



Felling Goliath: How to Enforce the Victory of Christ Over Unbelief

“...that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel” (1 Sam 17:46)

A battle is raging in our day – at the heart of both church and culture – between diametrically opposed worldviews.

It is a battle between anti-theistic unbelief and the true knowledge of God.

Humanity’s first parents, in rebellion against God and his clear verbal communication, presumed to judge between two supposed hypotheses: God’s clear revelation *or* Satan’s critique of the same (see Gen 3). Choosing to be morally and intellectually autonomous – independent of God – they opted for Satan’s critique—for his lie. And believing themselves to be wise they became fools (see Rom 1).

Pridefully presuming to be the judge over God and his revelation, as to whether they are believable, they became a competing moral and intellectual authority; thus determining and defining the human condition.

Believing themselves to be autonomous, and thus in possession of both the authority and the ability to neutrally judge between revelation and the knowledge of good and evil, choosing the latter they thrust their progeny into moral and intellectual enmity against God. They had, in fact, become as gods.

Man, having deposed God, is now the authority. This is the unspoken assumption – the presupposition – and thus, bedrock of all unbelieving thought, regardless of its intellectual superstructure. It is at the heart of all humanistic philosophy and especially materialistic scientism (the belief that the natural sciences, and more particularly the scientific method, are the only authority for understanding the universe). This is not to discredit science, which in fact emerged from the worldview of the Christian West. C. S. Lewis said it well: “Men became scientific because they expected Law in Nature, and they expected Law in Nature because they believed in a Legislator [i.e. Lawgiver].”

Nonetheless, since the 18th Century Humanist Enlightenment (rationalism and empiricism) our culture has been increasingly dominated, and now, in the 21st Century, bullied by this Goliath of unbelief.

The battle lines have been drawn. The armies of the Philistines are arrayed against those of Israel. And two opposed worldviews are at war: idolatrous nature worship (humanism, naturalism, and pantheism) *versus* that of the infinite, creator-redeemer God (Christian-theism).

Goliath, epitomising autonomous man, has stepped forward as champion of the Philistines, strutting his 9-foot frame before the armies of Israel in direct defiance of God. Through the chicaneries of mockery and intimidation Goliath has fooled them into cringing inaction. Believing they are impotent in the face of such a display of human skill and power they cower, awaiting deliverance.

With Goliath strutting his stuff morning and night, the standoff ground on for 40 days. This number is suggestive in scripture, signifying a period of testing and probation for God's people (e.g. Israel's 40 years in the wilderness, Jesus' wilderness fast of 40 days etc.). Despite the vociferous dominance of humanistic man for what seems an indeterminable period, God is not without an answer.

Prepared in obscurity, a young man – the youngest of his brothers and too young for military service – hears of the crisis. Goliath's boastful defiance of the armies of the living God stirs David's heart to jealousy for the Lord's name.

David steps forward as a defender of Israel to go against the Philistine—unqualified in the eyes of men, but qualified by God. We are about to discover the key to enforcing the victory of Christ over anti-theistic unbelief.

Saul, who stood out *head and shoulders* above his peers (1 Sam 9:2), representing human thinking and human leadership, advises David to put on Saul's own armour.

Hence in one salient lesson we discover the failure in our defence of Christianity. Heeding Saul, we have depended on human thinking and human leadership. The latter I have dealt with in my book, 'Snakes in the Temple'. And so, here we will focus on the former—human thinking.

In confronting the inroads of heresy and humanistic philosophy Tertullian (155-240 AD) rightly retorts: "What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?" And yet, tragically Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) synthesised Aristotelian philosophy with Christianity, setting the pattern for Christian thinking in both the academy and church. This was to have disastrous effects for apologetics and the intellectual defence of the faith.

Aquinas' error was to underestimate the effect of the Fall on human thinking [1]—the noetic impact of sin, causing humanity to suppress the knowledge of God (see Gen 3; Rom 1:18-24 & 28; 8:7; 2 Cor 10:5; Eph 2:3; 4:17-18; Col 2:18; Jas 4:4).

And yet, this was the nub of mankind's choice in the Garden: submission to the mind of God in his verbal communication (i.e. thinking the thoughts of God after him) *or* rebellion by setting himself up as a rival moral and intellectual authority (i.e. autonomous—thinking his own thoughts after himself). Man presided over God's revelation as the judge of its believability; and thus, all human thinking now presupposes its own authority and neutrality, despite its congenital prejudice towards unbelief.

To assume with Aquinas that man has both the authority and the neutrality to reason himself toward God is to ignore the effects of the Fall. It is to give ground to mankind's intellectual autonomy and rebellion against God.

To resort to Saul's armour in the face of the Goliath of Enlightenment Humanism – unbelief – spells certain defeat. It is to argue for Christianity on the same presupposition as all unbelieving thought—that is, both the authority and neutrality of man's intellect in judging what is true.

From the perspective of biblical Christianity, he has neither—they are a delusion. Man's reasoning capacities are neither original nor *determinative*—but *derivative*. They were designed by God to think his thoughts after him—

that is, God in his verbal revelation is the interpreter of reality, not man. [2]

Fortunately, David refused Saul's armour. He instead chose comparatively powerless weapons: 5 smooth stones, a sling, and his shepherd's staff. Nonetheless, he had proven them, in obscurity, defending his father's flock against the bear and the lion.

The Goliath of humanistic unbelief mocks at such foolishness. And Saul, representing the natural (carnal) Christian, completely underestimates the power of God, depending instead on the effectiveness of autonomous human thought and contrivance.

The number '5' biblically symbolises redemption (e.g. 5 wounds of Christ, 5 ministry gifts of Ephesians etc.). And so, choosing the foolishness of God over the wisdom of men (see 1 Cor 1:17-31), David symbolises the defender of the faith who appeals to the redemptive revelation of God in Christ—to the supremacy of the mind and word of God in interpreting reality. No ground is given to autonomous man to determine what is true.

David's stance, in defending the Lord's name, was one of confidence in the power of God—not of men:

... "You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied." 1 Sam 17:45 ESV

And so, this foreshadows for us the spiritual warfare that destroys intellectual strongholds that resist the knowledge of God:

"3 For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. 4 For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. 5 We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ." 2 Cor 10:3-5 ESV

To defend Christianity utilising the same weapons that Satan put into the hands of our first parents in the Garden is to concede defeat before the battle begins. And yet, this is the story of the Christian apologetics that flows in the tradition of Thomistic "natural theology". Man's ability to interpret the universe and determine what is true has been profoundly damaged by sin. Despite his pretensions to godhood, he possesses neither the authority nor the neutrality to arrive at truth.

Instead he develops exalted intellectual strongholds to resist the knowledge of God that overwhelmingly assails him from without and within—through both creation and conscience (see Rom 1-2).

We might ask then, "How is Christianity to be explained and defended?"

By speaking directly to the heart of the unbeliever, presupposing the clear revelation of God that they already possess (see Rom 1-2), despite their denial. The burden of proof therefore rests, not on the believer to prove the existence of God but rather on the unbeliever to prove his non-existence. Our job is to speak as God's voice to the whole person – heart *and* mind – that has been made in the image of God.

As we declare the truth of the absolute creator-God in love, presuming their clear knowledge of Him, we can bring to the light the intellectual hubris of unbelief (i.e. the assumed authority and neutrality to be able to judge God's verbal communication) and the utter intellectual incoherence of unbelief (i.e. no explanation for human consciousness, personality, rationality, morality, the factuality of the universe, the uniformity of natural law etc.).

We can show the human condition as one of rebellion against the God who is there. Only then can we call them to a change of heart and mind to return to their creator-redeemer God.

This is David's stone that took down the Goliath of unbelief. On impact it sank into the middle of his forehead, representing the mind and its prideful arguments against the knowledge of God.

We too, in our day, can release the stone of God's revelation to man and bring down this spiritual Goliath.

Like David we can also trust in the power of the Holy Spirit—that as we speak He will regenerate and convert the hearts and minds of men.

No amount of reasoning and evidences – as good as they are – can do what only the Holy Spirit can do—for “...*the Lord saves not with sword and spear. For the battle is the Lord's...*” (1 Sam 17:47).

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[1] Admittedly, in *Summa Theologica* (I, Q 85, Art 3), Aquinas saw man's intellect as wounded and impaired in some measure by the Fall. Nonetheless, in laying the groundwork for his theological enterprise, which was to develop into what has become known as “natural theology”, in *Summa Theologica* (I, Q 1), he did not fully address Paul's emphasis on fallen and willfully rebellious man whose biased intellect is inexcusably caught up in a stubborn rejection of the clear evidence from both our world and our inner life that reveals God. Aquinas therefore presumes the neutrality of human reason and philosophy. The role of revelation is then, not so much to correct human reason, as it is to provide further information that is beyond it.

[2] This is not to deny the capability of man's intellect in discovering the facts of the universe; but it is to say that he has an inbuilt bias regarding the interpretation of the facts. Despite them displaying the clear evidence of the creator-God, they are reinterpreted and God's knowledge actively suppressed. Man's intellect is somewhat like the ball used in lawn bowls; it is highly effective in terms of its design as a ball to roll smoothly. However, it possesses an inbuilt bias (a weight) in one side, directing it in a certain arc. And so, through our first parent's presumption to stand in authority over God's verbal revelation, mankind is now intellectually biased in an arc away from God.