

# Introduction

## Conflict Between Natural and Revealed Theologies

By Dr. Robert Morey

Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols?" (2 Corinthians 6:14-16).

### Introduction

The conflict between Natural and Revealed theologies existed long before Jesus was born. There were those Jews, such as Philo, who felt that Greek philosophy was so superior to the prophets that it would be better if Judaism abandoned its sole dependence on divine Revelation and instead appealed to Greek philosophic "Reason" as the Origin of truth. They were called Hellenistic Jews because they were more "Greek" than Jewish.

Orthodox Jews viewed Hellenistic Jews as traitors because they had turned their backs on the Torah and embraced Greek philosophy in the place of Scripture. Many of the books written during the inter-testamental period record the violent conflicts between Hellenized and Orthodox Jews. 1 and 2 Maccabees record how the conflict unfolded in the life of the Jewish people.

Dr. H.W. Hoehner explains:

Hellenism is the devotion to ancient Gk. thought, customs, and life style.... Alexander the Great, who was taught by Aristotle, devoting his life to conquering the world for the spread of Gk. culture.... The entrenchment of Hellenism can more readily be seen among the Alexandrian Jews, esp. among some of their philosophers such as Philo, who adopted the allegorical interpretation which led to the sacrificing of the truth in the OT on the altar of pagan philosophy.<sup>1</sup>

The Sadducees mentioned in the NT were the Hellenistic Jews of Jesus' time. They were theological liberals who followed Greek Natural theology in denying miracles, angels and demons, the immortality of the soul, and the resurrection of the body (Acts 23:8).

The Sadducees were the bitter enemies not only of the Orthodox Jews but also Jesus. They confronted Him with trick questions and evasive answers. In one brilliant exchange between the Sadducees and Jesus, He put them to shame by saying:

You are in error, not understanding the Scriptures nor the power of God! (Matt. 22:29).

The Pharisees were the Orthodox Jews of the NT. They did not accept the Sadducees as fellow Jews but as sell-outs to pagan Greek philosophy. Paul utilized their mutual hatred of each other when he announced that he was on trial for being a Pharisee who believed in the resurrection.

But perceiving that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, Paul began crying out in the Council, "Brethren, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees; I am on trial for the hope and resurrection of the dead!" And as he said this, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and Sadducees; and the assembly was divided. For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor an angel, nor a spirit; but the Pharisees acknowledge them all. And there arose a great uproar; and some of the scribes of the Pharisaic party stood up and began to argue heatedly, saying, "We find nothing wrong with this man; suppose a spirit or an angel has spoken to him?" And as a great dissension was developing, the commander was afraid Paul would be torn to pieces by them and ordered the troops to go down and take him away from them by force, and bring him into the barracks (Acts 23:6-10).

The Apostle was clearly on the Orthodox side and had no use for the liberals and their Natural theology. As a matter of fact, Paul never appealed to man's "reason" as the basis for doctrine and morals. He based his theology on Scripture alone (1 Cor. 15:3-4).

Later, a full scale theological war erupted in the Apostolic Church between those who followed Greek philosophy (Natural Theology) and those who followed Scripture (Revealed Theology). Such New Testament books as Colossians and 1 John were written to refute the invasion of Greek philosophy into the early church.

In 1 Tim. 6:20, Paul passionately warned Timothy not to listen to the sirenic call of philosophy.

O Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you, avoiding worldly and empty chatter and the opposing arguments of what is falsely called "knowledge."

With rigorous thrusts of his verbal sword, the Apostle dismisses Greek philosophy (Plato, Aristotle, et al) as nothing more than mere "chatter," i.e. foolish and frivolous talk that is a waste of time.

Philosophic "chatter" is described by Paul as: "worldly": finding its Origin in the world of Nature instead of in God's revelation. Hence it is godless and profane.

"empty": pointless, i.e. devoid of anything of profit to the Christian.

"falsely called knowledge": Paul dismisses all of Greek philosophy as "pseudo knowledge," which is actually the "antithesis" of real knowledge.

As an Orthodox Jew, Paul's hostility to Greek philosophy is quite caustic and severe:

See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to the Messiah (Colossians 2:8).

Natural philosophy is dismissed by Paul as:

- a. "empty deception": foolish and pointless lies.
- b. "the traditions of men": finding its Origin in man and his traditions rather than in God and His revelation.
- c. "the elementary principles of the world":

Paul uses the technical Greek term for the "first principles" of Greek philosophy. He knew exactly what he was saying. These first principles were abstracted from "the world," i.e. nature, instead of from divine revelation.

d. "not according to the Messiah": A.T. Robertson explains:

And not after Christ (*kai ou kata Christon*). Christ is the yardstick by which to measure philosophy and all phases of human knowledge. The Gnostics were measuring Christ by their philosophy as many men are doing today. They have it backwards. Christ is the measure for all human knowledge since he is the Creator and the Sustainer of the universe."<sup>2</sup>

When some of the saints at Corinth fell into the error of following Greek philosophy instead of following Scripture, Paul reminds them that the philosophers of this world never found God by human reason, experience, faith or feelings.

For it is written, "I will destroy the philosophy of the philosophers, and the cleverness of the clever I will set aside." Where is the philosopher? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the philosophy of this world? For since in the philosophy of God the world through its philosophy did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. For indeed Jews ask for miracles, and Greeks search for philosophy (1 Corinthians 1:19-22).

The Greek lexicons are unanimous that the Greek word *wisdom* in the passage above is a clear attack of Paul upon Greek philosophy in general and Greek rhetoric in particular. Thayer states that *wisdom* here refers to:

the empty conceit of wisdom which men make a parade of, a knowledge more specious than real of lofty and hidden subjects: such as the theosophy of certain Jewish Christians, Col. 2:23; the philosophy of the Greeks, 1 Cor. 1:21f; 2:1; with τοῦ κόσμου added, 1 Cor. 1:20; 3:19; τοῦ

αἰώνος τούτου, 1 Cor. 2:6; τῶν σοφῶν, 1 Cor. 1:19; ἀνθρώπων, 1 Cor. 2:5 (in each of these last passages the word includes also the rhetorical art, such as is taught in the schools), cf. Fritzsche, Romans, vol. i, p. 67f; σοφία τοῦ λόγου, the wisdom which shows itself in speaking (R.V. wisdom of words), the art of the rhetorician, 1 Cor. 1:17; λόγοι ἀνθρωπίνης (so R in 1 Cor. 1:4 (all texts in 1 Cor. 1:13) σοφίας, discourse conformed to philosophy and the art of rhetoric, 1 Cor. 2:4, 13.<sup>3</sup>

When the Apostle Paul mocks the vaunted claims of Greek philosophy as mere “foolishness,” he is only voicing the same attitude displayed by the prophets and the Apostles. To put it bluntly, the Bible from Genesis to Revelation is absolutely hostile to Natural religion, Natural law, and Natural theology.

It must also be pointed out that nowhere in the Bible do we ever find anyone at anytime encouraging the people of God to listen to the philosophers. No one in the Bible ever appealed to human reason, experience, feelings or faith as the basis of doctrine or morals.

Even though many today do not want to hear this, the Bible does not give us one kind word about Natural theology or philosophy. The attempt to discover truth, justice, morals, meaning, and beauty apart from and independent of Scripture is everywhere declared a miserable failure (1 Cor. 1:25-31).

In this edition of the JBA we will explore the origin, nature, and history of Natural Theology and how it has been the mother of every heresy and false doctrine that has ever plagued the Christian Church. We will follow the example of the prophets, Apostles, and our Lord Himself in looking to Special Revelation as the Origin of truth, justice, morals, meaning, and beauty. The God who is there, is not silent but has spoken in Scripture that we might know who He is, who we are, and how we can come into His presence with acceptance.

We will also examine the pernicious teachings of Natural Theology by focusing on the arch heretic Thomas Aquinas. The Reformation delivered us from him and his Schoolmen whom Luther dismissed as Sophists. Yet, we are faced

today with evangelical thinkers who call us to abandon the Reformation by returning to the official philosopher of the Roman Catholic Church.

It is no surprise to us that many of the men at the forefront of this modern counter-Reformation movement within evangelicalism graduated from Jesuit universities. They were taught by the Jesuits that the sun rises and sets on Thomas Aquinas and that his Natural Theology and philosophy is the ultimate basis of truth.

Our Protestant forefathers clearly saw that the Natural Theology of Thomas Aquinas was nothing more than a Trojan horse used by the Jesuits to wean Protestants away from the Reformation doctrine of *Sola Scriptura*. The Jesuits tricked naïve Protestant students into replacing *Sola Scriptura* with *Sola Ratione*.

Human reason was then exalted as the Origin of truth, justice, morals, meaning and beauty. Today, Natural Theology and Thomism have gained new respectability among evangelicals through such Jesuit trained apologists as Dr. Norman Geisler, whose nickname, understandably, is “Roman” Geisler.

It is also no surprise to us that those who call for a return to Thomism are ecumenical and do not view Roman Catholicism as a false church. They are the same ones who use Roman Catholic textbooks in their college classes and have their students reading apostates such as Peter Kreeft. He was raised a Protestant but converted to Romanism and is now published by InterVarsity Press! Is it any wonder that some students have already converted to Catholicism?

In this issue and the next, we are going to reveal the heresies of Aquinas and how he denied the biblical gospel. We do not expect to see him in heaven because he not only tried to mix Aristotle with Christ but also works with grace.

## Endnotes

1. *The Zondervan Pictorial Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 3:117.
2. Archibald Thomas Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville: Broadman, 1931) IV:491.
3. Joseph Henry Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1965) p. 582.