Papists..., "know the Scripture to be the word of God by the testimony of the Spirit. For either it is public testimony, which is that of the church" (and if this be granted they have enough); "or it is private testimony. But then," they say, "it will follow, 1. that our faith in the Scripture is enthusiasm. 2. That if the private testimony of the Spirit be questioned; it cannot be proved but by the Scripture; and so the Scripture being proved by the Spirit, and the Spirit again by the Scripture, we shall run in a round, which is no lawful way of arguing."

And, indeed, they do plainly run into a circle, in their proving the Scripture by the authority of the church and the authority of the church again by the Scripture; for with them the authority of the church is the motive or argument, whereby they prove the divine authority of the Scripture, and that again is the motive or argument, by which they prove the authority of the church. And so both the church and the Scripture are more known than each other, and yet less, too: more known, because they prove each other; and less known, because they are proved by each other.

## NATURAL REVELATION/NATURAL THEOLOGY

Assertion 9: General revelation yields a knowledge of God from nature — a *natural theology*.

*If people do in fact have a knowledge of God from nature, then a natural theology is possible.*

Natural theology, which is derived from general revelation, stands as a polar opposite to fideism... *Where natural theology asserts that people can and do gain valid knowledge of God by means of natural reason reflecting upon natural revelation, fideism asserts that God can be known only by faith.*

## MULLER ON A REFORMED VIEW

"...elements of the Thomistic “five ways” are used in rhetorical rather than in formally demonstrative arguments. Given, moreover, that God has been identified as the *principium essendi* of theology, the nominally Thomist *a posteriori* arguments no longer assume that God is not *per se nota*, not self-evident: rather, in a structure of argument that is *profoundly anti-Thomistic*, the arguments assume that God, as *principium*, is both self-evident and indemonstrable."

Although the Reformed orthodox discuss and even elaborate natural theology in a manner quite different from the theological efforts of the Reformers, the basic Reformation era understanding of the limits of natural knowledge of God and, therefore, of any attempt to formulate a natural theology—*clearly not Thomistic in its implications for the use of philosophy and reason in theology or in its denial of analogy between God and creation*—carries over into the theology of the Reformed orthodox, including its ambivalence about the value of the purely philosophical doctrine of God as Creator.

## REFORMED AND THE *ANALOGIA ENTIS*

...virtually all of the formulators of Protestant theology denied the Thomist analogia entis and declared that no proportion exists between the finite and the infinite (*finiti et infiniti nulla proportio*). Muller Vermigli concludes that no matter how clearly God may be inferred from nature to be the Creator, it is nevertheless necessary to know God as Creator by faith. The article of creation is the first article of the creed. Remove it from the articles of faith and the subsequent related doctrines, including the doctrines of original sin and Christ, will be unable to stand. *Faith itself demands that we learn even of creation by revelation. Vermigli thus explicitly sets aside the analogia entis of his Thomist teachers.*

## NOETIC EFFECTS OF SIN (NES)

*Classical Apologetics* 216 — "Van Til confuses the sinner's *rejecting* sound knowledge with *not having* sound knowledge. Therefore, he represents the unregenerate as having and not having knowledge."

*p. 50* — "To harmonize the Pauline passages, all that is necessary is to point out that general revelation provides and produces a *cognitive apprehension of God*. It does not produce intimate knowledge or saving knowledge."

Rom. 1:19-20, John 1:1-9 AND Gal. 4:8; 1 Thess. 4:5; 2 Thess. 1:8; 1 John 4:8.

## TROUBLING TAKES ON THE NES

*Classical Apologetics*, 243, "We suggest that classic Reformed orthodoxy saw the noetic influence of sin not as direct through a totally depraved mind, but as *indirect* through a totally depraved heart."

233, "But people do not necessarily consider themselves in opposition to God, *whose existence they do not even know at the outset*. They do not necessarily deny the divine being as Van Til insists they do. People do not assert their autonomy against an initially known God as Van Til insists they do. *They simply operate according to human nature.*"

## REFORMED ON EPISTEMOLOGY

“These early Reformed statements concerning theological presuppositions focus, *virtually without exception*, on the problem of the knowledge of God given the fact not only of human finitude but also of human sin. The critique leveled by the Reformation at medieval theological presuppositions added a soteriological dimension to the epistemological problem. Whereas the medieval doctors had assumed that the fall affected primarily the will and its affections and not the reason, the Reformers assumed also the fallenness of the rational faculty: a generalized or “pagan” natural theology, according to the Reformers, was not merely limited to nonsaving knowledge of God—it was *also bound in idolatry*. This view of the problem of knowledge is the single most important contribution of the early Reformed writers to the theological prolegomena of orthodox Protestantism. Indeed, it is the doctrinal issue that most forcibly presses the Protestant scholastics toward the modification of the medieval models for theological prolegomena.” Muller















