

A SURREJOINDER TO NORMAN L. GEISLER

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In view of Geisler's charge that in my "Response" I avoided many of his previous points, I will put references to section and paragraph numbers in his "Rejoinder" before my counterarguments.

(I,1) There is no irony in my having used some three thousand words to refute no real argument, because I did not design my "Response" to refute Geisler's arguments but to expose the fact that they need no refutation since they miss the point. (I,2) To say that they miss the point is not to deny that they are real arguments; it is to deny their relevance to the issue at hand. (II,1-2) I shall be happy if "the serious reader will cut through the literary verbiage to discover what argument may be embedded therein," so long as Geisler's dictum applies to both parties in the debate and so long as readers keep open the possibility that my "literary verbiage" describing his and my views is accurate. (III,1) He writes, "Gundry . . . even admits it [Geisler's central argument] is valid." Why the phrase "even admits" when my point was that syllogistic validity does not guarantee even a particle of truth? How else can Geisler prove the truth of his statement, "Gundry denies part of the Bible [*de facto*]," if he does not by exegetical arguments show that at certain points the Bible means what I do not think it means at those same points?

(III,3, pt. 1) To the extent I have come up with new understandings of Matthew's text and new considerations supporting them, the opinions of past critical commentators are polemically out of date. Those opinions may or may not be better than mine. But that issue is for current and future scholars to decide, since past ones did not have my new understandings and new considerations at their disposal. My coming up with some new understandings and new considerations, however, does not negate the fact that a number of my redaction-critical interpretations objectionable to Geisler are older than my *Commentary*, some of them having now achieved nearly universal acceptance among specialists in Matthew.

(III,3, pt. 2) Concerning the Magi, readers may consult my "Response" to Douglas Moo and my "Surrejoinder" to him. Geisler may be correct in saying that "Gundry is one of very few evangelical Bible scholars who cannot see history here," but he seems not to know, or at least not to feel, the problems of those who do see history here in their struggle to fit Matthew and Luke together when taken as equally and straightforwardly historical. Nor does Geisler take note that I do not regard the Magi as created out of thin air, but as Matthew's midrashic adaptation of the shepherds, truly historical figures.

(III,3, pt. 3) Geisler's saying that "it is wrong to deny, as Gundry does, that 'events reported in the gospel of Matthew actually occurred' " and then giving me a dictionary lesson in the definitions of "event" and "report" mark a low point of misrepresentation (so again in his fourth argument at the end of Section III). The words he quotes from my "Response" give what he thinks I do. I introduced them by writing, "Time after time we read [in Geisler's article] that I deny. . .," and

followed them with the statement, "But Geisler can make this charge only by skirting the question whether Matthew really means to report actual occurrences" (which question I answer negatively on occasion). Definitions of "event" and "report" are not violated. Geisler recognizes as much in his next paragraph (III,4) and thus destroys his preceding argument. His equation of midrashic adaptation and embellishment with "creating myths" might itself tolerate a lesson or two in definition. In my *Commentary* (636-638) and ETS paper (11-12) I have already dealt with the all-or-nothing attitude displayed in his statement, "But if Matthew can create myths about Jesus' life . . . sayings of Jesus . . . then we would be left with no assurance as to the truth of what Jesus actually did or said" (see also my remarks on the domino theory in my "Surrejoinder" to Moo).

(III, remainder) I urge readers to review my "Response" in order to judge for themselves whether "Gundry only 'responded' in part to some of these arguments . . . refuted none of them and bypassed most of them," as Geisler alleges. Let me refer to my "Response" paragraphs 2-4, 10-14 on his first argument; 12-14 on his second; 7-9 on his third; 1, 15 on his fourth; 5-6 on his fifth; 5 on his sixth; and 16-18 on his seventh and eighth. On his first argument, which succumbs to question-begging historical imperialism, readers will find greater detail in my ETS paper (31-32) and "Response" to Moo. His second argument overlooks that Luke states an historiographical intention whereas Matthew does not.

(IV,1) Geisler says I misrepresent his opposite view as "exclusively historicizing." But his omitting my qualification, "such as he favors for Biblical narrative," makes the charge itself a misrepresentation. Again he says I misrepresent his view as "literalistic." But his omitting my balancing argument that "not even Geisler takes all parts of the Bible literally . . . [but] accepts figures of speech [and] parables, too, even when they are not introduced as such but start out and continue as historical narrative" again makes the charge itself a misrepresentation. It escapes me why he complains of misrepresentation when he has repeatedly and emphatically affirmed the literal meaning of Biblical narrative (cf. his massive attack on Origen's and others' allegorism). Furthermore, he has used "literally" and "historically" as synonyms for what is "true." He has denied that any of Matthew's narrative should be taken as midrashic rather than as exclusively historical. And despite widespread practice of midrashic technique in Matthew's environment, he has put the burden of proof on anyone who takes a different view while he himself accepts no burden of proof for his exclusively historicizing interpretation. I say "exclusively" because "historical" and "midrashic" are not exact antonyms: midrash (in the sense of haggadic technique that I assume throughout) means historical tradition plus unhistorical adaptation and embellishment, not sheer nonhistory.

I did not wrongly assume that Geisler believes there must be explicit formal indicators of irony in the text. On the contrary, I assumed he would have enough literary sensitivity to recognize that formal indicators would destroy irony, and I was using that recognition as a lever to pry open his mind to the possibility of other literary techniques—in particular, midrash—to be recognized by other clues, to which my *Commentary*, ETS paper, and responses (but not Geisler's article or "Rejoinder") pay much attention.

As I guessed, Geisler goes to a phenomenological interpretation of the sun's rising on Sodom and Gomorrah. And his distinction between "what the Biblical

writers thought" and "what they taught" amounts to a distinction between authorial intent (to teach "that the sun is observed to rise and set") and a possible misconception by the Biblical author himself (that the universe is geocentric). That is my kind of distinction. I hardly confuse the two (as Geisler thinks; cf. my statement: "I only want to apply this kind of hermeneutics more widely, more consistently, and . . . more sensitively"). Yet elsewhere Geisler rejects appeals to authorial intent. To make it appear that he makes no such appeal here, he says that "what they [the Biblical writers] affirmed in the text is that the sun is observed to rise and set. This is literally true." But the words "is observed to" do not occur in the Biblical text, which simply reads, "The sun had risen over the earth" (Gen 19:23); so Geisler is stuck with an interpretative appeal to authorial intent.

(IV,2) I recognize that "literal" sometimes means "normal," sometimes "non-figurative" (cf. Geisler's fourth and fifth footnotes). Therefore my statement that "not even Geisler takes all parts of the Bible literally [i.e., nonfiguratively]" does not mean that I misrepresent the literal method of interpretation by denying its allowance of figurative language. It means that I use that allowance to argue that Geisler should not think of literalism and midrash (which is a kind of figurative language) as necessarily incompatible.

(IV,3) I am unsure what Geisler means by saying that midrash is false but not (necessarily?) deceitful. Does not our view of the Bible as God's message to us imply that a falsehood might deceive us? I am even unsure what he means by "false." If historically false, I can agree with him and "most other scholars." But if a midrashist did not intend to teach something historical in his adaptations and embellishments any more than the writer of Gen 19:23 intended to teach a geocentric universe, the description "false" becomes inappropriate. Would Geisler accuse Matthew of falsehood for saying that there were three sets of fourteen generations each from Adam to Christ when the OT shows there were more?

(IV,4) Geisler's calling "irrelevant" my "good" distinction between "a hermeneutical device and a decision one arrives at by using that method" should astound anyone who has read his article, where he attacks certain methods solely by citing what he considers wrong interpretations flowing from them rather than by exposing faults in the methods as such. Sometimes he does not even identify the method under attack—despite the title of the article: "Methodological Unorthodoxy." His defense that "decisions are based on devices" is self-incriminating, for it implies that he should have exposed faults in the methods as such. Furthermore, it is only fractionally true, for decisions are affected also by the nature of the evidence and by artistic sensibility. In fact Geisler's mechanistic bent—or what I earlier called his "apparent insensitivity to differences in literary art"—nowhere comes to light quite so clearly as in this paragraph on what he thinks is the overpowering force of hermeneutical devices.

(V,1-5) By now it should be clear that (and why) I do not accept the terms of Geisler's phraseology: "the reporting of events that never occurred (that is, falsehoods)." Midrashic adaptations and embellishments are not reports. Nonoccurrences are not events. What is not intended to be taken as the report of an event is not an historiographical falsehood. It is precisely the grammatical-historical method that has increasingly elevated authorial intent at the expense of reading into the text meanings assumed from ecclesiastical tradition, cultural prejudice

and individual desire. This hermeneutical development agrees with evangelicals' adherence to the Bible. It is an historical fact that they have increasingly participated in the development. Witness their struggles to accommodate to each other the Biblical text and scientific theories (recent creationism and flood geology not excepted). Nor can Geisler extricate himself from the development. Witness his recent participation in the nationally publicized trial in Arkansas on creation and evolution. These struggles always entail saying, "The Biblical author meant this, not that"—i.e., they always entail an appeal to authorial intent. Take for example Geisler's distinction between what a Biblical writer taught and what he thought—in one and the same Biblical statement about the sun's movement.

(V,2) It mystifies me why Geisler saddles me with using "intention" for the meaning behind the text rather than in the text. I denied it in my *Commentary* (623-624, 638) and in personal conversation with him at the last ETS conference. My use of "purpose" (at the moment I can find only one questionable example in my "Response") does not point to the author's purpose behind the text, as he thinks, but to what the author purposed—i.e., intended—to say in the text. Surely Geisler cannot think the marks that make up a text have any meaning apart from authorial intent. If a chicken happened to walk through a puddle of ink and scratch the same marks on a sheet of paper, we could hardly speak of "meaning expressed in the text." We distinguish between the meanings of an elevated, hook-shaped mark by asking whether the author intended us to take it as an apostrophe, a single quotation mark, a *yōd*, or a smooth breathing (to take but several possibilities). Usually the context makes the answer so obvious we are hardly aware of the question. But it is always there, because apart from authorial intent an elevated, hook-shaped mark means nothing. So also with other marks that make up a text. If Geisler really does want to avoid authorial intent, he needs to show from what other source those marks get their meaning. I refuse to separate the text from its author's mind, as Geisler does. To make such a separation is to empty the text of any meaning except what we read into it—the very kind of subjectivism Geisler wants to avoid. At the same time I can agree with his statement, "All we know of the author's 'intentions' is expressed in the inspired text," so long as it does not rule out the use of auxiliary disciplines—such as linguistics, comparative literature and archaeology—in our attempt to understand those intentions as expressed in the text.

(V,4) Despite professed allegiance to "the locus of meaning (and truth) . . . in the text," a textual carelessness shows up when Geisler writes, "Gundry speaks of the alleged 'thought' in the author's mind regarding a geocentric world (in Joshua 10)." The text of my "Response" referred to Gen 19:23, not to Joshua 10. But if Geisler wants to bring in Josh 10:13, let us note that its text does not distinguish between what the author thought (the universe is geocentric) and what he taught (the sun was observed to stand still) any more than that of Gen 19:23 makes that kind of distinction. We readers, we interpreters—Geisler, too—are the ones who make it by appealing to authorial intent.

(VI,1) The discussions of adductive reasoning—the interplay between assumptions and questions brought to the text and the data of the text—in my *Commentary* (638-639) and ETS paper (2-3) should have disabused Geisler of the notion that I assume that "methodology is not a philosophical question." It would also help if he would identify the "false philosophy" he thinks I have adopted.

(VI,2) Yes, "modern" often entails "naturalistic and unorthodox premises." But "often" is not "always"—Geisler would not hesitate to use modern archaeological discoveries for historical-critical purposes—and again it would help if he would identify the naturalistic and unorthodox premises he thinks I have adopted. If he does not think I have adopted a false philosophy or naturalistic and unorthodox premises, why bring up the matter in his "Rejoinder" to me?

I take exception to the insinuation that I may be one of those evangelicals who "in accepting these 'modern' views" have the motive of gaining "academic respectability." I take exception also on behalf of others to whom Geisler is referring. He does not know our motives. I must be a fool to have written much of what I have written, including the Theological Postscript in my *Commentary*, in order to gain academic respectability outside evangelical ranks. Besides, a view would not in the least be false for having a bad motive behind it, or in the least true for having a good motive behind it.

(VI,3) Similarly irrelevant to the truth or falsity of my views is the question of whether the ETS doctrinal basis commits its subscribers to a particular interpretation of the Bible. To say that Gundry "admits" that the doctrinal basis does not do so makes no sense, since I am defending my *Commentary*, not the ETS doctrinal basis.

(VII,1) Though the NT is my specialty, I do not believe I would have the right to criticize Geisler's philosophical-theological views without having first devoted a fair amount of study to, say, Thomas Aquinas. Nor would I accuse Geisler of dogmatism for making this reasonable demand of me. Profitable cross-fertilization of each other's disciplines requires nothing less. I did not find enough study of Matthew and the other synoptics reflected in Geisler's article to make his philosophical-theological criticisms well informed enough to be exegetically relevant. Since at the time of his writing almost none of the scholarly journals had carried reviews of my *Commentary*, and since it takes years for NT scholars in general to reach verdicts on large technical works, Geisler can hardly know that "nearly all" NT scholars disagree with me.

(VII,2-3) My supposed dogmatism on the meaning of Matt 27:52-53 rests on the wording of the text. Lange, whom Geisler quotes, lets some statements of Paul override that wording. Calvin, whom Geisler also quotes, lets the "absurdity" of imagining the OT saints spent three days alive in their tombs override Matthew's wording. Systematic theological concerns seem to be trimming the text. Geisler might consider whether the absurdity of a natural reading may signal a midrashic rather than historical understanding of the passage.

(VIII,1) Geisler correctly sees differences of interpretation between Archer and Lindsell and me, but he needs to establish basic methodological differences. He has not done so. Regarding creation according to Genesis 1, Archer does not deny literal "time-periods" (Geisler's terminology); but he does allow the denial of "days" with "evenings and mornings" (the Bible's terminology) in the literal—i.e., normal—sense. And Lindsell does deny the literal—i.e., normal—sense of Jesus' predicting three denials by Peter. I do not deny that events reported in the Bible actually happened, but only that the Biblical authors meant to report events, or historical details in connection with events, at points where Geisler and others think they did so mean. I deny in some texts what would be the literal, normal meaning for a reader who assumes a modern standard of history-writing, but

not what I believe to be the literal, normal meaning for the original audience, or even for a modern audience that is homiletically oriented. Since Archer and Lindsell can scarcely think that the original audience thought of days as geological ages or of three denials as part of six denials, Geisler is making me feel more evangelical than they are. Attention to literary style and authorial intent strips the Bible of extraneous concerns imposed on it and lets it speak with far greater force.

(VIII,2) I did not compare my view with the allegorical views of Augustine and Aquinas. Rather, my remarks on allegorism negated describing my view as allegorical at all.

I will not dodge Geisler's questions:

(IX, ques. 1) Several things need to be said about Geisler's method in this question before I answer it. First, sincere though he may be, he is trying to bait me into saying something that different readers are bound to disagree with in one way or another (because of differing personal assessments of the candidates he lists) regardless of my principal arguments. Second, he is trying to force me into a dilemma. A simple yes vote will show me up as too liberal for the ETS. A simple no vote—given Geisler's associating me with several names on the list—will raise the question of why I think I belong in the ETS. Third, mixing candidates near to the ETS with candidates far from it is an attempt to force a differentiated answer that would seem inconsistent. Fourth, by demanding a yes or no answer Geisler tries to create the impression that I am waffling if I give an analytical answer.

Fifth and most important, the terms of his question are unrealistically incomplete. There is more to membership in the ETS than being "able and willing to sincerely sign the ETS doctrinal statement." Geisler does not take into account the ethos of the Society. Because of the ethos, the Mary Baker Eddy whom we think of by that name (to take his most scare-raising candidate) would hardly be a Mary Baker Eddy to seek membership in the ETS. On the other hand, if we make the terms of Geisler's question realistic by adding comfort with the ethos of the Society—the kind of general theological comfort that would engender a desire to seek and keep membership (and would thus purge the candidates' names of whatever bad connotations they may presently have in our minds)—I would vote yes on a.-f. And Geisler should vote the same way, for we have a "doctrinal basis" instead of a fullbodied orthodox creed. In the absence of such a creed, we must trust the ethos to help the doctrinal basis do the work of sifting. This sifting normally happens in advance, so that voting yes or no does not come up. If Geisler really thinks that the ethos is not helping well enough, he should not vote no on the candidates. He should work for a fullbodied orthodox creed (not just for a by-law interpreting the doctrine of inerrancy) in order to keep out heretics.

(IX, ques. 2) Yes, an interpretative method that on philosophical grounds rules out the supernatural or miraculous from being part of God's Word should be judged disagreeable with Biblical inerrancy, which the ETS doctrinal basis affirms; for all sides—nonevangelical as well as evangelical—recognize that the Biblical writers often mean to narrate genuinely supernatural, miraculous events.

(IX, ques. 3) I could conscientiously sign all the Articles in the "Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics" (ICBI, 1982) because the questionableness (as it seems to me) of their coherence not only allows but also demands a large amount of interpretation by anyone who would sign them thinkingly. Doubtless

those who framed the Statement were striving for balance. But the favor shown toward "human language" (Article II), "a wide variety of literary forms" (Article X), "literary categories, formal and stylistic, . . . and . . . genre criticism" (Article XIII), "legitimate critical techniques" (Article XVI), and "extra-Biblical data" (Article XX) sits ill at ease alongside denials "that generic categories which negate historicity may rightly be imposed on Biblical narratives which present themselves as factual" (Article XIII) and "that any event, discourse or saying reported in Scripture was invented by the Biblical writers or by the traditions they incorporated" (Article XIV). What if a literary form, compared with extra-Biblical data by means of legitimate critical techniques, pointed to unhistorical invention, in whole or in part? Presumably, "which present themselves as factual" and the strict sense of "reported" would come into play: That particular literary form does not present itself as (entirely) factual and therefore does not qualify as (strict) reporting. To say that such an interpretation of the denials stretches them unnaturally is to take away the natural meaning of the paired literary concessions. In hard cases one has to adopt an elastic interpretation of one or the other side in these Articles. This necessity holds under the assumption that the framers of the Statement did not include the literary concessions for show but put them and the denials forward with equal seriousness.

Similarly, Article VII, which affirms that "the meaning expressed in each Biblical text is single, definite and fixed," may be intended to rule out Averronianism. But without the benefit of Geisler's attack on Averronianism one could easily think (and, for all I know, might be correct in thinking) that the Article is intended to rule out typology, double fulfillment of Biblical prophecy, and *sensus plenior* (which hardly count as the "application" the Article allows). Most evangelicals would balk at one or more of these exclusions. But the ETS is not the ICBI; so I do not know why Geisler thinks my answer to this question is "especially important," unless he also thinks the ICBI should govern the ETS.

(IX, ques. 4) As noted already in this "Surrejoinder," the intention of the Biblical authors is located in their words, and our knowledge of it is limited to the words of Scripture studied with all the helps available.

(X) I do not know the names or the number of the rest of the "we" for whom Geisler speaks in asking me to resign if I do not change. But I value their and Geisler's Christian fellowship and scholarly stimulation, as well as that of other members of the ETS, too much to resign. If unity entails partly agreement, partly the giving and taking of freedom to disagree, perhaps these exchanges will show why his and my disagreements ought to fall into the freedom zone rather than break up unity.