

Toward a Recovery of Christian Belief

Over the years I have read quite a few books, probably four or five hundred since graduating from Seminary back in 1982; of that number there are about fifty books that stand out and this book, written by Carl Henry, is one of them. It is a short book, only 126 pages, yet it is a powerfully written book that has markings on nearly every page – and the following notes are gleaned from those markings.

1: Living at the Bottom of a Well

The central thought of the chapter is that the West has lost its moral and epistemic compass bearings (15). For many centuries the Western world recognized an absolute norm, namely, the will of the self-revealed God made known in the Scriptures (16).

Over time, modern philosophy came to affirm (21):

- + nature alone is the ultimate reality
- + man is essentially a complex animal
- + truth and the good are relative and changing

By the 20th century, secular humanism had become the molding metaphysics of Western liberal arts training. It emphasized that (23):

- + all reality is reducible to impersonal processes and energy events
- + all life, including human life, is transient, and its final destiny is death
- + truth and the good are culture-conditioned distinctions that the human projects upon the cosmos and history

The implication is clear: humanity's "coming of age" requires rejecting all transcendently fixed and final authority; and expunging from Western thought any emphasis on an objectively existing deity.

"Now the tide is shifting to naked paganism. The term *god* is stripped of metaphysical significance; no objective criteria are acknowledged for telling right from wrong or truth from error. At the bottom of the well the last glimmers of light are lowering" (32).

2: Presuppositions and Theological Method

The earliest systematic theology began with God as the basic axiom and from this explanatory principle derived the content of the Christian faith; and its operative methodology for systematic theology has been mainly deductive (37).

The Christian's primary ontological axiom is the one living God, and his primary epistemological axiom is divine revelation. On these basic axioms depend all the core beliefs¹ of Biblical theism (49). The Christian believer knows assuredly that his postulates and control beliefs are not conjecturally grounded, but are anchored in the triune God's self-existence and self-disclosure (50).

The Christian also affirms his axioms to be presuppositions fundamental to all thought and being; they are basic to human noetic structure (50). Every human being ought to assume these axioms in order to account for the reality "of what is" since these explanatory principles are grounded ultimately and eternally in the Logos of God (50-51).

In appealing to transcendent revelation as its basic epistemic axiom, Christianity casts its truth claim comprehensively over all areas of human life (53).

3: The Axioms of Biblical Theism

Every theology or philosophy or science has a starting point enabling it to get under way (63). Axioms are the ruling principles with which any system of thought begins. They are never deduced or inferred from other principles, but are simply presupposed. From its controlling axioms every system's theorems are subsequently deduced (64).

Each worldview has its distinctive starting point or touchstone thesis through which it attempts to unify and explain human experience. The Christian philosopher is under no intellectual compulsion, therefore, to accept rival premises as the starting point for advancing his or her theistic worldview (65).

C. S. Lewis said that Christianity is "a religion you could not have guessed." The Christian knows that the axioms of his faith are grounded in transcendent realities and not in speculative fabrication (69).

There can be but one comprehensive system of truth. If the true system is comprehensive, every false system must contain contradictions (88).

4: Drinking from Eternal Springs

God's eternal Word invites a parched humanity to the Well that never runs dry, to the Water of life that alone truly and fully quenches the thirst of stricken pilgrims (114).

¹ "As revelationally grounded and intelligible faith, Christianity sets out from the ontological priority of the living God and the epistemological priority of divine revelation. From these basic postulates it derives and expounds all the core doctrines of the Christian faith" (59).