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Other contributors to this volume can doubtless be depended on to offer analysis and philosophical reflection upon Plantinga's "Advice to Christian Philosophers." Instead, I should like to share something more of a personal memoir about the impact of Plantinga's advice upon my own philosophical career (or, as I prefer, ministry, since I view it as a calling from God).

I had completed my doctoral studies in theology at the University of Munich only one year before Plantinga delivered his epochal lecture. So I was just embarking upon a career as a Christian philosopher when I read Plantinga's advice. I had already absorbed during my undergraduate days at Wheaton College the vital importance of the integration of my faith and learning. I was, moreover, mindful of Scripture's condemnation of those who "loved the praise of men more than the praise of God" (John 12.43). And I admired the Apostle Paul for his heroic boldness in proclaiming the Gospel in the face of seemingly overwhelming opposition. So Plantinga's advice met in me with a prepared heart, and his appeal for greater autonomy, integrality, and boldness on the part of Christian philosophers resonated deeply within me. I determined that I would heed Plantinga's advice and so direct my efforts as a Christian philosopher. His call for greater autonomy, integrality, and boldness among Christian philosophers thus helped to chart my path from the beginning.

Many years later, when I published my trilogy on God and time, I included the following dedication:

To
ALVIN PLANTINGA
who by his work and his life has pointed the way

That dedication signaled my indebtedness and heartfelt gratitude to Plantinga for showing us—showing *me*—how to be a Christian philosopher.

Notice that in my dedication I mentioned both his work and his life. Not only was Plantinga's philosophical work characterized by the autonomy, integrality, and boldness that he called for, but his personal life exemplified that Christian character that should be exhibited by Christian philosophers. In 1985 I participated along with Plantinga in a remarkable interdisciplinary conference organized by Roy Varghese in Dallas. During the course of the conference, I arranged to meet personally with Plantinga so that I could ask him several questions I had about his philosophical positions. We had just begun to talk when a staff member of the conference came to us and said, "Dr. Plantinga, the Press are here and are asking to interview you." My heart sank. But to my utter shock, Plantinga replied, "Well, tell them to go away! Tell them I'm doing something more important: we're talking philosophy." You can imagine how that made me, as a young philosopher, feel! Alvin Plantinga considered it more important to talk with me than to do a published interview!

Years later Plantinga's gracious character was on full display at a Wheaton Philosophy conference I attended. A philosopher of no renown was assigned to deliver a comment on Plantinga's paper, and he was obviously intimidated at the prospect. Before

reading his comment, he nervously expressed his apprehension. “I’m afraid Al’s going to wipe the floor with me!” His ensuing critique was a tissue of obvious errors. When Plantinga rose to respond, I wondered what he was going to say. He began by turning to the commentator and addressing him by name, saying, “No one’s going to wipe the floor with anybody.” He paused and then added, “In fact, I feel pretty wiped out myself by your critique!” Of course, that wasn’t true; but I thought to myself, “What incredible graciousness!” That’s Alvin Plantinga.

But this essay is supposed to be about his advice, not his life. Since Plantinga’s original address is peppered with examples, let me give a few of my own to illustrate how his advice has influenced my own work. Fresh out of my doctoral studies, I wondered what research project I ought to undertake. I chose the coherence of theism, beginning with divine omniscience, particularly divine foreknowledge of future contingents. Even though the Bible explicitly attributes foreknowledge (*prognōsis*) to God and provides numerous illustrations of God’s foretelling future contingents like Judas’ betrayal and Peter’s threefold denial before the cock crows twice, an astonishing number of Christian philosophers have denied to God such knowledge of the future. Such unbiblical compromise betrays a lack of integrality on their part. Instead, they ought to explore, just as Plantinga has done, ways of defending the compatibility of divine foreknowledge with human freedom, as well as the metaphysical possibility of God’s knowing future contingents, or at least admit that they do not know the solution. In my work I defended not only an Ockhamist solution to the problem, but even more fundamentally the Molinist doctrine of middle knowledge, which brings with it enormous theological benefits

concerning divine providence, predestination, and other doctrines. Whatever one thinks of the success of my arguments, such an approach at least exhibits the integrality that Plantinga called for, whereas the denial of divine foreknowledge of future contingents does not.

After seven years, I turned my attention to the study of divine eternity, exploring God's relationship to time. I soon discovered that the philosophy of time and space is one of those areas of philosophy that requires a bold autonomy on the part of the Christian philosopher. Mainstream philosophy of time is shaped by Quine's so-called naturalized epistemology, which sees legitimate metaphysics as an extension of the natural sciences. As a result, the common, almost unquestioned, assumption among philosophers of time is that time is that quantity which is treated under that name in physics. Even many Christian philosophers writing on divine eternity acquiesce in this assumption. But the assumption is obviously wrong. If God, existing alone sans the universe, were to count down to creation, "... 3, 2, 1, *fiat lux!*" then clearly there would be a temporal sequence in his contents of consciousness wholly in the absence of any physical reality. (If it be thought that God is immutable, then just substitute angels experiencing a succession of thoughts.) I take this to be a knock-down argument against the widespread belief that time itself is a physical quantity.

In other words, Isaac Newton was right in distinguishing between time and our physical measures of time. Thus thrust into Newton's arms, I was stunned to discover that the metaphysical basis for Newton's doctrine of absolute time lay in his theism! In the *Scholium* to his *Principia Mathematica*,

Newton clearly explains that because God is eternal and omnipresent, absolute time and space are concomitant effects of God's being. This stunning realization meant that the widely trumpeted destruction of absolute time by Albert Einstein's special theory of relativity is spurious. For Einstein had no way of knowing that God's absolute time does not exist. A careful reading of his early papers on relativity reveals that his rejection of absolute time, space, and motion was predicated on a verificationist epistemology that he inherited from Ernst Mach, the very sort of verificationism so roundly criticized in Plantinga's address. Verificationism has passed away, but in its place stands naturalized epistemology, which will not countenance time apart from physics. Never mind for now how the relation between time itself and physical time is to be resolved, the overriding point of the illustration is that the Christian philosopher exploring God's relationship to time must be prepared to challenge the very foundations of contemporary philosophy of time and the naturalized epistemology that underlies it.

Another illustration emerged from my subsequent study of divine aseity. Although the Bible teaches clearly that God is the sole ultimate reality, the Creator of all things other than himself, some Christian philosophers accept the reality of uncreated abstract objects, objects which, as Plantinga put it in *The Nature of Necessity*, exist just as serenely as your most robust concrete objects. The acceptance of untold infinities of infinities of uncreated abstract objects makes God's creation of the physical universe *ex nihilo* an utter triviality. Plantinga himself came to embrace a divine conceptualism concerning such putative abstract objects, as already evident in his advice to Christian

philosophers. But a more fundamental challenge to Platonism is to call into question the neo-Quinean criterion of ontological commitment that allegedly requires such an ontology. There is no good reason to think, and good reasons to doubt, that we are ontologically committed to the values of variables bound by the existential quantifier or to the referents of singular terms in sentences we take to be true. Christian philosophers who countenance an ontology of uncreated objects of any sort exhibit a lack of integrality with their faith; but challenging the prevalent neo-Quineanism requires autonomy and boldness.

So much for my examples of the influence of Plantinga's advice in my own life and work! Plantinga's advice to Christian philosophers has shaped my work from the beginning and continues to do so until this day. I thank God to have been born a contemporary of this great man.

We have also been asked to share any further advice that we ourselves might have for Christian philosophers. In fact, I do have one such piece of advice. It is that we Christian philosophers give greater heed to biblical theology. Plantinga advised us to exhibit greater integrality in our work, to think about issues from a Christian point of view. But Plantinga did not discuss what determines a Christian point of view. It is the conviction of the Christian Church that our ultimate authority for Christian doctrine is the teaching of inspired Scripture. Even the authority of ecumenical councils is ultimately derivative from the final authority of Scripture. Therefore we Christian philosophers need to put some effort into understanding and submitting to the teaching of Scripture.

I have been alarmed at the ignorance of or indifference to scriptural teaching by many Christian philosophers. As, at best, philosophical theologians, many of us do not seem to be greatly interested in biblical theology. Very typically, we reflect philosophically upon an issue independently of scriptural teaching, not bothering to determine what the Bible teaches about a subject.

Illustrations come all too readily to mind. Consider once more God's omniscience. In chatting with one Christian philosopher about my work on divine omniscience, I asked him, "How can Christian philosophers deny that God has foreknowledge, when the Bible explicitly states that he has foreknowledge?" He smiled and said, "Bill, you know that Christian philosophers don't care what the Bible teaches!" We both laughed, but inside I felt a certain sadness. Could it be true that Christian philosophers really do not care?

Or consider some Christian philosophers' espousal of Platonic realism about *abstracta* in contradiction to the biblical teaching that God alone is uncreated. Their attempts to reconcile their position with biblical teaching on the grounds that biblical authors did not have abstract objects in mind fails to appreciate that whatever lay in the domain of their quantifiers unknown to them, nonetheless they intended to assert that all things apart from God have been created by God, that God and God alone is an uncreated being. If we were to tell them that abstract objects are just as real as people or rocks, they would doubtless have said that they, too, must then have been created by God.

Or again, the doctrines of divine simplicity and impassibility espoused some of us Christian philosophers are unbiblical, not merely in the sense that, say, the doctrines of divine necessity or timelessness are unbiblical, that is, not explicitly taught but nevertheless permitted by the biblical text, but in the sense that they are positively anti-biblical. The Bible teaches that God has a diversity of attributes and is multi-personal. Moreover, he is affected by his creatures in what he knows, loves, and wills. Strong doctrines of divine simplicity and impassibility are rooted historically, not in the Bible, but in neo-Platonism and represent a perversion of biblical teaching.

Or consider the doctrine of the atonement. I have found that fellow Christian philosophers who write on this subject are often woefully ignorant of biblical teaching. The typical procedure is to develop a doctrine of the atonement based upon how reconciliation is achieved between human parties to a dispute. Such a methodology is horribly distorted, not merely because of the disanalogies between the persons involved (human and divine), but even more fundamentally because the biblical doctrine of atonement is not primarily about reconciliation. Christian philosophers typically treat the atonement in the etymological sense of the term of “at one-ment” or reconciliation. But the biblical words in Hebrew and Greek for “atonement” or “to make atonement” have to do mainly with cleansing or expiation of impurity and sin. German theologians nicely mark this distinction by distinguishing between *die Sühne* and *die Versöhnung*, but in English we are not so blessed. Thus, incredibly, the work of many, if not most, Christian philosophers on the doctrine of the atonement has almost nothing to do with the biblical concept of atonement. They usually develop their

atonement theories independently of biblical teaching and then turn to the Bible to find proof texts in support of their theory.

These examples illustrate an important weakness of contemporary Christian philosophy. The reason our work often lacks integrality is because we are too often ignorant of or indifferent to the teaching of Scripture. We might try to excuse our indifference on the grounds that we are not biblical scholars, after all, but philosophers. But this excuse is empty. One need not know the biblical languages in order to benefit from reading expert commentaries written by biblical scholars who do know such languages and can exegete the text for us. We just need to do our homework.

In fact, reading biblical theology can be extremely interesting for a Christian philosopher because of our training in conceptual analysis, which biblical scholars usually lack. One will sometimes find them overlooking important distinctions, e.g., between death as a consequence of sin and death as a punishment for sin or propositional faith in contrast to personal faith. Many biblical theologians do not understand the differences between anthropological dualism (which the Bible teaches) and Platonic dualism (which it does not). We can thus help one another in our common quest for an adequate worldview. But we cannot do so if we ignore our sister discipline.

In his advice to Christian philosophers Plantinga emphasized that as Christian philosophers we are to serve the Christian community. We shall be much more effective in our service to

the Church if we make an effort to familiarize ourselves with biblical theology.