INFERENTIAL THEOLOGY: de rigueur or un grand péris?

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One of the most serious dangers to meaningful Christianity in the present era is the proliferation of opinions about what the Bible is alleged to teach. Perhaps the quickest way to see this allegation is to tune in to a “Gospel” radio station, i.e., one with a seemingly interminable array of preachers (cum D.D.s) promoting their books, papers, and pamphlets for free or fee.

The original humility of many is usually negated by the dominance of the inductive mode and the absence—or near absence—of the subjunctive mode; that is the speaker asserts with definite finality his interpretations about the various prooftexts cited rather than prefacing his comments with “if” or “in my opinion.” In other words, the presentation is often characterized by a one-to-one identification of the speaker’s interpretation with the original meaning of Scripture. The present situation betrays an every-speaker—is-a-Pope-for-himself syndrome.

“Inferential Theology” is the product of human response and reflection upon the sacred text. It may take on the resultant form of Biblical Theology, Systematic Theology, Practical, Pastoral and so on. In short, Inferential Theology may be anything one asserts about the meaning or application of the text other than the actual words of the Scriptures themselves. If Inferential Theology has been thus established, then one ought to ask: Is it strictly required activity (de rigueur)? (Here de rigueur speaks of that required by the obvious condition imposed on man by the fact that Scripture does not speak explicitly to or about every matter believers face.) Or is it a perilous activity (un grand péris)? Perhaps further, is it both?

Someone may raise the question: What is so problematic about Inferential Theology? In answer, the problem stems in part from the traditional philosophical difficulty known as “the problem of induction.” This can best be grasped by comparing induction to deduction. For example:

**Major Premise:** All men are mortal.

**Minor Premise:** Socrates is a man.

**Conclusion:** : Socrates is mortal.

According to deduction the conclusion has to follow logically. Even if it could be shown that in 399 B.C. Socrates was bodily assumed into heaven. In my opinion, however, it is the God-created nature of logic that it does not have a 1:1 correspondence with reality.

Now with induction, one moves from the particulars of experience to a general observation supposedly based upon those particulars. For example, in the course of one’s experience, one observes (one inducts or

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