

REPLY TO THE METAPHORICAL DR. MACKY

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Doubtless every author feels some elation when his publications are given book reviews, and more so when they elicit critical articles. Some authors may echo the politician who said, "I don't care what they write about me so long as they mention my name." Gordon R. Lewis in his *Testing Christianity's Truth Claims* almost perfectly describes my position, even though his negative criticism concerns something not mentioned in his summary. Ronald Nash made only one mistake, but unfortunately used it as an essential part of his rebuttal. Another critic, after quoting from a certain page in one of my books, attributed to me a position that I had explicitly denied on the very page from which he quoted. Peter W. Macky is not so stupid as the latter, nor is he quite so perfect as the first.

If Macky's repeated, chiding references to geometry were used only to gain the support of students who do not like the subject, it would not bother me much. But his own dislike for the subject is so strong that he stumbles into falsity. For example, "Clark in adopting geometry promotes the logical coherence of a system as the sole standard" (*JETS* 24/3 [1981] 240). Then too, "Clark's theory follows coherently from his *initial* [italics mine] assumption that *geometry* is the standard by which *all* thought is to be measured" (p. 243). He also says, "Clark essentially excludes *all* human thought except geometry from the realm of truth" (p. 248). These statements are just plain false.

In the first place I use geometry only as an example of logical thinking. There are many other examples, but geometry is one of the best and should be well known. If anyone objects to the procedures of geometry—the deduction of theorems from axioms—he is in reality objecting to logical thought as such and is justifying fallacious argumentation. But this, though devastating to anyone who does so, is not what makes the assertions reprehensible.

Now if a critic should miss some obscure point in two dozen books, or if he failed to understand some subordinate idea, it would not much matter. But it seems inexplicable to me that anyone with an IQ above 80 can fail to note that my axioms are the Bible's and not Euclid's. The Trinity Foundation has collected a dozen or more of my tractates on inerrancy and is now in process of publishing them in book form. Besides these, can anyone have read my *Three Types of Religious Philosophy* without noticing that I do not "exclude all human thought except geometry from the realm of truth"? Consider also *The Philosophy of Gordon H. Clark* (I did not choose the title) where on page 59 I say, "Revelation should be accepted as our axiom." Or on page 62: "The more serious reply to the charge that the axiom of revelation begs all questions is. . . . Obviously a first principle or set of axioms covers all that follows. . . . The first principle will give us all the teaching of Scripture." And even: "This exhibition of the logic embedded in Scripture explains why Scripture rather than the law of contradiction is selected

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as the axiom" (p. 71). But the evidence of the falsity of Macky's statements is not so much detached sentences—though they are conclusive by themselves—as the full mass of all my publications.

The discussion of metaphorical language is important but derivative. On this subject Macky uses more assertions than reasoned conclusions. He seems to think—seems because it looks as if he is inconsistent—that the Bible is entirely metaphorical and that literal language has been imposed on it by later theologians. For example, in reporting my views he says, "The metaphor of the lamb is not what God was commencing. Instead it was . . . a surrogate for the real meaning, which Clark believes he can state literally and precisely. Thus a certain theological tradition is the truth . . . while the Bible's metaphors are only pointers to the truth" (pp. 241, 242). This gives me the impression that the literal statements of Biblical truth have come only in a later theological tradition. On the contrary, the metaphor of the lamb is explained literally by Paul in Romans and elsewhere. It is also based on the literal directions of the Levitical Law. And it could not be correctly understood without them.

Christ is like a lamb—in some respects, of course. They both have a head, two ears and two eyes. Christ remained speechless, as a lamb is dumb when being shorn. There are always dozens of similarities in any metaphor, simile or analogy. The figure of speech does not of itself indicate which similarity is intended. Without Romans and Leviticus we would have no basis for understanding what John the Baptist meant. And our basis is not a later theological tradition but the Bible itself.

As for Macky's further remarks on metaphor, it seems to me that he relies on bare assertions without giving reasons for accepting them. Possibly reasons are too geometrical. At any rate, I just do not believe that "poetic speech, however, is the best way to share human experience." Poetry, frequently what some people call the best poetry, is often vague and unintelligible. Contrariwise, intelligibility does not necessitate poetry.

The Alexandrine lines "Quand on ne peut changer le fond d'un caractère / Il faudrait beaucoup mieux, Nerisse, de se taire" are intelligible good advice, and they have rhythm and rhyme. But the greatness of Corneille's *Le Cid* does not depend on its poetic form. Molière's *Tartuffe* is overwhelming evidence against Macky's dependence on poetry for "sharing" human experience. As for Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, I doubt that more than one person in a thousand who view it would realize that it is poetry, unless so informed beforehand. From another angle, the rondeau of Charles d'Orléans, "Le temps a laissé son manteau," which competes for the honor of being the most beautiful poem ever written, is completely intelligible—and utterly trivial. Keats is insufferably boring, and the last two lines of his "Grecian Ode" are totally moronic. How fortunate Descartes and Kant were to have lived before they might have had to share this monstrosity!

Besides, I do not believe that human experience can be "shared," poetically or otherwise. Two persons may understand the same proposition, but the subjective accompaniments—the proposition may make one person happy and another sad—cannot be common. No one can feel my toothache, and fortunately I cannot feel yours.

Nor do I believe that "it is of the very nature of thought and language to represent what is immaterial in picturable terms" (p. 244). In fact, I believe the state-

ment is false. I do not merely assert that it is false—I have reasons for saying so: (1) I never do so myself, and yet I think—at least I think that I think. (2) I challenge anyone to try to represent the general conic or the square root of minus one by a picture. I do not say that it cannot be done. But it will not be a picture of the reality, nor can algebra, geometry or calculus ever be developed from such images. (3) Long ago Francis Galton produced the evidence that many well-educated persons never have any such images, and from this we conclude that pictorial representation cannot be “the very nature of thought.” (4) Brand Blanshard (*The Nature of Thought*, pp. 257-281) describes the images people have and by so doing demolishes the theory. But Macky does not even try to meet these arguments, nor does he give any reasons of his own. He simply asserts that the Bible is a “tasting of the reality of God.” Does God taste like chocolate or salt? Tasting is a metaphor, but what is it a metaphor of? Except in the Roman Catholic mass and Luther’s consubstantiation, no one chews God with his teeth.

Of course the Bible uses figurative language, but Macky fails to note one reason why Jesus did so. The reason was not that it is more clear and informative. In fact, the people and the disciples too were constantly baffled and confused by it. Jesus used it for this very purpose. He wanted to obscure his meaning, and parables are effective means of disguising one’s thoughts.

Another statement—which I do not believe in the least, and for which Macky gives no reason—is: “We know another person intimately and adequately by means of metaphors” (p. 250). I just do not see how any intelligent person can believe this. To my mind it is utterly ridiculous.

This leads to a final point. Macky at least seems to hold that the term “justice,” as used in the doctrine of the atonement, is metaphorical also (p. 249), and he at least comes close to concluding that all words are metaphorical. He even criticizes me as inconsistently using the phrase “clear thinking.” Perhaps I should have used the phrase “intelligible thinking” or “correct thinking.” Are the words “intelligible,” “correct” and “thinking” metaphorical? Indeed several language philosophers in the recent past have maintained that all words are metaphorical. This view is suicidal because if all words were metaphors, there could be no metaphors. The term “metaphorical” has a meaning only in relation to the term “literal.” Neither is intelligible without the other—otherwise the dispute could not begin. Therefore if all of Macky’s words are metaphorical, no one can have the least idea of what he is talking about because the word “metaphorical” is metaphorical.

In addition to this final point, and as a sort of appendix—which is still an argument and not an unsupported assertion—I take the liberty of noting that anyone who belittles geometry must hold automotive mechanics, the stupendous advances in modern medicine, atomic bombs and trips to the moon in equally low esteem. Mathematics is not my forte either, but it is far more beautiful than poetry. It is surpassed only by systematic theology.