

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

Handout #5

1-8-2012

A. Preliminary Comments to Critique #2:

[From nothing, God gave existence to everything that makes up the cosmos so that the cosmos could now exist right alongside himself.]

1. Genesis 1:1 – what does it mean?
2. Must choose between 4 pictures.
 - a. I cannot NOT choose; I must choose one of these pictures:
 - i. *God as craftsman*
 - ii. *God as wizard*
 - iii. *God as progenitor*
 - iv. *God as author*
 - v. *Any other option?*

(A) Will not consider view that cosmos is part of God. God is not creator on such a view.
 - b. How I understand nature of the God-creation relationship depends on which picture I choose.
 - i. *Foundational to my rejection of the “Christian” worldview is that I believe it has chosen the wrong picture of God as creator.*
3. OBJECTION: “You should stick to the Bible, you mustn’t bring your philosophical beliefs into it.”
 - a. This is fundamentally naïve.
 - b. EVERYONE will and MUST bring his philosophical beliefs into his understanding of Bible.
 - i. *Without a set of philosophical assumptions, I have NO interpretation of Genesis 1:1.*
 - ii. *I can embrace the right set of philosophical assumptions, or the wrong ones; but I MUST embrace some set of philosophical assumptions.*

- c. Philosophical assumptions play a role in exegesis analogous to that of cultural background.
4. Ramifications of the different pictures of God as creator
- a. God as builder / craftsman
 - i. *God's creation exists on the same level as God.*
 - (A) If I build a chair, the chair is my ontological equal; it exists on the same level as I.
 - (B) Similarly, if God "built" the universe, then the created universe is God's ontological equal; it exists on the same level as God.
 - ii. *With some qualifications, this is roughly the conception of God that exists in pagan polytheism.*
 - b. God as wizard
 - i. *God's creation exists on the same level as God.*
 - (A) If I conjure up a dragon, the dragon is my ontological equal; it exists on the same level as I.
 - (B) Similarly, if God "conjured up" the universe, then the created universe is God's ontological equal; it exists on the same level as God.
 - ii. *With some qualifications, this is roughly the conception of God that exists in typical Christianity.*
 - c. God as progenitor
 - i. *God's creation exists on the same level as God.*
 - (A) If I give birth to another being, that being is my ontological equal; it exists on the same level as I.
 - (B) Similarly, if God gave birth to the universe, then the created universe is God's ontological equal; it exists on the same level as God.
 - ii. *With some qualifications, this is another conception of God that exists in pagan polytheism and it is the one that exists in various forms of mystical Christianity.*
 - d. God as author
 - i. *God's creation is most decidedly NOT God's ontological equal; it does not exist on the same level as God.*

(A) If I write a novel, no character in that novel exists on the same level as I.

(B) Similarly, if God is the “author” of created reality and the whole of cosmic history, then nothing in that created reality exists on the same level as God.

ii. *With some qualifications, this is roughly the conception of God that exists in the biblical worldview.*

B. Critique of point #2 of the “Ordinary Christian’s Creed”: “could exist right alongside of himself” > the creed has chosen a wrong philosophical picture to inform Genesis 1:1

1. Based on a concept of God that makes the created order exist on the same level as God.
2. Biblical concept of God: God (as author) transcends his creation.

C. OBJECTION: the typical Christian does not believe that the created order exists “right alongside” God.

1. Evidence that typical Christians do believe this:
They show that they do hold the view that the created order exists on the same level as God when they speak of God as...
 - a. 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

D. THREE ABSOLUTELY CRITICAL ELEMENTS OF THE BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW

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

1. God transcends his creation (like an author transcends the work of his imagination).
 - a. This fact allows us to have a coherent understanding of...
 - i. *Sovereignty / freedom*
 - ii. *Divine foreknowledge*
 - iii. *Incarnation*
 - iv. *Indomitable power / faithfulness of God*

2. Created reality (cosmic history) has a narrative structure.

a. This allows us to have a coherent explanation of...

i. Israel

ii. Human sin

iii. Problem of evil

3. Human beings are characters within a narrative.

a. This allows us to have an accurate understanding of...

i. The nature of individual, personal identity

ii. Personal preservation

iii. Meaning of human existence

E. The philosophical “fruitfulness” of understanding God as creator in accord with the AUTHOR picture is a very strong argument that the AUTHOR picture is the right one.

F. A second critique of point #2 of the “Ordinary Christian’s Creed”: “gave existence to everything that makes up the cosmos”

1. God did not create the furniture of reality and then set reality up to create its own story.

2. God is the author of the story of reality.

a. Acts 2:23, 4:27-28

b. Eph 1:11

c. Hebrews 1:2

d. Isaiah 46:9-11

3. God did not set the cosmos up like a boy sets up an electric football game; he is telling a story like a storyteller tells a story

a. He knows the outcome of every choice, of every action.