

Christian Presuppositions About God

A Paper submitted by Earl Jackson

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Preface:

The paper which you are reading was never previously published, but it contains a lot of valuable Apologetic material. Proving God, has always occupied a lot of space on the Theological bookshelf. But is it necessary? I don't think so. Why? Because God requires no proving. He is. He does. He says. And that's it. Nobody can add to that.

While this paper is not exhaustive, as a Doctoral Thesis would be, it is very suggestive and illuminative of a Christian Worldview way of thinking. I feel that it should be useful to any Christian who is trying to reach others with God's living and true message. We must never be ashamed of God, or apologize for who He is. Let God be God. Let God be true and every man a liar" - Rom. 3: 4.

I send this forth with prayer and dedication to the service of God. May He use it and bless it to those who use it for His glory.

Rev. Earl Jackson

Introduction:

The starting point for all Theology, and for an understanding thereof, is the Doctrine of Theology Proper. This paper represents a hybrid offshoot of both Biblical Theology and Systematic Theology. These are the two ways of studying the doctrine of God. Biblical Theology presents God from the aspect of how He reveals Himself over a period of time in an historical framework ; and Systematic Theology categorizes all of the different texts pertaining to the subject of God. This paper uses both approaches...Biblical and Systematic.

The Starting point of this study is precisely the starting point of any and all philosophy about the existence of God... Is God knowable? and if so, How is he known?

My presupposition here is that God is known only by Faith, and His existence cannot be proven in any kind of a laboratory of human construction. We will examine some of the different ways that scholars have attempted to prove God's existence, and we will show how miserably they fail. We will chart a course designed to show without a doubt that every system seeking to prove God, is based on presumption and presupposition. God's existence is assumed.

I. God Cannot be Proved

The text books and Theological Reference works abound in attempts to prove the existence of God. Since this is the case, we will begin by delineating some of the most common attempts to prove God.

1. Theological Arguments:

There are basically five main arguments for the existence of God.¹

- 1). Cosmological
- 2). Teleological
- 3). Anthropological
- 4). Christological
- 5). Congruity

We will Consider these one at a time.

1). The Cosmological Argument

This argument comes from the Greek word “cosmos” which means world. So the argument is based on the notion that the world and all of its order, arrangement and mass came from some source infinitely greater than the effects which it produced. Every effect has its cause. In this case the universe was caused by a creator. A pile of building material does not magically transform into a house. It requires a builder to put it all together.

The cosmological argument seeks to use nature and science to prove God’s existence. There might be some justification for this in Romans Chapter One verses 19 and 20. But it is totally questionable if we should view nature as a revelation from God which is to be understood as equal to His revelation in the Scriptures.

2). The Teleological Argument

This argument comes from the Greek word “telos” meaning “design”. This is

¹ See Emery Bancroft ; Christian Theology Pages 51-54

the argument from the design of the universe. This argument is based on the design and order found throughout the universe. Whether looking at the universe through a telescope or under a microscope, everything has immense order and design, and therefore a designer is implied. It is really nothing more than a subset of the cosmological argument, and it too seeks to prove God through the observation of nature and science. The cosmological argument and the teleological argument really belong together.

3). The Anthropological Argument

“Anthropos”, is the Greek word for “man”. This argument is based on “the mental and moral condition of man”². Man’s intelligence requires an intelligent creator. Man’s moral nature requires a moral lawgiver. Man’s spirit requires a spiritual being behind the creation of man. “Knowledge within” mans requires a “knowledge without” him. Intelligence in man, as distinguished from that of the lower animals, has to be explained.

4). The Christological Argument

This is based on the existence of Christ. Because Christ existed God exists.

Christ: A. Fulfilled the prophecies of the Bible

B. He worked miracles which only God could have done

C. He claimed to be on a supernatural mission

D. He still has a supernatural effect on people today.

The problem with this argument is that it cannot prove God, because the fact of “Christ” assumes “God” already. This argument is virtually useless in trying to prove God’s existence, but many apologists use it anyway.

5). The Argument from Congruity:

“ Congruity refers to a state of logical or practical agreement or harmonious relationship; the state of being harmoniously related or united; adaptation.”³ This is the most difficult argument, but it basically states that the existence of a personal God is in complete harmony with our mental and moral natures. We expect God to exist because that harmonizes with our experiences and intellectual pursuits. As I see it, however, this argument is nothing more than a different way of stating the anthropological argument as seen in number 3

² Ibid. pg. 52

³ Ibid. pg. 54

(above).

2. Problems with these arguments:

These arguments cannot prove the existence of God to an atheist for the following reasons:

- 1). Who caused the cause? If a so called God created everything, then who caused Him?
- 2). Is he a caused or an uncaused cause?
- 3). Is he finite or infinite? We cannot conceive of an infinite!
- 4). Is everything the result of one cause, or many causes?
- 5). Is he intelligent, or is he non-personal?
- 6). Is he actually a creator, or merely a fashioner?
- 7). Is he a moral being, or not?
- 8). Is he indeed a he, or does non-personal causes explain the existence of everything?
- 9). Is the existence of the Bible simply a collection of mythology?
- 10). Was Christ simply another human being?
- 11). Evidences for the existence of God are circumstantial.
- 12). There are many who have no concept of God.
- 13). There are many different concepts of God including the atheistic concept.

3. God is assumed and accepted by Faith.

Whether you believe in God, or disbelieve in Him you must do so by faith. The Christian believes through Faith,⁴ and the atheist believes that God does not exist on the same basis. Atheists have their own kind of faith...faith in the non-existence of God. Either belief cannot be proved, and both beliefs rest upon their own presuppositions. The platform is the same whether you believe in God or not...you believe it by faith.

“Every true logic must have an a priori and an a posteriori aspect”⁵. Professor Van Til indicates the necessity of such a logical formulation. For the Christian, our a priori is the impossibility of thinking of the non-existence of God. For the atheist, his a priori is the impossibility of thinking of the existence of God. Both starting points require absolute faith.

⁴ See Hebrews 11: 1-6 especially verse 6

⁵ Cornelius Van Til, An Introduction to Systematic Theology, (an unpublished classroom syllabus) pg 9, Westminster Theological Seminary, 1971

II. The Knowledge of God

The problem of the knowledge of God is the starting point for Theology Proper. How do we know God, and how do we demonstrate Him to those who don't know Him?

1. God's Knowledge is Transcendental

Our God-concept, our a priori, our starting platform is the idea that Man cannot fully comprehend God. We know the unknowable God by faith. This structure is the doctrine of incomprehensibility. We do not mean that God is incomprehensible to himself, but that he is incomprehensible to man, as far as man's innate knowledge of God is concerned. Yet the Bible is clear that even though God is incomprehensible, we can know him. John 17: 3 says: "That they might know Thee the only true God". So Christianity is all about knowing the unknowable. As believers we know Him in terms of His Self-disclosure which is in the Bible, and which He has told us we can know. While we do not know Him in any sort of comprehensive sense. We know Him in the sense in which He has revealed Himself. Our whole system of beliefs rest upon this presupposition.

2. God's Knowledge is Foundational

God is the only perfect whole. When man was created, (a doctrine which all Christians endorse in one way or another), God created him as an image bearer. In other words, man reflected the character of God. Part of that character is man's intellect. God is the only perfect whole, but man was created to reflect the whole and not just the parts.

Van Til says: "Man's knowledge is analogical of God's knowledge".⁶ Then, on the same page, he goes on to say: "As man's existence is dependent upon an act of voluntary creation on the part of God, so man's knowledge depends upon an act of voluntary revelation of God to man. Even the voluntary creation of man is already a revelation of God to man. Thus every bit of knowledge on the part of man is derivative and re-interpretive. This is what we

⁶ *ibid*, pg.12

mean by saying that man's knowledge is analogical.”

So our knowledge of God is analogical. In other words it is derived from outside of ourselves. It comes from God as the ultimate source of knowledge. We are “rational” because his is the ultimate rationality. We reflect that in how we think. There is no logic in thinking outside of the God - box. In Him everything is thought as one thought. We think because He has thought. We know because He has “made known”.

Some interesting scriptures come to mind on this point. We are told to have “the mind of Christ” 1Cor. 2: 16. “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus” Phil. 2: 5. “Bringing into captivity, every thought to the obedience of Christ” 2Cor. 10: 5. “Be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind” Romans 12: 2.

The knowledge of God is the foundational truth of all true Theology. It is for this reason that Calvin started his monumental work of theology (The Institutes of the Christian Religion) with a chapter entitled: “The Knowledge of God and of Ourselves Mutually Connected”.⁷ In fact the first 5 chapters of this great work by Calvin all deal with this concept of how to know the unknowable God. Look at these Titles:

Chapter 1- The knowledge of God and Ourselves Mutually Connected

Chapter 2- What it is to know God

Chapter 3- The Knowledge of God Naturally Implanted

Chapter 4- The Knowledge of God Stifled and Corrupted

Chapter 5- The knowledge of God in Creation and in the Continual Government of the World

3. God's Knowledge is Revelational

We are dependent upon God revealing himself to men. We can know nothing about Him without this self-disclosure. He is after all transcendent, but the Bible is careful to paint him not only as “the High and Lofty one who inhabits eternity” - Isa. 57: 15, but also as the God who is near enough to walk with Adam and Enoch - Gen. 3: 8, Gen. 5: 22,24, to converse with Moses - Ex. 3: 4, and to take upon Himself “the form of a servant” - Phil. 2: 7

It is the stooping down of God that makes Him near. John tells us that Christ is “the true light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world” - 1Jn. 1: 9.

⁷ Calvin, John; The Institutes of the Christian Religion; pg. 7

There are several ways in which God reveals Himself:

1). In Creation - "The Heavens declare the Glory of God" Ps. 19: 1; Ps. 50: 6; Ps. 97: 6; Ps. 19: 2.

2). In Providence - He orders the affairs of the world stating that "He does according to His will in the armies of heaven" - Dan. 4: 35.

3). In Scripture - This is the most detailed part of His self revelation. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God" - 2Tim. 3: 16.

4). In Grace - He has revealed His matchless heart of love in the plan of salvation - 1Jn. 1: 17; Eph. 2: 8; .

Christianity is eminently a religion of divine revelation. Our God is not aloof. He is not so far away in the realm of transcendence that he cannot be revealed to his people and to the world.

God did not have to reveal himself to man, but he did it because he loved man (Jn. 3: 16), Because He wanted to reveal Himself, and He has a plan for man which is also revealed in the Bible. Our presuppositions about God are the result of His direct revelations about himself. We must always embrace the things which we know by faith.

Paul wrote to the Galatians and upbraided them for being "Bewitched by false Doctrine" and "drawn away from the crucified Christ who is embraced by Faith" (Look up Galatians 3: 1-5).

III. Special Revelation

Theologians have generally agreed that there are two types of revelation - natural and special. The natural revelation would embrace such concepts as indicated in verses like this “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showed His handiwork” - Ps. 19: 1| Ps. 50: 6; Ps. 97: 6; and Rom. 1: 19-20. Special revelation is usually understood as the revelation of God in scripture. Speaking of these Two Types of revelation, Herman Hoeksema has this to say:

“Frequently these two forms of revelation are presented as if they were two wholly different revelations, not only distinct, but separated from each other. The one is adopted to reason as its subjective principle of knowledge, the other to faith. The one is a revelation of God to man in general, the other to His people in Christ. The one provides man with the necessary material for the structure of a “natural theology”; the other is the source of Christian dogmatics. But this is plainly erroneous. It speaks about general revelation, natural theology, and natural religion as if the original condition of the first paradise still existed. And it completely fails to take into account the important change that was brought about in this “general revelation” through the fall of man and the curse of God. Yet on the one hand, through this fall the recipient of God’s revelation was so changed and corrupted that he can no longer truly hear the word of God. For he lost the image of God, and all his light was changed into darkness. And although the light still shines in the darkness, the darkness comprehended it not.”⁸

This makes it clear that natural revelation is quite limited, because man is now in a fallen state. People who try to base an apologetic upon the light of nature, really have a very wobbly leg to stand on. These real significant truths about God can only be understood by special revelation. Thiessen discusses the importance of special revelation and says:

“Certainly, we could never know God if He had not revealed himself.

⁸ Hoeksema, Herman; Reformed Dogmatics, pgs. 41-42

But what do we mean by “revelation”? By revelation we mean that act of God whereby he discloses Himself or communicates truth to the mind; whereby He makes manifest to His creatures that which could not be known any other way. The revelation may occur in a single, instantaneous act, or it may extend over a long period of time; and this communication of Himself and His truth may be perceived by the human mind in varying degrees of fullness.”⁹

Thiessen goes on to discuss special revelation. His definition is simple: “By special revelation we mean those acts of God whereby He makes Himself and His truth known at special times to specific peoples”.¹⁰ Some examples of special revelation would be: miracles, prophecy, Jesus Christ, the scriptures, and personal experiences (such as the new birth, and fellowship with God).

Getting back to our thesis, we must now urge our readers to be clear about the necessity and certainty of special revelation. Our presupposition is that God exists and has revealed both himself and His plan.

This revelation is:

1). Necessary: Man is portrayed in the Bible as a fallen creature - Eph. 2: 1-3; one who’s understanding is darkened, and who’s will is corrupted. Man’s condition requires a revelation from God, because without it man would forever be in a state of spiritual death and darkness.

2) Certain: God indicates in the Bible that “Jesus is the light of the world” - Jn. 8: 12; Jn. 9: 5, and that “God so loved the world” - Jn. 3: 16. That Christ is “The true light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world” - Jn. 1:9. These verses and others like them indicate that God has some sort of universal love and concern for the state of mankind. This great love of God draws out from Him this desire for Him to reveal Himself and His plans. In some sense He wants man to know Him and He created man for fellowship. The plan of salvation embraces these concepts. The divine revelation gives us a solid construct on which we can hang all of our understanding and our eternal destiny.

E.Y. Mullins, the great Baptist theologian, indicates that not only do we hang our understanding and our destiny on the revelation of God, but also our experience. “The Christian religion has to do with two great groups of facts:

⁹ Thiessen, Henry Clarence; Introductory Lectures in Systematic Theology pg. 31

¹⁰ Ibid pg. 35

the facts of experience and the facts of the historical revelation of God.”¹¹ In other words Christians are people who not only receive the scriptures, but we receive The experience of God revealed.

IV. Jesus - God’s Ultimate Revelation

I have met a common objection that the Christian life and the knowledge of God is subjective, and I always counter that just because something is subjective does not make it real or true. The Christian subjective experience is real because it embraces the revelation of “God in Christ reconciling the world to Himself” - 2Cor. 5: 19. No other system can explain the vast body of truth contained in Jesus Christ. It has been said of Christ that if everything about Him were written in books, “The world could not contain them” - Jn. 21: 25. That indicates that Christ Himself is the ultimate revelation of God.

We have said that our presuppositions include the fact that God is, and that He is a revealer of Himself. Now, since man is a personal being, and since God is a personal being, it makes sense that God would reveal Himself in a person i.e. Jesus Christ.

Christ is the embodiment of God , That’s why He said, “When thou hast seen me, thou hast seen the Father” - Jn. 14: 9. “I and my Father are one” - Jn. 10: 30. The Jews perfectly understood what Jesus was saying. They took up stones to stone Him because He made Himself “equal with God” - Jn. 5: 18; Phil. 2: 6.

Christ is the key to scripture. As such He reveals God in a most personal way. “God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself” - 2Cor. 5: 19. The presupposition here is that Christ is God revealed and manifested in the flesh - Rom. 8: 3; 1Pet. 3: 18; 1Pet. 4: 1; 1Jn. 4: 2. The purpose for the incarnation was not only to reveal God, but to complete His Plan of salvation through Christ.

“IN Christ and by Christ, God effects complete self-disclosure, although He shows Himself not to reason but to faith and love. Faith is an organ of knowledge, and love is an organ of experience. God came to us in the incarnation; in atonement he reconciled us to Himself, and by faith and love we enter and lay hold on Him”¹²

¹¹ Mullins, E.Y., The Christian Religion in it’s Doctrinal Expression pg. 18

¹² Tozer, A.W. The Knowledge of the Holy; pg. 15

1. Matthew 11: 27

“All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him”.

This is a critical verse because it deals with the knowability of God. It is as if Christ were saying The Father is unknowable, the Son is unknowable, But both are knowable through the revelation of the Son. This is not a contradiction. There are no contradictions in the Bible, not even apparent ones.

This passage is indeed one of the most remarkable passages in the Gospels.

“It declares that Jesus sustains to the Father an extraordinary relation; possesses unparalleled knowledge of the Father; and performs a unique function in revealing the Father. He correlates his own knowledge of God with God’s knowledge of him. He claims to possess “all things” from the Father. His own consciousness dwells completely in the divine consciousness. The center of his own will coincides with the center of God’s will.”¹³

This is a most astounding and deep doctrine of scripture, but Jesus is the unique person of the universe. There has never been, and there will never be another like Him. He is the God-man. We will look at some other verses which teach that Jesus was God.

2. Hebrews 1: 8

“But unto the Son He saith, Thy throne O God, is forever and ever”

This is the Father speaking to the Son, and He clearly calls Him God. In verse three He says that Christ is “The brightness of His glory, and the express image of His person.” It would be very difficult to make these verses mean anything less than the deity of Christ.

3. Titus 2: 13

“Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ” The Weymouth translation is very close to the original Greek: **“in expectation of the fulfilment of our blessed hope--the Appearing in glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ”**.

¹³ Ibid pg. 157

Christ is clearly called “Our Great God and Savior Jesus Christ”

4. Philippians 2: 6

“Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God.”

Here is a passage which goes into great detail to prove that Christ pre-existed before He became incarnate, and that He was God. His incarnation is seen to be a self-emptying.

5. Colossians 1: 15-17

“Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: For by Him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And He is before all things, and by Him all things consist.”

This wonderful passage clarifies several things:

- 1). Christ pre-existed as God.
- 2). Christ is the creator.
- 3). Christ is the bond of unity for the universe, “In Him all things consist”.
- 4). Christ is the image of the invisible God.

We could produce a plethora of verses to prove that Christ is God, and that He is God’s ultimate revelation, but let these suffice for now.

V. How this Presuppositional Posture Affects the Modern Church

1. We don't have to prove God in our teaching and preaching.

We can proclaim Him boldly and without apology. Paul spoke to the pagans on Mars hill about the “God whom they ignorantly worship....The unknown God” - Acts 17: 23. Our apologetics must not lower God to mans judgment bar. God is the Sovereign Lord of the universe, and he is not ignorantly proved by apologetic arguments...He is simply declared!

Just as Paul did, it is our job to declare the true God who cannot be comprehended by humanistic rationalism or human philosophy. God is revealed.

2. We can speak to people with authority.

Our message is not of human derivation. It is not the result of human viewpoint, rather it is the expression of divine viewpoint. This renders a note of authority to our message. We seek not the approbation of men in the matter of content. Our content is uniquely heavenly, and our message is derived rather than contrived.

3. Our Doctrines are Re-interpretive rather than just merely Interpretive.

We do not just arbitrarily come up with something to say. Rather we re-interpret what God has said to us. It is interesting that Christ promised the Holy Spirit who would not speak things of Himself, but rather would call to remembrance all things which Christ spoke to us - Jn. 14: 26. Van Til says:

“There are two mutually exclusive methodologies. The one of the natural man assumes the ultimacy of the human mind. On this basis man, making himself the ultimate reference point, virtually reduces all reality to one level and denies the counsel of God as determinative of the possible and the impossible. Instead of the plan of God, it assumes

an abstract notion of possibility or probability, of being and rationality... On the other hand there is the Christian position. When consistently expressed it posits God's self-existence and plan, as well as self-contained self knowledge, as the presupposition of all created existence and knowledge. In that case all facts show forth and thus prove the existence of God and His plan. In that case too, all human knowledge should be self consciously subordinated to that plan."¹⁴

We believe that we have "the mind of Christ" - 1Cor. 2: 16, and that His revealed mind is the basis for our reinterpretation of everything from divine viewpoint rather than mere human viewpoint. We are to "Think God's Thoughts After Him" - a phrase also coined by Van Til. This means that we do not render an interpretation of the universe and of God by mere deductive reasoning. Instead we render our concepts of everything from the divine viewpoint.

4. Our Consciousness is Opened and Expanded

We receive God's revelation in three areas:

- 1). Cosmo-consciousness - About Nature
- 2). Self-consciousness - About Man
- 3). God-consciousness - About God

The revelation of God in nature comes through mostly through physics. The revelation of God about man comes mostly through nature and psychology. And the revelation of God about God comes through Theology which is revealed in the Bible. In all these areas the revelation must be accompanied by Grace. We will never properly understand nature by physics alone, so the Christian position adds grace with it. We will never understand man by psychology alone. It must be co-joined with grace. Theology alone cannot reveal God to us fully, so we require divine grace. When coupled with divine grace the result is not merely "gnosis" (Gk) or knowledge, but it is "epignosis"(Gk) which means over and above knowledge. Such knowledge is not natural, but it is supernatural , the product of special revelation.

5. Our Witnessing is in the Spirit and with Power

The Holy Spirit attends His word with power and life changing dynamics. We are told that "the Word of God is alive and powerful, sharper than any Two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of joints and marrow and is

¹⁴ Van Til, Introduction to Systematic Theology, pg. 18

a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” - Heb. 4: 12.

Because our message is one that has been revealed, and not one that was simple figured out by man, we have the absolute authority and power of the living word. We wield, as it were, supernatural instruments to convict and convert the lost. There is a tremendous need for this kind of powerful preaching. It is not apologetic. It is not sentimental. It is the very power of God. It is self-existent and creative in it's force.

6. Identification

When we hold the truth in this manner, we are identifying ourselves not only with God, but with the whole body of believers...the church. This greatly adds to the credibility of our message. This is the reason why the church throughout history has had great councils, and has formulated great historic confessions and creeds. These things exist not to replace the word of God, but to identify the true message of the church, and to be identified in an ecumenical sense with all true believers. This identification lends credibility to our message, because as someone has said: “There is strength in numbers”. The sheer magnitude of the number of true believers, is mind boggling. We are identified with them in the kingdom of God.

VI. Conclusion

Christian Presuppositionalism is the foundation for true apologetics and preaching of the Word of God. We do not utilize man's methods or man's reasonings to prove anything. God is, and God say's, and that's it.

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