

# ***Non-Sequitur: the Sickness of Christian Apologetics***

I am the way and the truth and the life  
--John 14:6

Perhaps my title is a bit misleading. By no means am I suggesting that only Christians are guilty of the *non-sequitur* fallacy. I have dealt with all kinds of non-Christians: Muslim, Pagan, Witches, Wiccan and skeptics. I can attest that this problem knows no boundaries. But as I strive to defend the Christian faith, it's my Christian brethren that I hope to improve. We are losing four Christians for every one we convert. We need to be better than our competitors if our faith is to survive. But before I actually talk about *non-sequitur*, I want to explain why it is important that Christians become better amateur philosophers.

Immanuel Kant had envisioned a world where the intelligentsia would be free to go any place their curious imaginations would take them, while the common man would judge any ideas that were derived from such pondering for their practicality. If the philosopher wants to declare that an apple and a lemon are both the same because they both grow on trees, then that was his prerogative. But the philosopher is never satisfied with any conclusion, so next he will declare that trees and grass both use photosynthesis to produce energy, therefore fruit and vegetables are both the same. And this analysis will go on for eternity, because every observation will lead to more questions. The common man, however, does not need an infinite list of ideas that lead to more questions; he needs one concept that works when needed. G.K. Chesterton does quite well explaining this phenomenon in his famous "Mysticism Keeps Men Sane" discussion in his book, *Orthodoxy* (chapter 2). The common man has stereoscopic vision. He is free to accept that apples, lemons and carrots are the same because it makes it very easy to find all of them in the grocery store (i.e., the produce aisle). But, and this is critical, the common man is equally free to reject this premise and say that apples and lemons are different when he wants something sweet to drink instead of something sour.

But we live in a culture where everyone is encouraged to be a philosopher, so the sanity that the common man ought to provide society has been lost. In a vain effort to be what the common man is not, the common man is now trying to come up with his own ideas instead of judging the value of those produced by true philosophers. Martin Luther opened up this Pandora's Box by insisting that everyone should interpret for themselves what the Bible said. Christians, he would argue, do not need the pope because everyone should be their own pope. He assumed that the meaning of any particular scripture would be made clear upon reflection, and that everyone would clearly see it. But this experiment failed catastrophically even at the beginning. His own ideas were constantly beset by his own free thinking followers. His desire to separate the so-called "*antilegomena*" from the rest of the Bible was sharply vetoed by his own priests, and Huldrych Zwingli, who claimed, "There are no people on earth with whom I would rather be at one than the [Lutheran] Wittenbergers." (George Timothy, *Theology of the Reformers*, pg 155), openly cried during the Marburg Colloquy as the religious summit failed to bring union within the self-called "Reformers." And now there are literally tens of thousands of different Christian churches in the U.S. alone, each with their own dogmas and ideas of what the Bible "really" means. Far from having universal agreement on the clear meaning of scripture as Luther assumed existed, Protestants today are proud of their great diversity in opinion. But the damage extends beyond that. If one is free to challenge the legitimacy of the only Church Jesus authorized, then it is perfectly reasonable and rational to challenge the existence of God as well. But I am not here to discuss this bitter part of Christian history, but rather to make an observation on what happened to theological thought as a result of Luther's multiple and epic *non-sequitur* fallacies.

Today, it no longer matters if you are Catholic, Protestant, non-Catholic apostolic, atheist, pagan, spiritualist, wiccan or whatever. The focus for the common man is not on judging which theological theory works best (if at all); it is about coming up with one's own theory. But a theory ought to be logical, rational, reasonable and internally consistent. Furthermore, it ought to be based on, and compatible with, all available evidence on the subject matter. And there is plenty of theological evidence that exists outside of the Bible. It takes work and effort to properly review all relevant information, and then to put together an internally consistent catechist. This is why the common man is a poor philosopher, and why there is so much disunion within a Church Jesus prayed would be united (four times in the span of 13 verses: John 17:11-23, and note that this was not just for His disciples, but for those who would follow them). Like I mentioned before, the common man wants a single answer that works, not a myriad of alternatives and endless speculation. And without a doubt, the single greatest mistake both the philosopher and the common man makes is known as the *non-sequitur* fallacy. *Non-sequitur* means the conclusion does not follow the premises. But, unlike the proper philosopher, the common man has neither the training nor the peers to look out for it.

To be clear, *non-sequitur* does *not* mean that the conclusion was *incompatible* with the presented evidence, only that multiple conclusions can be derived from the presented evidence. Sadly, since the common man is not doing his job in judging the theories of true philosophers based on practicality, this problem is also popping up to an alarming degree among true philosophers. While speculation on my part, I believe it is because with no outside authority to check up behind him (i.e., the pragmatic common man), the philosopher has become sloppy. This, of course, is a *non-sequitur* of my own, but I admit as such. I would not call anyone who disagreed with me "wrong," but I would want to understand their line of thought so we could both get to the truth of the matter. Now to the formal discussion.

I believe that Jesus is truth incarnate, based on the scriptural evidence given at the beginning of this paper. *Anyone* who is honestly and genuinely seeking truth (including atheists, Satan-worshippers and anyone else hostile to Christianity), is seeking Jesus. This declaration is not new for those who have been following my writings over the years, as I've mentioned it multiple times. Indeed, it is one of my "silver bullets" in apologizing, as it covers a tremendous amount of theological ground. But this time, I am not talking about coming to Christ, but rather I want to use it to demonstrate two key concepts as it pertains to logical thought.

Note that Jesus did not say that He is only some of the truth, that He is truthful, or that He knows of the truth. Most importantly for my argument, He did not say, "I am a certain type of truth." Jesus unequivocally called Himself truth, something no other philosopher in the history of the world has done. If Jesus is who He says He is, then He is, to use a sentence popular in our court system, "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth." Therefore, it *must follow* that anyone who honestly and sincerely seeks the truth is in search of Jesus because there is no truth outside of Jesus. Whether or not this person will admit he is seeking Jesus is a moot point.

To say something "must follow" is a *sequitur* argument: if one thing is true, then another thing *must* also be true. While I've no doubt that many Christians won't like the idea of atheists or Satanists finding Jesus, such Christians can only attack my argument by questioning my idea of what the relationship between Jesus and truth is. To discredit my claim, my interlocutor must either show that Jesus is only a certain type of truth, or to question if a particular non-Christian is being honest and sincere in his search for truth. But of particular importance to this paper is what the interlocutor *cannot* use against me: that I'm saying anyone seeking truth will be saved.

To spell it out, this theoretical accusation against me would look something like this: "You're saying that anyone who looks for truth will find Jesus, which means they are saved. And since everyone needs truthfulness in their lives, then everyone will be saved, and we know from scripture that this is not true." This is known as a *reductio ad absurdum* (reduction to absurdity). It is an attempt to show me that the logical conclusion of my argument would be absurd, therefore my logic is flawed somewhere.

However, it is not my argument that is flawed, but rather their *reductio ad absurdum*. The part "which means they are saved" is *non sequitur*. It is assuming that everyone who *finds* Jesus will *accept* Jesus. It is ignoring the possibility that one may find Jesus and still reject Him. Now, showing that a theory is *non sequitur* does not disprove the theory; it only shows that alternatives exist. Additional evidence needs to be introduced, and a means of judging which theory fits the evidence best needs to be devised. In this particular example, the theory that all who come to Jesus will be saved is contrary to what the Bible tells us. Caiaphas and Pontius Pilate are certainly the biggest names of those who found and rejected Jesus, but we see many others. Indeed, it is difficult to find two consecutive chapters in Jesus' public ministry where we don't see at least one person coming to Jesus only to leave Him. We have untold numbers of Pharisees, Sadducees and scribes doing just this. Judas Iscariot, the rich disciple, and even Satan (the temptation in the desert) are memorable examples as well. And how can we forget the 5,000 men (and their families) who rejected Jesus after His Bread of Life Discourse (John 6:22-60, which, ironically, is the center of the most fundamental difference between Catholicism and all the rest of Christianity)?

I desperately want to find Jesus, and my main means of doing so is through the study of the truth. I chose Christianity over every other religion/philosophy because I have come to believe it does a better job in finding the truth than all the others. Likewise, I chose Catholicism because I have found that it does the best job in leading one to the truth than any other form of Christianity. If my ideas concerning Christianity and Catholicism are wrong, I want to know. But all too often, those who call my belief in the Catholic Church wrong present *really bad* arguments. And while there are other problems with the many anti-Catholic theories I have come across, *non-sequitur* is always prominent.

For my first example, I will discuss apocalyptic literature as a whole. One ought to be very cautious in claiming definitive knowledge from it, as it speaks of things that are beyond human experience (either the future and/or of spiritual realities). Even the prophet who experienced it is often unsure of what it was he observed. Indeed, angels are sometimes present to explain to the prophet what was seen, and even then only partial explanations are given. Because it is beyond human experience (at least at the time it was written), it is mysterious, subject to much interpretation and easily misunderstood. As a result, the study of apocalyptic literature, unless solid evidence is present to show that it is either happening now or has already come to pass, is almost always filled with *non-sequitur* fallacies. If the gentle reader will forgive a short sidebar, let me show how easy it is to misunderstand this type of scripture.

Imagine going back to the Wild West of the 19th century and trying to describe an automobile, something so ubiquitous to our culture. To them, however, a car was an element of a railroad train. When you tell them this car moves itself, they may think of the engine (which would have been powered by a steam boiler). So you might change your tactic and call it "a horseless carriage" (which actually was a common means of describing automobiles when they first came out). But this was a time before the technological wonders we now take for granted existed, so you have to prove to them that it is neither witchcraft propelling it, nor invisible hellhounds pulling it. But how does one describe an internal combustion engine to these people? We find ourselves back to the steam-driven train

engine again. In the end, you might have to simply tell them, "It's like a train engine, but the size of a wagon, and it doesn't need to follow railroad tracks or have a coal tender." Yes, they may finally get the idea of how a car is *used*, but a small, fire-powered steam engine with a piston forcing wheels to move is still a far cry from the gas-powered, internal combustion engines and their transmission systems that make cars the preferred alternative today. Now imagine someone actually wrote your prophetic words in their journal, and it just so happens that a good friend of yours is a descendant of this writer, finds the diary, and reads it. He then comes to you, not knowing you were the prophet mentioned, and says, "Boy, some prophet he was! If he really knew the future, he would have told them we don't use steam power. What a crock."

To quote blindly from scripture, especially apocalyptic scripture, always runs the risk of being *non-sequitur* because it is difficult to tell what type of truth the scripture was actually trying to present. The truth of how a car is *used* was very accurate in the above thought exercise, the truth on how the car *operates* was very wrong. And it had no way of being right, as the concepts needed to understand its operation were too foreign to accept in that era. This is not a weakness of the Bible, but its strength. One of the most beautiful aspects of Christian scripture is that multiple, yet legitimate, interpretations of a single biblical truth are almost always possible. Luther was not completely wrong in challenging the Church, as he did make it relook at how it operated, and many changes did follow (Pope Leo X initially thought Luther's concern was a dispute between Luther's Augustinian order and the Dominican order, which was the main proponent of indulgences). But then he fell into the very mentality he accused the Church of having, and refused to accept any ideas incompatible with his own (as proven during the ill-fated Marburg Colloquy).

Of course, misunderstanding scripture is not merely a Christian problem, atheists do it quite regularly as well. For my next example, consider the genealogies presented in the Old Testament, of which some Christians have taken upon themselves to estimate how many years ago the first man and woman existed. I will use the 6,000 Year Theory to represent these efforts, as it seems to be the most common age used by Creationists. It is interesting to compare it against an atheist who is defending some variation of the Big Bang Theory as proof the Bible is wrong. *Both* are making the *non-sequitur* fallacy, and both are using the *same* scripture for their theories! The creationist is assuming that every line of scripture must be factually true, as opposed to trying to reveal a deeper truth (the *purpose* of creation) than what simple facts could convey (*how* creation took place). The atheist is also assuming that these verses need to be taken as an expression of factual truth, but sees them contradicting whatever variation of the Big Bang Theory he believes in (both conveniently forgetting that it was a Catholic Priest, Father Georges Lemaître, who came up with it). Therefore, the Bible must be wrong and, by extension, God must not exist (another *non-sequitur* fallacy).

But if we look at Hebrew texts, we see that "days" was translated from the Hebrew word *yom*. *Yom* is a generic word for time, and whose meaning must be taken in context. It can represent hours, days, weeks, months, etc. It can even represent "an indefinite period of time" or "an age." When used to establish the Sabbath, "days" is the most reasonable interpretation based on the context. But before creation, there was no time at all, so *yom* must be taken in the context that time itself is in the process of being created! In this context, a sequence of events is what is important, not "seconds," "minutes," "hours," etc. Indeed, how can *yom* mean a full rotation of the Earth about its own axis when the Earth did not exist until halfway through the Creation process (early in the third *yom* to be specific, Genesis 1:9-10, 13)? From here, we do see the first *yom* is defined as "evening came, and morning followed." (Genesis 1:5), but with nothing in existence except light and darkness, how can these terms be literal? Taken in context, "an indefinite period of time" is the most rational choice for *yom*, and "evening" and "morning" showing that this period did have a beginning and a duration (note that, in Jewish culture the

"day" began at dusk and lasted beyond the dawn).

So there are at least three rational and reasonable interpretations of this scripture, but only one fits all the known evidence. The third interpretation did not deny science, but rather gave science room to explore, and what science found is fascinating. Science has not only proven that Creation took place, but that it parallels Genesis 1:1-2:3 quite well, *and* is showing just how important Intelligent Design (what Jews and Christians recognize as God) is for Creation to exist. So there is extremely strong scientific evidence that atheism is wrong and that the Jews and Christians are right after all. But if we insist that *yom* must mean a 24-hour period (as we measure time today), then the Creationist has very embarrassing questions to answer. How can evening and morning take place without the horizon that comes from the Earth? Another problem is the dinosaurs and other prehistoric animals. Simply saying they died in the Great Flood is not a good answer, as now the Christian has to try to explain why Noah ignored them when God said to accept all animals, and why so many marine animals died out as well. And the problems go on *ad infinitum*. The common *non-sequitur* fallacy Creationists make in assuming *yom* means "day" is perhaps the single greatest error in all of Christendom since the Enlightenment. It alienates its own child, science, from Christianity and forces science to join the atheists, even though science and atheism are proven to be incompatible.

This is what happens with *non-sequiturs*. When more than one interpretation of a given piece of evidence is possible, there will be at least two theories if at least two people look at the same evidence. Protestants have a proclivity to assume every line of scripture is factually true, pick one they like, and then decide any other scripture is wrong whenever there is a conflict. Atheists likewise like to pick a scripture that appeals to them, show that it is in conflict with either science or another line of scripture, and then decide God does not exist as a result of the disagreement. And while Catholics are just as guilty of *non-sequitur* as anyone else, it manifests itself in quite a different way.

The Catholic Church has been very careful to craft every line of scripture into a coherent whole, and has 2,000 years of experience in perfecting its teachings. And all this is grounded in the teachings of the apostles of Jesus (Apostolic Tradition), giving mankind the best perspective on what Jesus meant on matters during His time as well as insight into more contemporary issues. But while it is extremely difficult to challenge the Catholic Church on its internal beliefs once its methodology is understood, the Church does a very poor job in explaining it to the world at large. Instead, it relies on a handful of apologists who take the time to understand this to make the arguments for them. While this in and of itself is not a problem, a good many Catholics try to be the philosopher (or, to be more specific, the theologian) they are not. And they are every bit as guilty of *non-sequitur* as any. Indeed, Natural Law Theory seems to be the argument of choice for them, yet even a superficial questioning of what they say reveals they have no idea what Natural Law really is. And Catholics tend to disregard the fact that many famous atheists use Natural Law to develop their own ideas, many of which are considered heretical by the Church (such as Kantianism and Unitarianism).

To be specific, the primary *non-sequitur* fallacy Catholics use is to assume Natural Law can justify any moral belief they have. But Natural Law is a system of logic, and all logic processes are subject to the same infinite regress of philosophy I spoke about at the beginning. At some point, the logic process needs to be directed or stopped, or else undesirable outcomes will be the result. Even the pagans understood this dynamic, as a god usually represented some virtue and this virtue was often shown being taken in excess. But only a god can define when too much of a good thing is too much. If that god is not Jehovah, then another god must take its place. It may be a traditional god (such as Zeus or Shiva), or man taking the role of god (such as David Hume, Karl Marx, Russel Bertrand, or even the Christian who is fooling himself into thinking he can justify a *full* system of morality without Jehovah).

The apparently common Catholic idea that if everyone only understood Natural Law then everyone would agree on what was moral is the same *non-sequitur* fallacy Luther made in assuming anyone who could read the Bible would agree on what the Bible meant.

Protestants and Catholics alike can research Jewish culture and language, historical records, and scientific discovery. Some important additional sources Catholics need to consider is Revealed Law (what God said through the prophets), Civil and Ecclesiastical Law (procedures to ensure smooth operations of any organization), Magisterium Infallibility (reference to Jesus telling Saint Peter that, "The gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against [the Church]," Matthew 16:18), and Apostolic Tradition (decisions and interpretations of scripture by the apostles and maintained by the Magisterium). None of these Catholic resources are logic-based, they are based on faith that God cares about the spiritual health of His Church, and that He will intervene as necessary to keep His promise in this regard. But none of the tools listed here will help if not used. If they are not used, then there is simply no avoiding the *non-sequitur* fallacy.

To be clear, I am *not* saying that moral behavior cannot be determined to some degree by Natural Law. One can use Natural Law to arrive at the conclusion that it is wrong to kill somebody illegally. It takes Revealed Law, however, to arrive at the conclusion that gossiping is a form of murder (Matthew 5:22). Once this concept is revealed, one can turn to Natural Law to explain why this surprising revelation actually makes sense (*a posteriori*, commonly called "reverse engineering"). Furthermore, Divine Revelation can actually be used as a premise in Natural Law, as any Christian ought to accept it as unquestionable truth. And this is where I believe the real problems come in.

One can easily pick a scripture and get a "gut feeling," or find that the "spirit moved them." But how does one know if this hunch is real or imaginary? More importantly, why should someone else have to rely on another's "gut feeling" or confession of holiness? It is easy to connect almost any two occurrences when one wants to. As long as the links are rational and reasonable, a legitimate logical argument is made. But it is *non-sequitur* to suggest that it is a strong argument, or that it must be true. The only way to ensure it is a strong argument, or that it might be true, is to consider alternative interpretations and test each theory for its merits and weaknesses. Not only is the trap thereby avoided, but one can have great confidence that the theory which ultimately won out is the most believable.

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