

## Doing Theology Well

### 2) Reason

A. Christ reasoned (Mt 22:31-32).

B. Paul reasoned (1 Cor 15:13).

C. The writer of Hebrews reasoned (Hebrew 7).

There is a correct use of reason in doing theology. Truth is never irrational. That includes revealed truth. The canons of strict logic should never be violated. Nobody should be better logicians than theologians. half our theological trouble is our fundamental faulty reasoning. Need more strict logic.

#### Wrong uses of reason

- **Not plausibility**

However, most of our reasoning is not done according to strict logic, but according to induction or simply what seems plausible to us. *To many, reason is simply plausibility. Our sense of plausibility can be affected by a lot of things and thus is very subjective.*

However, not all that is true will seem reasonable to us. Can't say reason will get us where we need to go.

- **Not what we think is rational to believe**

Rationalism is the willingness to accept only those parts of the Bible that appear reasonable. In some circumstances, rationalism is the willingness of the person to substitute the authority of reason (in whole or part) for the authority of Scripture. *Not just rigorous logic--Scripture is never anti-logical.*

### 3) Experience

- 1) **Wrong use: Mystical.**

#### B. Mystical.

1. In its pure form, mysticism holds to the reception of truths immediately from God, i.e., God gives direct revelation to the soul. In a purely mystical system, Scripture is at best secondary or even unnecessary. You're getting the revelation you need directly from God. (Quaker approach)

2. In a modified form, this theory shows up in

a. An undisciplined "God told me" attitude.

b. A denigration of Scripture in favour of Spirit leading.

c. A willingness to subject doctrine and Biblical interpretation to an unregulated application of spiritual illumination.

Illumination does not take the place of a disciplined study of God's Word. You cannot rely on the Holy Spirit to do for you what He has equipped you to do for yourself.

- 2) **Right use: Devotional.**

There is a sense in which our experience does impact our theology.

Theology is supposed to be something that is lived – there's a symbiotic relationship between life and doctrine, devotion and theology. We must be careful of reducing our theology to whatever preaches well, but also to reducing our theology to bare propositions. Neither is correct.

#### **4) Intuition**

##### **A. Some intuitions are fundamental to all knowledge.**

Intuition is an immediate perception of some truth or reality, the rational stages of which you can't trace. If we could not have intuitions, we couldn't know anything. How do we know we exist? There's no way we could prove it. We don't know our own existence because we have worked through a series of proofs. How do we know that the world outside of us exists? We intuit an external world that exists. The basic axioms of logic are intuitive. The elementary principles of mathematics are intuitive.

##### **B. Intuition does enter into theology at a very basic level.**

In fact, our most fundamental knowledge of God is a personal intuition of God (KTB).

When we read Romans 1:19ff . . . Paul is not saying we look at creation, go through the teleological argument, and conclude that there is a God. Rather, we are always encountering the persona of God because we are dealing with His handiwork. ...

It registers in our psyche that God is eternal, He is powerful, and I am accountable to Him. This knowledge of God is hard-wired into man. Vs. 18 - natural man suppresses the truth. They see what God has made, and to explain it they make idols.

**Intuitions can be deceptive; not all intuitions are intuitions of truth.** Some intuitions cannot be denied without denying the very possibility of knowledge, but they are not true merely because they are intuitions. Intuitions are our most basic presuppositions.

#### **5) Tradition**

##### **A. The Roman Idea**

In the Romanist idea, you have the apostles who received their tradition from Christ. The apostles teach the churches in two ways: (1) they give the churches the written Scriptures; (2) they give the Scriptures via oral teaching. These two never contradict each other, but each contains elements that won't be found in the other. Both get handed down. The body that has the right and authority to hand down the teaching of the church is called the Magisterium. The Magisterium is the bishops (and the church is the bishops). The church is all the successors of the apostles who are in communion with the successor of Peter (*i.e.*, all bishops who are loyal to the pope). These have the right to interpret both the Scriptures and the oral traditions of the apostles. A Catholic theologian, then, must take into account both what the Bible teaches and what the Magisterium says. Where do they find how the Magisterium has interpreted the oral teaching of the apostles? In the canons of the ecumenical councils; in the authoritative pronouncements of the popes (when the pope speaks *ex cathedra* and in infallible).

How do we know when the pope is speaking *ex cathedra* and when he is not? With each passing generation, you get an increasing (exponentially increasing) amount of interpretation from the Magisterium to which you must pay attention.

##### **B. The Biblical Idea**

**1) It is important to remember that even the best traditions are fallible. Therefore, they are subject to evaluation.** Not all traditions exist for good reasons, so we cannot accept tradition uncritically. We are always free to challenge a tradition and work through its implications.

**2) The attitude that simply rejects tradition is a dangerous attitude, probably as dangerous as the one that absorbs uncritically.** Before we reject a tradition, we need to know: why it was there to begin with, and what we are going to do without it. Also, we cannot thoughtfully criticize everything at once. Very bad when we reject tradition in favor of experience. When you do that, you are assuming certain things about what you are trying to do, and may have no idea what you are doing. Good example of this: Charles Finney.

#### Uses of tradition

**a. The Christian tradition preserves the labors of God's people who have struggled with the meaning of His revelation** Their interpretation is not infallible and authoritative, however, there has been a progress, a development to the way people have understood the Scriptures doctrinally, and we ignore that progress at our own peril. (Our pastor didn't just figure out the entire doctrinal system for himself.)

**b. Tradition is a natural part of the Christian experience 2 Tim. 2:1-2** Paul is saying to Timothy to take what he (Paul) has taught and teach them to faithful men, who in turn will be able to teach others also.

This is a tradition, and this process of "teaching faithful men" is still going on today, directly from the apostolic tradition.

**c. Knowing how theology has developed will save us from having to reinvent the wheel. It delivers us from having to find categories with which to explain major doctrine.** . We are very dependent on our tradition to explain the categories which help us make sense of the data of Scripture.

**d. The raw material of theology is given in Scripture. There is a progress to the manner in which that material has been developed and explained and systematized. We won't understand the doctrine if we don't understand that progress.**

**e. We should be aware of the controversies out of which doctrines have been articulated.** You don't understand why we speak of Christ as we do until you understand how that has been challenged through the years and the way in which theologians have been forced to build fences against errors. *E.g.*, Chalcedon was thought through so well that we have yet to find a better way to speak of the nature of Christ.

**f. Provides a perspective or a collection of perspectives from which Scripture may be viewed and launches us on a trajectory for our investigation.** Should not allow tradition to govern our theology. We recognize that Scripture corrects tradition, but that is not the same thing as saying we shouldn't have a tradition. Tradition gives us the context. Without tradition we would wallow in the data.

**g. Provides a pre-theological sensibility that will shape the form that our theology should take.**

Tradition is a culture, stretched over time. That tradition or culture passes from generation to generation certain indispensable things. We get our language of worship from tradition. We get our language of preaching from tradition (listening to preaching). Tradition gives us an ethic, an ethos, a pre-argumentative, pre-exploratory ethos that tells us what is and is not allowable. Tradition informs what we hate, what we love.