

Discussion Notes: Reformation Fellowship
Critique of Ordinary Christian's Creed
Handout #2

A. Clarifying comments on the deity of Jesus: In what sense is Jesus God?

1. The nature of his being: an ordinary human being
2. Uniquely, the "translation" of the individual person that Yahweh is into the form of a human being
3. Analogies:
 - a. Jesus is to God as musical score is to performed song
 - b. Jesus is to God as shadow on wall is to object that casts the shadow
 - c. Jesus is to God as character in novel created to be the author is to author

B. Final comments on critique #1: the Trinity

1. But what about passages that "teach" the Trinity
 - a. Every text has a several plausible readings
 - b. "Natural" reading of text based on *a priori* assumptions one brings to text
 - i. *"repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of your sins"*
 - ii. *John 15 > "Abide in Me, and I in you."*
 - iii. *"eat my flesh and drink my blood to have Life"*
 - iv. *Matthew 28:19 > " baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit"*
 - c. Typical argument for Trinity:
 - i. *"Natural" reading of the text is X.*
 - ii. *X implies the Trinity.*
 - iii. *Therefore, Trinity is implicit in this text.*
 - iv. *Therefore, this text is evidence for the Trinity.*
 - d. In each such text, the "natural" reading is the interpretation that is "natural" to a Trinitarian.
 - i. *Can it be surprising that the reading that is "natural" to someone who assumes the Trinity will imply the Trinity?*
(A) The Trinity is implicit in the meaning because the interpreter read it into the meaning.
 - ii. *Therefore, we cannot allow the "natural meaning" of texts to be conclusive evidence for the Trinity (nor of ANY doctrine).*
 - iii. *Rather, ...*

- (A) imagining the possibility that the doctrine I have been previously committed to is actually false I must interpret the text in the light of an alternative (contrary) doctrine;
- (B) then, I must weigh the likelihood of each different interpretation of this text
 - (1) On the basis of which best offers the most likely reading of passage in which it is found
 - (a) Not a question of which is a better rendering of the text in question, it is a question of which offers a better, more likely, more coherent reading of the paragraph
- 2. IMPORTANT: note the difference between looking for evidence in a theological battle and interpreting the Bible
- 3. My point here will not be convincing to one who
 - a. doesn't understand and recognize the role of one's pre-understanding
 - b. believes that it is sufficient to find "evidence" in the Bible for a doctrine

C. Does it matter that Christians espouse belief in the Trinity?

- 1. Our charge is to proclaim the truth of the gospel, not to proclaim something that is close enough to be serviceable: *to espouse the Trinity is to obscure the truth of the worldview and message of the Bible*
 - a. Creates an unnecessary obstacle to Jews and others
- 2. It justifies incoherence in our theology
- 3. Is used to reinforce false expectations about relationship to God
 - a. I was made to experience the "fellowship" with God that the 3 persons of the Trinity have with each other
 - i. *Point 3 on Ordinary Christian's Creed*
- 4. Is used as an unchallengeable foundation for eccentric and/or false perspectives:
 - a. E.g., false visions of the Christian faith
 - i. *Trinity means that "social justice" is the essence of our faith*
 - b. Trinity solves the "one-and-many" problem
 - c. All of reality has a Trinitarian structure

D. Preliminary comments to Critique #2:

- 1. Genesis 1:1 – what does it mean?
- 2. Must choose between different pictures
 - a. craftsman
 - b. wizard
 - c. author
 - d. other option?

3. Different pictures involve different understandings of the relationship between God and his creation
4. The criticism—"you should stick to the Bible, you mustn't bring your philosophical beliefs into it"—is fundamentally naïve
 - a. EVERYONE will and MUST bring their philosophical beliefs into it
 - b. Philosophical assumptions plays a role in exegesis analogous to that of cultural background

E. Critique #2: the statement "could exist right alongside of himself"

[Point #2 of Ordinary Christian's Creed] has chosen a wrong philosophical picture to inform Gen 1:1

1. Mistakenly understands creation to be God's ontological "equal" (that is, God's equal with regard to its having existence)
 - a. This is polytheism / paganism (NOT biblical worldview)
2. Alternative: God transcends his creation; the creation does not rise to the level of existing alongside him
3. Evidence that Christians do believe this element of the Ordinary Christian's Creed:

whenever Christians speak of God ...

- a. being obligated by the created order
 - b. benefiting from the created order
 - c. thwarted (potentially) by something in the created order
 - d. limited by something in the created order
 - e. overwhelmed (potentially) by his creation
 - f. influenced by his creation
4. THREE ABSOLUTELY CRITICAL ELEMENTS OF THE BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW

Perhaps there are more. These 3 have particularly struck me.

- a. God transcends his creation (like an author does the work of his imagination)
 - i. *Explains sovereignty / freedom*
 - ii. *Explains divine foreknowledge*
 - iii. *Makes sense of deity of Jesus*
 - iv. *Makes sense of indomitable power / faithfulness of God*
- b. Reality has a narrative structure
 - i. *Explains role of Israel*
 - ii. *Explains existence of sin and evil*
 - iii. *Answers problem of evil*
- c. Human beings are characters within a narrative

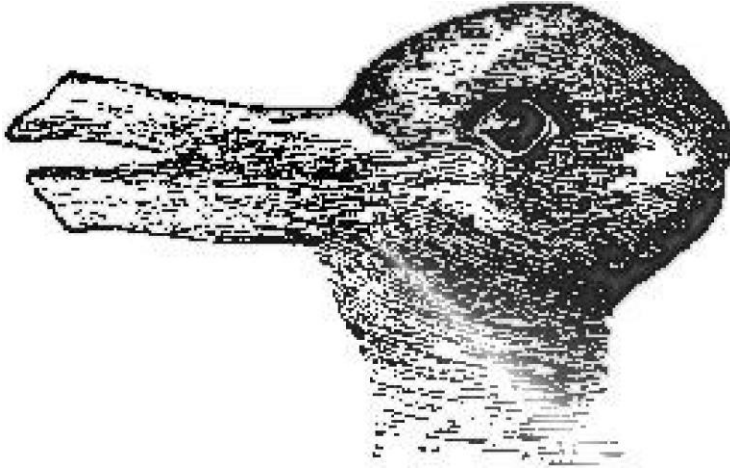
- i. Explains the nature of individual, personal identity*
- ii. Explains how personal preservation is possible*
- iii. Explains the meaning of human existence*

F. Critique #3: "gave existence to everything that makes up the cosmos"
> point #2 of Ordinary Christian's

1. Rather, "gave existence to all that is and to all that occurs"
 - a. More accurately, "brought the cosmos into existence and set the stage for determining all that would occur"
 - i. Acts 2:23, 4:27-28*
 - ii. Eph 1:11*
 - iii. Hebrews 1:2*
 - iv. Isaiah 46:9-11*
 - v. God did not set up the cosmos up like a boy builds things out of a lego set; he is telling a story like a storyteller tells a story*
(A)He knows the outcome of every choice, of every action.

Illustrations

First:



Duck? Rabbit?

Second:



Young woman? Old woman?