

Floyd E. Hamilton: *The Basis of Christian Faith* (fourth revised edition). New York and Evanston: Harper & Row. 1964. 364. \$5.00.

In the “Preface to the Fourth Revised Edition” the author describes his method of apologetics as follows, “the method previously followed (and followed again in this revision) may be called the old Princeton method of apologetics used by the great Princeton theologians of the past century and a half. The giants of the theological world, like Charles Hodge, Benjamin B. Warfield, Francis L. Patton, William Brenton Greene, Jr., and J. Gresham Machen, all used it in their writing and lectures. This method, briefly, is to present evidence and arguments from all different lines of thought in an attempt to show that God exists, that the Bible is the Word of God, and that the burden of inferential proof is so great that there is no excuse for an unbeliever to reject Christianity .... It was claimed, moreover, that, in being presented the facts, an unbeliever could understand the arguments and evidence and even attain relative truth before his regeneration. Then the Holy Spirit could use all that as preparation for His sovereign act of bringing regeneration to the person” (p. xiv). The book is a working out of this method of apologetics in which the author, after laying down fundamental tenets, brings together various lines of evidence drawn from a vast array of facts to show a high presumption for, and probability of, the Christian faith. In doing this the author delves into biology, physics, philosophy and other fields, and thus shows that he possesses wide interests and many gifts. In most places he displays the gift of being able to present his arguments with clarity and a sense of economy of statement. One of the faults of the book is that it seeks to cover too wide a range of materials and as a result often is inadequate and unconvincing.

Of particular interest is the fact that the author, in this fourth, revised, edition, seeks to defend his position against the apologetic method developed by Dr. C. Van ‘hit of Westminster Theological Seminary. In the preface the author says, “During the past thirty-five years the method has been attacked by the ‘presuppositionalists’ led by Dr. Cornelius Van Til of Westminster” (p. xiv). He goes on to state that due to the persuasiveness of this newer apologetics he was compelled to reconsider his own methods. After reconsideration he remained unmoved in his conviction of the value of the older method of apologetics and seeks to give it some added defense against Van Til by adding a page specifically directed against him (see p.34).

The author makes an interesting statement of the reason why he remained unconvinced of the newer apologetics of Van Til. He says, “Before this revision could be undertaken, therefore, I had to come to some definite conclusion regarding the method to be used in the book. It was the fact that the old Princeton method has been blessed by the Lord so greatly in ‘the salvation of souls that led me to conclude that it was the truest and best method. Unbelievers, as a matter of history, have been met on so called ‘neutral’ ground of facts and argument and have been brought to the belief in God and the Bible as the Word of God, and the Holy Spirit has used these methods to prepare them for His regenerating act. I have in my files many letters from those who have been brought to the Lord reading *The Basis of Christian Faith*. As a matter of fact this old method really *works* in reaching unbelievers with the gospel” (pp. xiv f.).

It was by an appeal to facts such as these that the author was confirmed in his faith in the old Princeton apologetics. He consulted the many letters in his files, and became convinced that “this old method really *works*”. It would appear that after many years of grappling with the problems of the old and new apologetics we finally have a way of deciding between them. It would seem, according to Hamilton, that if

we could tabulate the letters of testimony to the success of *The New Modernism* and *The Defense of the Faith*, to be found in Van Til's files, and then compare them with the files of Hamilton, perhaps using the latest computer, we could find out the relative statistics of the success of the two methods and let the "facts" decide.

It would be interesting to know how the author would classify his own argument for believing in his method. Is this argument an example of what he means by an appeal to the "facts"? Perhaps one should be careful in suggesting that this argument has a pragmatic tinge, but since the word "works" in the sentence, "this old method really *works*", is italicized, I cannot help labeling the argument "pure pragmatism".

It would be more than interesting, if it were possible, to consult the letters of testimonials to the success of the *Summa Contra Gentiles* of Thomas Aquinas. Due to the remarkable similarity between the apologetic methods of Aquinas and Hamilton, Hamilton could probably find some "evidence" for the success of his method outside his own files. To the evidence undoubtedly to be found for Hamilton's method in the files of St. Thomas we could add the letters of testimony from the Arminian apologete Stuart C. Hackett (see p. 34).

Since this problem of the right method of apologetics is of great concern to those who claim to be inheritors of the Princeton tradition, I would like to make a few suggestions. Apparently the debate between the older and newer apologetics has reached somewhat of a stalemate if the author must resort to the inner recesses of his files to prove his position. The fact that there are still such avid supporters of this rather archaic, nineteenth-century apologetics points out that this debate can only be made fruitful if we subject both positions to a clearer historical light. At least one reason for doing this is that both apologetic positions have succeeded in imbibing a good dose of scholastic, synthetic, concepts. It is my belief that the newer apologetic of Van Til is far less affected by synthesis, but it cannot any longer be denied or left unsaid that there is a remarkable similarity in both schools in the holding fast to certain scholastic formulations, *e. g.*, time and eternity, the supernatural-natural distinction, and the scholastic inheritance in respect to the value of metaphysics. Both schools, for example, still maintain the classic scholastic position of the scope and nature of theological ethics. In my opinion it will only be through a thorough investigation of the history of both positions that the debate will be advanced and the full ambiguity of the situation laid bare.

Hamilton's whole book is filled with examples of ambiguity and ambivalence due to the fact that he has accommodated himself at so many points to the scholastic traditions of both the Reformed and Roman Catholic camps. This fact, coupled with a rather obvious accommodation to the common sense realism of the last few centuries, greatly detracts from its value. The author shows this accommodation clearly when he says, "The view of Christian realism is the view commonly held in Christian churches. The ordinary Christian realist bases his belief in the reality of matter as a non-spiritual substance on what is called the common-sense view of the universe. That is, he usually makes little or no attempt to work out a metaphysics, but accepts the testimony of his senses as to the reality and actuality of an extended, solid world, in a universe of space. He finds this conception is not contradicted by the Bible and therefore bases his Christianity on this view of the universe. The vast majority of Christians either consciously or unconsciously take this view of the universe" (p. 30). For anyone having any acquaintance with the history of philosophy this statement of Hamilton jeopardizes his whole presentation.

There are many examples of this accommodation. On page 6 the author describes a view of epistemology which comes straight out of the humanistic tradition, and

uncritically accepts it. His view of sensation and of space and time have a clear history. Yet Hamilton would incorporate this humanistic tradition and have his own position remain unscathed. An example is his statement, concerning the seeing of a red object, "This red sensation is meaningless until the mind reacts to the stimulus and thinks 'It is red' " (p. 10). This is a clear instance of a form of subjectivism where the law for the object is reduced to the subjective act of judging. It would be tragic if the sensations were meaningless until they were acted upon by the mind, for then no perception would be possible since this chaotic mass of sensation does not exist, unless one follows the humanist, Kant.

On page 7 the author develops his view of "innate ideas". This doctrine of innate ideas in any form has been demonstrated by D. H. Th. Vollenhoven of the Calvinistic school of philosophy to be a remnant of our pagan, hellenistic, gentile inheritance. The whole chain of reasoning in this book rests on this ambiguous notion of innate ideas.

On page 125 Christianity is defended by the claim that "Christianity did not appeal to man's lower nature" and "Nothing about Christianity appealed to the lower sensual nature of man". On the same page Hamilton says, "But not only in the marriage relationship were the natural appetites of man placed under control and spiritualized ...". One could easily delude oneself into thinking he was reading some pagan Greek writer before the coming of Christ and not Hamilton. Phrases like "our lower nature", "lower sensual nature", *etc.*, show clear traces of a nature-grace ground motive in Hamilton's thinking which vitiates his whole position.

The book is replete with clear examples of synthetic thinking, that is, thinking which tends to water down the totalitarian demand of our Lord to claim all areas of life and thought and to bring them captive to him. Hamilton is driven to combine, and therefore to tolerate, the claims of the unregenerate mind within his attempt to present a Christian position congenial to the Reformation.

If one would subject Van Til's system to a thorough historical investigation, it, too, would probably manifest many points of accommodation to scholasticism. However, his main thrust throughout his whole thinking is one that has continually demanded reformation of Christian thinking, while Hamilton's thinking and the old Princeton apologetic in general represents a counter-reformational thinking stemming from the Reformed scholasticism of the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It is this scholasticism which should be the common enemy of both schools of apologetics, for it is this which has sucked the life blood of the Reformed Christian community in America and elsewhere. This scholasticism Van Til has seen and is fighting, but Hamilton has not seen it and continues to propagate it.

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