

Logic and Scripture

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from the Postscript to Logic

There is a minor misunderstanding that can easily be disposed of before discussing the relation of logic to the Scriptures. Someone with a lively historical sense might wonder why Scripture and revelation are equated, when God's direct speech to Moses, Samuel, and the prophets is even more clearly revelation.

This observation became possible simply because of previous brevity. Of course God's speech to Moses was revelation, in fact, revelation par excellence, if you wish. But we are not Moses. Today we have the Scripture. As the Westminster Confession says, "It pleased the Lord . . . to reveal himself . . . and afterwards . . . to commit the same wholly unto writing, which make the Holy Scripture to be most necessary, those former ways of God's revealing his will unto his people being now ceased." What God said to Moses is written in the Bible; the words are identical; the revelation is the same.

In this may be anticipated the relation of logic to the Scripture. First of all, Scripture, the written words of the Bible, is the mind of God. What is said in Scripture is God's thought. In contemporary religious polemics the Biblical view of the Bible, the historic position of the Reformation, or, what is the same thing, the doctrine of plenary and verbal inspiration is castigated as bibliolatry. The liberals accuse the Lutherans and Calvinists of worshipping a book instead of worshipping God. Apparently they think that we genuflect to the Bible on the pulpit, and they deride us for kissing the ring of a paper pope.

This caricature stems from their materialistic turn of mind, a materialism that may not be apparent to other discussions, but which comes to the surface when they direct their fire against fundamentalism. They think of the Bible as a material book, with paper contents, and a leather binding. That the contents are the thoughts of God, expressed in God's own words, is a position to which they are so invincibly antagonistic that they cannot even admit to be the position of a fundamentalist.

Nevertheless we maintain that the Bible expresses the mind of God. Conceptually it is the mind of God, or, more accurately, a part of God's mind. For this reason the Apostle Paul, referring to the revelation given him, and in fact given to the Corinthians through him, is able to say, "We have the mind of Christ." Also in Philippians 2:5 he exhorts them, "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus." To the same purpose is his modest claim in 1 Corinthians 7:40, "I think also that I have the Spirit of God."

The Bible then, is the mind or thought of God. It is not a physical fetish, like a crucifix. And I doubt that there has ever been even one hillbilly fundamentalist ignorant enough to pray to a black book with red edges. Similarly, the charge that the Bible is a paper pope misses the mark for the same reason. The Bible consists of thoughts, not paper; and the thoughts are the thought of the omniscient, infallible God, not those of Innocent III. On this basis, that is, on the basis that Scripture is the mind of God, the relation to logic

can easily be made clear. As might be expected, if God has spoken, he has spoken logically. The Scripture therefore should and does exhibit logical organization. For example, Romans 4:2 is an enthymematic hypothetical destructive syllogism. Romans 5:13 is a hypothetical constructive syllogism. 1 Corinthians 15:15-18 is a sorites. Obviously, examples of standard logical forms such as these could be listed at great length.

There is of course much in Scripture that is not syllogistic. The historical sections are largely narrative. Yet every declarative sentence is a logical unit. These sentences are truths; as such they are objects of knowledge. Each of them has, or perhaps we should say, each of them is a predicate attached to a subject. Only so can they convey meaning. Even in the single words themselves, as is mostly clearly seen in the cases of nouns and verbs, logic is embedded. If Scripture says, David was King of Israel, it does not mean that David was president of Babylon; and surely it does not mean that Churchill was prime minister of China. That is say, the words David, King, and Israel have definite meanings.

The old libel that Scripture is a wax nose and that interpretation is infinitely elastic is clearly wrong. If there were no limits to interpretation, we might interpret the libel itself as an acceptance of verbal and plenary inspiration. but since the libel cannot be so interpreted, neither can the virgin birth be interpreted as a myth nor the resurrection as a symbol of spring. No doubt there are some things hard to be understood which the unlearned wrest to their own destruction, but the difficulties are no greater than those found in Aristotle or Plotinus, and against these philosophers no such libel is ever directed. Furthermore, only some things are hard. For the rest, Protestants have insisted on the perspicuity of Scripture.

No need we waste time repeating Aristotle's explanation of ambiguous words. The fact that a word must mean one thing and not its contradictory is the evidence of the law of contradiction in all rational language.

This exhibition of the logic embedded in Scripture explains why Scripture rather than the law of contradiction is selected as the axiom. Should we assume merely the law of contradiction, we would be no better off than Kant was. His notion that knowledge requires a priori categories deserves great respect. Once for all, in a positive way – the complement of Hume's negative and unintentional way – Kant demonstrated the necessity of axioms, presuppositions, or a priori equipment. But this sine qua non is not sufficient to produce knowledge. Therefore the law of contradiction as such and by itself is not made the axiom of this argument.

For a similar reason, God as distinct from Scripture is not made the axiom of this argument. Undoubtedly this twist will seem strange to many theologians. It will seem particularly strange after the previous emphasis on the mind of God as the origin of all truth. Must not God be the axiom? For example, the first article of the Augsburg Confession give the doctrine of God, and the doctrine of the Scripture is discussed in the

next five. The Belgic Confession has the same order. The Scotch Confession of 1560 begins with God and gets to the Scripture only in article nineteen. The Thirty-Nine Articles begin with the Trinity, and Scripture comes in articles six and following. If God is sovereign, it seems very reasonable to put him first in the system.

But several other creeds, and especially the Westminster Confession, state the doctrine of Scripture at the very start. The explanation is quite simple: Our knowledge of God comes from the Bible. We may assert that every proposition is true because God thinks it so, and we may follow Charnock in all his great detail, but the whole is based on Scripture. Suppose this were not so. Then “God” as an axiom, apart from Scripture, is just a name. We must specify which God. The best known system in which “God” was made the axiom is Spinoza's. For him all theorems are deduced from Deus sive Natura. But it is the Natura that identifies Spinoza's god. Different gods might be made axioms of other systems. Hence the important thing is not to presuppose God, but to define the mind of the God presupposed. Therefore the Scripture is offered here as the axiom. This gives definiteness and content, without which axioms are useless.

Thus it is that God, Scripture, and logic are tied together. The pietists should not complain that emphasis on logic is a deification of an abstraction, or of human reason divorced from God. Emphasis on logic is strictly in accord with John's Prologue and is nothing other than recognition of the nature of God.

Does it seem peculiar, in this connection, that a theologian can be so greatly attached to the doctrine of the atonement, or a Pietist to the idea of sanctification, which nonetheless is explained only in some parts of Scripture, and yet be hostile to or suspicious of rationality and logic which every verse of Scripture exhibits?