

THE TRINITY REVIEW

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare [are] not fleshly but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. And they will be ready to punish all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.

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Copyright 2003 John W. Robbins Post Office Box 68, Unicoi, Tennessee 37692

Email: Jrob1517@aol.com

Website: www.trinityfoundation.org

Telephone: 423.743.0199

Fax: 423.743.2005

A Biblical Perspective on Steve Allen

W. Gary Crampton

Steve Allen is lauded as a comedian, actor, writer (he has authored some forty books), composer (he has written over 4000 songs), songwriter, and pianist (he has recorded some 40 albums). He has been the Master of Ceremonies of the *NBC Tonight Show* and has hosted his own *Steve Allen Show* and *Steve Allen Comedy Hour*.

Allen considers himself to be something of a theologian and philosopher. Raised as a Roman Catholic, when he was in his early thirties he was excommunicated due to a second marriage. It was, however, when he was in his twenties that he began to have serious doubts about the claims of Roman Catholicism and the Christian faith. These doubts had something to do with the writing of two of his latest books: *Steve Allen on the Bible, Religion & Morality (I)* and *More Steve Allen on the Bible, Religion & Morality (II)*.

On reading these volumes, it is apparent that Allen's views regarding the Bible, religion, and morality are as humorous as some of his antics on television. His understanding of the Bible is very limited. In fact, Allen himself states that Scripture is so "profoundly mysterious" that he at first intended to entitle these two volumes "The Mystery of the Bible" (II:xiii). Frequently the author is found guilty of distorting the sacred text of Scripture. And to support his assertions, Allen favorably quotes such Biblical antagonists as Bertrand Russell, Robert Ingersoll, and Thomas Paine.

The Bible

There can be little question as to where Allen stands regarding the Bible. It "is full of error" (I:416). There are "hundreds of contradictions and discrepancies in the pages of Scripture" (II:60). Although many persons believe that the Bible generally reports events with a high degree of accuracy, they are wrong: "It does nothing of the sort... there is... a very great deal in it that is neither edifying nor factual" (II:xviii). There are "millions of Christians [who] believe the Bible to be the literal Word of God.... It is not. ... Millions of believers assume that – perhaps granting a few minor exceptions – the Bible is reliable history. It is not" (II:436). The Gospel accounts of the resurrection of Jesus Christ "give conflicting reports" (I:368). For Steve Allen, even the laws of nature are more certain than the laws of God (II:326). Moreover, the Bible is full of myths, such as the story of creation, the Garden of Eden, the flood, and the numerous accounts of divine miracles (I:121-123; II:26-31). Says Allen, there are places where the Bible is inadequate, absurd, illogical, and stupid (I:420).

Allen is wrong. Because God is truth itself (*Psalms* 31:5), and since Christ is the *Logos* (*John* 1:1) and Wisdom or Reason of God (*I Corinthians* 1:24, 30; *Colossians* 2:31), Scripture is a seamless garment. It is one system of truth, in which all of the parts fit together. This high view of Scripture was held by

Christ. When tempted by the devil Jesus quoted Scripture, saying; "It is written It is written.... It is written" (*Matthew* 4:1-11). When Christ explained His resurrection to the disciples on the road to Emmaus, He did so by means of Scripture: "And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.... And he opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures" (*Luke* 24:27, 45).

The apostle Paul told the elders at Ephesus that he was "innocent of the blood of all men" because he had not avoided teaching them "the whole counsel of God" (*Acts* 20:26, 27). And when explaining the Gospel of Jesus Christ he twice said that His death, burial, and resurrection were "according to the Scriptures" (*1 Corinthians* 15:3-4). Gordon Clark says it this way: "It cannot be emphasized too strongly that Christianity is a unified, logical system of doctrine and that various parts of theology which seem so disconnected are in fact absolutely essential to each other" (*The Biblical Doctrine of Man*, 76-77).

As far as the contradictions are concerned, there is none. Bible scholars such as Gleason Archer (*Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*) and John W. Haley (*Alleged Discrepancies of the Bible*), as well as others, have aptly refuted the sophomoric criticisms of men such as Allen regarding the alleged contradictions of Scripture. Never has the Bible been shown to contain error. Further, there are no historical errors found in Scripture. Both Christian and non-Christian scholars have witnessed to this fact. Gordon Clark, for example, writes that there was a time when the modernists claimed that the Hittite nation referred to in the Bible never existed. However, "today the museums have more Hittite books than they have time to translate" (*What Do Presbyterians Believe?* 17).

Then there is William F. Albright, the highly reputed archaeologist. Albright stated that "there can be no doubt that archaeology has confirmed the substantial historicity of Old Testament tradition." He adds: "The excessive skepticism shown toward the Bible by important historical schools of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, certain phases

of which still appear periodically, has been progressively discredited. Discovery after discovery has established the accuracy of innumerable details, and has brought increased recognition to the value of the Bible as a source of history" (cited by Josh McDowell, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, 65).

Allen's inaccuracies are further noticeable in his statements regarding Jesus Christ. He believes that Christ was a real figure in history. He writes: "My own belief is that he did indeed live in the time of Augustus Caesar." Not only this, but "among human heroes, Jesus is supreme... [Jesus] demonstrated the virtues of compassion, charity, love, courage, faith, and intelligence" (I:229). How did Allen obtain his information about Jesus? Not from some secular source, but from the Bible. As Wayne Jackson points out, the absurdity here is that in Allen's comments regarding Jesus, he is "relying on the very book he so strenuously attempts to discredit – the New Testament" (Jackson, 44).

Allen says that the Bible is "a profoundly important document; it has been a mighty influence on Western culture and is well worth scholarly study by every thoughtful person" (I:180). But how can a document which is inadequate, absurd, and illogical – a document that is full of error and hundreds of discrepancies – be "profoundly important?" How can it be "worth scholarly study" by a "thoughtful person"?

Then, too, Allen is opposed to logical systems. "There is no such thing as one, large, all-encompassing truth. In reality there is an infinite number of small, specific truths" (II:xiv). Any incoherence between Allen's "small, specific truths" does not bother him. At the same time, Mr. Allen has no problem stating that although the Bible is not the Word of God, it contains the Word of God (shades of neo-orthodoxy). He observes: "Those portions of the Scripture that speak wisdom and truth may indeed be said to speak the word of God. In that same sense, of course, any true statement, about any subject matter whatever, may be said to be God's word" (I:42). That sounds like the neo-evangelical slogan, "All truth is God's truth."

As it turns out, it is not the Bible but Steve Allen who is inadequate, absurd, and illogical – in his understanding of the Scriptures. It is jejune to arbitrarily pick and choose what portions of Scripture are and which are not to be taken seriously.

Religion

A low view of Scripture will produce a low view of God. So it is with Allen. First, he is not an atheist (II:32B); rather, he believes that there are a number of "creative, and intellectually respectable arguments for the existence of God from diverse parts of the world" (I:179). Then too, "if there is no God, then we are left with a profound puzzle as to how the intricate machinery of the universe came to exist" (I:51). Yet, elsewhere he states that "both the existence and non-existence of God seem in some respects preposterous. I accept the probability that there is some kind of divine force, however, because that appears to me the least preposterous assumption of the two" (I:xxix). And again: "My own belief in God, then, is just that – a matter of belief, not of knowledge" (I:51). Soren Kierkegaard would be pleased. Allen believes in God, even though his belief is devoid of knowledge and preposterous. Wayne Jackson's comment is apropos: "The reader will have to use his own judgment as to whether or not this is an intellectually respectable viewpoint" (Jackson, 42).

Allen has a distorted view of the Trinity. Whereas orthodox Christianity maintains that "There is but one only God... [and] There are three persons in the Godhead; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory," (*The Westminster Shorter Catechism*, Questions 5 and 6), Allen demurs. He avers that the Bible can just as easily be understood to teach that there are really three gods: polytheism (II:410-412).

Whatever Allen's god is, he is not the God of Scripture. Unlike Prometheus who said "I hate all gods," Allen primarily restricts his vilifying remarks to the one true God. He writes that "there is not the

slightest question but that the God of the Old Testament is a jealous, vengeful God" (I:180). He "is incredibly stupid" (II:112). In a blatant perversion of Scripture, Allen declares that God condones polygamy, incest, and prostitution (II:306,307), along with numerous atrocities (I:33-35). And He is a God who causes physical suffering and evil (II:107-115, 266-267). The doctrine of Hell as taught in Scripture, says Allen, "is morally incomprehensible." We must "renounce our belief in [this] criminally sadistic hypothesis of Hell" (I:193,194). Notably, Jesus Christ, who Allen says "demonstrated the virtues of compassion, charity, love...and intelligence," taught more on the subject of Hell than anyone else in the Bible.

Seemingly, Allen has no concept of the holiness, the greatness, and the majesty of the triune God. Paul rightly describes him: "There is no fear of God before [his] eyes" (*Romans* 3:18). Allen has determined for himself what God must and must not be and do. But the God of Scripture is altogether different from Allen's impotent deity. The triune God of the Bible is "infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth" (*Westminster Shorter Catechism*, Question 4). He "works all things after the counsel of His will" (*Ephesians* 1:11). He is the God who "is in Heaven, [and] He does whatever He pleases" (*Psalms* 115:3). Further, the God of the Bible brooks no competition: "He does not give an accounting of any of His doings" to anyone, simply because He is God (*Job* 33:13).

For Steve Allen, Christianity is just one religion among many, most of which contain some truth and some error (I:50-51; II:323-343). Even the early Israelites were polytheistic. This, says Allen, is recognizable in the first commandment: "You shall have no other gods *before* Me" (another misinterpretation of Scripture). Monotheism, we are told, did not evolve in Judaism until the eighth century B.C. (II:291-294).

Again, Allen is in error. Christianity is not a species of a larger genus called religion. It is the uniquely true. It was the Fall of man that resulted in his estrangement from God, giving rise to the many false religions. Hence, as Clark points out, all of the

false "religions of today...are descendants of the one original religion, and because of their common origin they are colloquially called religion" (*Religion, Reason and Revelation*, 25).

Paradoxically, Allen, who considers himself to be a Christian, also roundly endorses "secular humanism" (I:200-203). He knows enough to criticize those so-called Christians, "including Ronald and Nancy Reagan, [who] are ignorant of the fact that it is not intellectually possible, or religiously respectable to hold Christian doctrines on the one hand and also to believe in astrology, numerology, or other pseudosciences on the other" (I:203). Yet Allen does not see the great divide between the doctrines of the Christian faith and the doctrines of the American Humanist Association.

Who, according to Steve Allen, was Jesus Christ? As we have seen, Allen believes that Jesus Christ truly did exist, and He was a supreme example of human behavior. Yet, says Allen, He was not the Son of God (I:226-236; II:410-412). He observes: "Jesus...was merely a very remarkable man, perhaps the most remarkable who ever lived, but only a man nevertheless, certainly not a uniquely chosen Son of God and equally not God himself in human form" (I:369). Once again our author has contradicted himself. To cite Jackson: "If Jesus was not the Son of God, as He surely claimed to be (see *Matthew* 16:16-17; *Mark* 14:62), then He was a dishonest charlatan – a religious huckster – Who hardly deserves [Allen's] accolade that He 'approaches the ideal of perfection more closely than anyone else who has ever lived' " (45). Or perhaps Christ was insane. Or, as Allen might argue, the Gospel authors lied, or were mistaken.

Pascal once wrote: "One of the ways in which the damned will be confounded is that they will see themselves condemned by their own reason, by which they claim to condemn the Christian religion."

Morality

Just as a low view of Scripture produces a low view of God, so also it yields a low view of morality. As we have seen, Allen at times maintains that the

Bible is an immoral book. For example, it condones polygamy, incest, and prostitution. Says Allen: "morality by no means depends on accepting the Bible as the literal Word of God" (II:251). In fact, one does not even need to believe in God to have a viable standard of ethics (II:252).

Allen believes that each person is to be guided by the "natural moral awareness" that resides in the human heart (I:86). The problem here is that the heart of man "is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked" (*Jeremiah* 17:9). The human conscience "is seared [as] with a hot iron" (*I Timothy* 4:2). It cannot be trusted. Allen's concept of "let your conscience be your guide" is nothing more than Jiminy Cricket theology.

Why does Allen believe in this "natural awareness?" On what basis does he condemn anything as evil? Further, without an absolute standard, how does one define good and evil? How can a relativist, such as Allen, know that there are good or evil things in the world? Nonetheless, standing on the sinking sand of his own ethical code, Allen arbitrarily judges that which is right and that which is wrong. He declares that rape is wrong (interestingly, here he appeals to the "Golden Rule" of the Sermon on the Mount) (I:7), and under some circumstances so is abortion (I:5; II:1-2). Polygamy, incest, and prostitution are also wrong (II:306-307), whereas suicide, under certain circumstances, is honorable (II:404-406). There are times when vulgar language is permissible, but not around children (II:261).

Once again Steve Allen is caught on the horns of a dilemma. If each man is his own standard, as our author avers, then no one can fault him for his opinions. But neither can he fault someone else who believes that rape, polygamy, incest, and prostitution are permissible and that suicide and vulgar language (except around children) are wrong. In fact, in a non-system such as Allen's, all judgments must be regarded as true; no statement can be false. So I am right when I believe that Allen is wrong. Interestingly, it was Friedrich Nietzsche who wrote: "When one gives up the Christian faith, one pulls the right to Christian morality out from under one's feet.... Christianity is a system, a whole

view of things thought out together. By breaking one main concept out of it, the faith in God, one breaks the whole: nothing necessary remains in one's hands." Allen, at least on this point, would do well to listen to Nietzsche.

There is an inextricable relationship between ethics and politics. A false view of one will manifest itself in a faulty view of the other. From a biblical perspective, the authority of the civil magistrate comes from God. He instituted government "for the punishment of evil doers and for the praise of those who do good" (*1 Peter* 2:14). Not so, says Steve Allen: "Both theologians and laymen long held that the ruling powers derived their legitimate power...from God.... From the modern vantage point, we perceive at once that the belief was utterly erroneous" (II:90). As he has rejected God's sovereignty in ethics, so too Allen rejects divine authority in the civil magistrate. Authority, according to Allen, is derivative from man or the state (a social compact of men). The logical implication of this non-theistic, antinomian worldview is either anarchy or totalitarianism. Only the Christian theistic worldview, as taught in the Scriptures, will avoid these two extremes.

Contradicting Allen, the Bible claims to have a monopoly on truth (*2 Timothy* 3:16-17). God's moral law is our sole standard of ethics. But behind the validity of the moral law of God is the authority of the God who gives us the law. The prologue of the Ten Commandments is: "I am the Lord." Theology, not ethics, is primary. We must obey God's law because He is "the Lord." Something is right or wrong because God so declares it.

Further, the Bible teaches that it is the rejection of the God of Scripture that leads to immorality. It is because the "fool [non-believer] has said in his heart there is no God," that he is "corrupt" and does "abominable works" (*Psalms* 14:1). Jesus says that it is because a judge does not "fear God" that he is an "unjust judge" (*Luke* 18:1, 6). According to the Bible, true morality is grounded in one's belief about the God of Scripture: "as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, 'be holy, for I am holy' " (*1*

Peter 1:15-16). Allen has rejected this belief, and his code of ethics shows it.

Conclusion

We have seen that Steve Allen's views regarding "the Bible, religion, and morality" are false; they are self-contradictory. And since logic is a negative test for truth (that is, if something is contradictory, it cannot be true), Allen's system must be judged a failure.

As noted above, by his own admission, Allen considers the Bible to be a "profoundly mysterious" book. This is reminiscent of Jesus' parable of the sower; "To you [the elect] it has been given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God; but to those outside [the non-elect] all things come in parables, so that 'seeing they may see and not perceive, and hearing they may hear and not understand; lest they should turn, and their sins be forgiven them.' " Then Jesus said, "Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables?" (*Mark* 4:11-13).

Why is the parable of the sower so crucial to an understanding of all of the parables? Because it has to do with the reception or the rejection of the Word of God! Steve Allen has rejected the only source of truth: the Bible. The apostle Paul said it this way: "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap" (*Galatians* 6:7).