So the Christian philosopher has his own topics and projects to think about; and when he thinks about the topics of current concern in the broader philosophical world, he will think about them in his own way, which may be a different way. He may have to reject certain currently fashionable assumptions about the philosophic enterprise-he may have to reject widely accepted assumptions as to what are the proper starting points and procedures for philosophical endeavor. And-and this is crucially important-the Christian philosopher has a perfect right to the point of view and prephilosophical assumptions he brings to philosophic work; the fact that these are not widely shared outside the Christian or theistic community is interesting but fundamentally irrelevant. I can best explain what I mean by way of example; so I shall descend from the level of lofty generality to specific examples.

II.Theism and Verifiability

First, the dreaded "Verifiability Criterion of Meaning." During the palmy days of logical positivism, some thirty or forty years ago, the positivists claimed that most of the sentences Christians characteristically utter-"God loves us," for example, or "God created the heavens and the earth"-don't even have the grace to be false; they are, said the positivists, literally meaningless. It is not that they express false propositions; they don't express any propositions at all. Like that lovely line from Alice in Wonderland, "T'was brillig, and the slithy toves did gyre and gymbol in the wabe," they say nothing false, but only because they say nothing at all; they are "cognitively meaningless," to use the positivist's charming phrase. The sorts of things theists and others had been saying for centuries, they said, were now shown to be without sense; we theists had all been the victims, it seems, of a cruel hoax-perpetrated, perhaps, by ambitious priests and foisted upon us by our own credulous natures.

Now if this is true, it is indeed important. How had the positivists come by this startling piece of intelligence? They inferred it from the Verifiability Criterion of Meaning, which said, roughly, that a sentence is meaningful only if either it is analytic, or its truth or falsehood can be determined by empirical or scientific investigation-by the methods of the empirical sciences. On these grounds not only theism and theology, but most of traditional metaphysics and philosophy and much else besides was declared nonsense, without any literal sense at all. Some positivists conceded that metaphysics and theology, though strictly meaningless, might still have a certain limited value. Carnap, for example, thought they might be a kind of music. It isn't known whether he expected theology and metaphysics to supplant Bach and Mozart, or even Wagner; I myself, however, think they could nicely supersede rock. Hegel could take the place of The Talking Heads; Immanuel Kant could replace The Beach Boys; and instead of The Grateful Dead we could have, say, Arthur Schopenhauer.

Positivism had a delicious air of being avant garde and with-it; and many philosophers found it extremely attractive. Furthermore, many who didn't endorse it nonetheless entertained it with great hospitality as at the least extremely plausible. As a consequence many philosophers-both Christians and non-Christians-saw here a real challenge and an important danger to Christianity: "The main danger to theism today," said J. J. C. Smart in 1955, "comes from people who want to say that 'God exists' and 'God does not exist' are equally absurd." In 1955 New Essays in Philosophical Theology appeared, a volume of essays that was to set the tone and topics for philosophy of religion for the next decade or more; and most of this volume was given over to a discussion of the impact of Verificationism on theism.

Many philosophically inclined Christians were disturbed and perplexed and felt deeply threatened; could it really be true that linguistic philosophers had somehow discovered that the Christian's most cherished convictions were, in fact, just meaningless? There was a great deal of anxious hand wringing among philosophers, either themselves theists or sympathetic to theism. Some suggested, in the face of positivistic onslaught, that the thing for the Christian community to do was to fold up its tents and silently slink away, admitting that the verifiability criterion was probably true.

Others conceded that strictly speaking, theism really is nonsense, but is important nonsense. Still others suggested that the sentences in question should be reinterpreted in such a way as not to give offense to the positivists; someone seriously suggested, for example, that Christians resolve, henceforth, to use the sentence "God exists" to mean "some men and women have had, and all may have, experiences called 'meeting God'"; he added that when we say "God created the world from nothing" what we should mean is "everything we call 'material' can be used in such a way that it contributes to the wellbeing of men." In a different context but the same spirit, Rudolph Bultmann embarked upon his program of demythologizing Christianity. Traditional supernaturalistic Christian belief, he said, is "impossible in this age of electric light and the wireless." (One can perhaps imagine an earlier village skeptic taking a similar view of, say, the tallow candle and printing press, or perhaps the pine torch and the papyrus scroll.)

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