

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

## Faith and Reason:

# How Do I Know Christianity Is True?

WILLIAM LANE CRAIG

1

BEFORE PRESENTING A CASE FOR CHRISTIANITY, we must come to grips with some very fundamental questions about the nature and relationship of faith and reason. Exactly how do we know Christianity to be true? Is it simply by a leap of faith or on the authority of the Word of God, both unrelated to reason? Does religious experience assure us of the truth of the Christian faith, so that no further justification is needed? Or is a rational foundation for faith necessary, without which faith would be unjustified and irrational? We can better answer these questions if we briefly survey some of the most important representative thinkers of the past.

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

### MEDIEVAL

In our historical survey, let's look first at Augustine (354–430) and Thomas Aquinas (1224–74). Their approaches were determinative for the Middle Ages.

#### Augustine

Augustine's attitude toward faith and reason is very difficult to interpret, especially because his views apparently evolved over the years. Sometimes he gives the impression of being a strict authoritarian; that is to say, he held that the ground for faith was sheer, unquestionable, divine authority. This authority might be expressed in either the Scriptures or in the Church. Thus, Augustine confessed, "I should not believe the gospel except as moved by the authority of the Catholic Church."<sup>1</sup> The authority of Scripture he held in even higher esteem than that of the Church. Because the Scriptures are inspired by God, they are completely free from error and are therefore to be believed absolutely.<sup>2</sup> Such a view of authority would seem to imply that reason has no role to play in the justification of belief, and sometimes Augustine gives that impression. He asserts that one must first believe before he can know.<sup>3</sup> He was fond of quoting Isaiah 7: 9 in the

---

<sup>1</sup> Augustine, *Against the Epistle of Manichaeus Called Fundamental* 5.6.

<sup>2</sup> Augustine, *Letters* 82.3; idem *City of God* 21.6.1.

<sup>3</sup> Augustine, *On Free Will* 2.1.6.

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

Septuagint version: "Unless you believe you shall not understand." The fundamental principle of the Augustinian tradition throughout the Middle Ages was *fides quaerens intellectum*: faith seeking understanding.

But certain statements of Augustine make it clear that he was not an unqualified authoritarian. He maintained that authority and reason cooperate in bringing a person to faith. Authority demands belief and prepares man for reason, and reason in turn leads to understanding and knowledge. But at the same time, reason is not entirely absent from authority, for one has to consider whom to believe, and the highest authority belongs to clearly known truth; that is to say, the truth, when it is clearly known, has the highest claim to authority because it demands our assent. According to Augustine, it is our duty to consider what men or what books we ought to believe in order to worship God rightly. Gerhard Strauss in his book on Augustine's doctrine of Scripture explains that although for Augustine Scripture is absolutely authoritative and inerrant in itself, it does not carry credibility in itself—that is, people will not automatically accept its authority upon hearing it. Therefore, there must be certain signs (*indicia*) of credibility that make its authority evident. On the basis of these signs, we can believe that the Scripture is the authoritative Word of God, and submit to its authority. The principal signs adduced by Augustine on behalf of the authority of Scripture are miracle and prophecy. Though many religions boast of revelations showing the way of salvation, only the Scriptures have the support of miracle and prophecy, which prove it to be the true authority.

Thus, Augustine's authoritarianism would seem to be drastically qualified. Perhaps Augustine's apparent inconsistency is best explained by the medieval understanding of authority. In the early church, authority (*auctoritas*) included not just theological truths, but the whole tradition of past knowledge. The relationship between authority and reason was not the same as that between faith and reason. Rather it was the relationship between all past knowledge and present-day understanding. Knowledge of the past was simply accepted on the basis of authority. This seems to have been Augustine's attitude. He distinguishes between what is *seen* to be true and what is *believed* to be true. We *see* that something is true by either physical perception or rational demonstration. We *believe* that something is true on the basis of the testimony of others. Hence, with regard to miracle and prophecy, Augustine says that the trustworthiness of reports of either past or future events must be believed, not known by the intelligence. Elsewhere he declares that one should believe in God because belief in him is taught in the books of men who have left their testimony in writing that they lived with the Son of God and saw things that could not have happened if there were no God. Then he concludes that one must believe before he can know. Since for Augustine the historical evidence for miracle and prophecy lay in the past, it was in the realm of authority, not reason. Today, on the other

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

hand, we would say that such a procedure would be an attempt to provide a rational foundation for authority via historical apologetics.

Now the obvious question at this point is, Why accept the authority of the writers of the past, whether they be the classical writers or the authors of Scripture? Clearly, if Augustine is to avoid circular reasoning, he cannot say that we should accept the authority of the evangelists because of the authority of Scripture, for it is the evangelists' testimony to miracle and prophecy that is supposed to make evident the authority of Scripture. So Augustine must either come up with some reason to accept the evangelists' testimony as reliable, or abandon this historically oriented approach. Since he lacked the historical method, the first alternative was not open to him. Therefore, he chose the second. He frankly admits that the books containing the story of Christ belong to an ancient history that anyone may refuse to believe. Therefore, he turns to the present miracle of the Church as the basis for accepting the authority of Scripture. He saw the very existence of the mighty and universal Church as an overwhelming sign that the Scriptures are true and divine.

Now notice that Augustine is not basing the authority of Scripture on the authority of the Church, for he held the Scripture's authority to exceed even that of the Church. Rather, his appeal is still to the sign of miracle, not indeed the gospel miracles, which are irretrievably removed in the past, but the present and evident miracle of the Church. In *The City of God* he states that even if the unbeliever rejects all biblical miracles, he is still left with one stupendous miracle, which is all one needs, namely, the fact of the whole world believing in Christianity without the benefit of the gospel miracles.<sup>4</sup> It's interesting that, by appealing to a present miracle as the sign of the authority of Scripture, Augustine seems to have implicitly denied authoritarianism, since this sign was not in the past, in the realm of authority where it could only be believed, but in the present, where it could be seen and known. Be that as it may, Augustine's emphases on biblical authority and signs of credibility were to set the tone for subsequent medieval theology.

## Thomas Aquinas

Aquinas's *Summa contra gentiles*, written to combat Greco-Arabic philosophy, is the greatest apologetic work of the Middle Ages and so merits our attention. Thomas develops a framework for the relationship of faith and reason that includes the Augustinian signs of credibility. He begins by making a distinction within truths about God. On the one hand, there are truths that completely surpass the capability of human reason, for example, the doctrine of the Trinity. On the other hand, many truths lie within

---

<sup>4</sup> Augustine, *City of God* 22.5.

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

the grasp of human reason, such as the existence of God. In the first three volumes of the *Summa contra gentiles*, Thomas attempts to prove these truths of reason, including the existence and nature of God, the orders of creation, the nature and end of man, and so forth. But when he comes to the fourth volume, in which he handles subjects like the Trinity, the incarnation, the sacraments, and the last things, he suddenly changes his method of approach. He states that these things are to be proved by the authority of Holy Scripture, not by natural reason. Because these doctrines surpass reason, they are properly objects of faith.

Now at first blush this seems to suggest that for Aquinas these truths of faith are mysteries, somehow “above logic.” But here we must be very careful. For as I read Aquinas, that’s not how he defines his terms. Rather he seems to mean that truths of faith surpass reason in the sense that they are neither empirically evident nor demonstrable with absolute certainty. He makes no suggestion that truths of faith transcend Aristotelian logic. Rather there are just no empirical facts which make these truths evident or from which these truths may be inferred. For example, although the existence of God can be proved from his effects, there are no empirical facts from which the Trinity may be inferred. Or again, the eschatological resurrection of the dead cannot be proved, because there is no empirical evidence for this future event. Elsewhere Thomas makes it clear that truths of faith cannot be demonstrated by reason alone, either. He maintains that we Christians must use only arguments that prove their conclusions with absolute certainty; for if we use mere probability arguments, the insufficiency of those arguments will only serve to confirm the non-Christian in his unbelief.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, the distinction Thomas makes between truths of reason and truths of faith is rather like Augustine’s distinction between seeing and believing. Truths of reason may be “seen” — that is, either proved with rational certainty or accepted as empirically evident — whereas truths of faith must be believed, since they are neither empirically evident nor rationally provable. This does not mean that truths of faith are incomprehensible or “above logic.”

Now because truths of faith can only be believed, does this imply that Thomas is in the end a fideist or an authoritarian? The answer seems clearly no. For like Augustine he proceeds to argue that God provides the signs of miracle and prophecy, which serve to confirm the truths of faith, though not demonstrating them directly. Because of these signs, Aquinas held that a man can see the truths of faith: “Then they are indeed seen by the one who believes; he would not believe unless he saw that they are worthy of belief

---

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1a.32.1; cf. idem, *Summa contra gentiles* 1.9.

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

on the basis of evident signs or something of this sort.”<sup>6</sup> Thomas calls these signs “confirmations,” “arguments,” and “proofs” for the truths of faith.<sup>7</sup> This seems to make it clear that Aquinas believed there are good grounds for accepting the truths of faith as a whole. The proofs of miracle and prophecy are compelling, although they are indirect. Thus, for example, the doctrine of the Trinity is a truth of faith because it cannot be directly proved by any argument; nevertheless, it is indirectly proved insofar as the truths of faith taken together as a whole are shown to be credible by the divine signs.

Thomas’s procedure, then, may be summarized in three steps: (1) Fulfilled prophecies and miracles make it credible that the Scriptures taken together as a whole are a revelation from God. (2) As a revelation from God, Scripture is absolutely authoritative. (3) Therefore, those doctrines taught by Scripture that are neither demonstratively provable nor empirically evident may be accepted by faith on the authority of Scripture. Thus, Aquinas can say that an opponent may be convinced of the truths of faith on the basis of the authority of Scripture as confirmed by God with miracles.<sup>8</sup>

Again the question arises: How do we know that the purported miracles or fulfilled prophecies ever took place? The medieval thinkers, lacking the historical method, could not answer this question. They developed a philosophical framework in which the signs of credibility confirmed the truths of faith, but they had no way of proving the signs themselves. About the only argument was Augustine’s indirect proof from the miracle of the Church. Thus, Thomas declares,

Now such a wondrous conversion of the world to the Christian faith is a most indubitable proof that such signs did take place. ... For it would be the most wondrous sign of all if without any wondrous signs the world were persuaded by simple and lowly men to believe things so arduous, to accomplish things so difficult, and to hope for things so sublime.<sup>9</sup>

A final word might be added. With Aquinas we see the reduction of faith to an epistemological category; that is to say, faith was no longer trust or commitment of the heart, but became a way of knowing, complementary to reason. Faith was essentially intellectual assent to doctrines not provable by reason—hence, Aquinas’s view that a doctrine cannot be both known and believed: if you know it (by reason), then you cannot believe it (by faith). Thus, Aquinas lost the view of faith as trust or commitment. This

---

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 2a2ae.1.4 ad 2.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles* 3.154; 1.6.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.9.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* 1.9.

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

same intellectualist understanding of faith characterized the documents of the Council of Trent and of Vatican I but was adjusted in the documents of Vatican II.

## THE ENLIGHTENMENT

The fact that the Enlightenment is also known as the Age of Reason no doubt gives us a good clue as to how thinkers of that period regarded the relationship between faith and reason. Nevertheless, there was not complete agreement on this issue, and the two figures we shall survey represent two fundamentally opposed viewpoints.

### John Locke

The thought of John Locke (1632–1704) was determinative for the eighteenth century. His *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689) laid down the epistemological principles that were to shape religious thought during that age. Though he rejected the philosophical rationalism of Descartes, Locke was nevertheless an ardent theological rationalist. That is to say, he maintained that religious belief must have a rational foundation and that where such a foundation is absent, religious belief is unwarranted. Locke himself attempted to provide such a rational foundation.

Locke argued for the existence of God by means of a cosmological argument—indeed, he maintained that the existence of God is “the most obvious truth that reason discovers,” having an evidence “equal to mathematical certainty.”<sup>10</sup> When one moves beyond such matters of demonstrative reason into matters of faith, Locke insisted that revealed truths cannot contradict reason. God can reveal to us both truths attainable by reason (though reason gives greater certainty of these than does revelation) as well as truths unattainable by reason. The revealed truths unattainable by reason cannot contradict reason, because we will always be more certain of the truth of reason than we will be of a purported revelation that contradicts reason. Therefore, no proposition contrary to reason can be accepted as divine revelation. Thus, although we know that a revelation from God must be true, it still lies within the scope of reason to determine if a supposed revelation really is from God and to determine its meaning.<sup>11</sup>

More than that, revelation must not only be in harmony with reason, but must itself be guaranteed by appropriate rational proofs that it is indeed divine. Otherwise, one degenerates into irresponsible enthusiasm:

---

<sup>10</sup> John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 4.10.1.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.18.5.

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

Revelation is natural reason enlarged by a new set of discoveries communicated by God immediately, which reason vouches the truth of by the testimony and proofs it gives that they come from God. So that he that takes away reason to make way for revelation, puts out the light of both; and does much the same as if he would persuade a man to put out his eyes, the better to receive the remote light of an invisible star by a telescope.<sup>12</sup>

Religious enthusiasm was the form of religious expression most scorned by the intellectualist believers of the Age of Reason, and Locke would have nothing to do with it. Only if reason makes plausible that a purported revelation is genuine can that revelation be believed.

Hence, in his subsequent works *The Reasonableness of Christianity* (1695) and *Discourse on Miracles* (1690), Locke argued that fulfilled prophecy and palpable miracles furnish proof of Christ's divine mission. He set forth three criteria for discerning a genuine revelation: First, it must not be dishonoring to God or inconsistent with natural religion and the natural moral law. Second, it must not inform man of things indifferent, insignificant, or easily discovered by natural ability. Third, it must be confirmed by supernatural signs. For Locke, the chief of these signs was miracle. On the basis of Jesus' miracles, we are justified in regarding him as the Messiah and his revelation from God as true.

As the fountainhead for both Deist works and orthodox apologetics, Locke's outlook shaped the religious thought of the eighteenth century. Be they Deist or orthodox, most thinkers of the century after Locke agreed that reason was to be given priority even in matters of faith, that revelation could not contradict reason, and that reason provided the essential foundation to religious belief.

## Henry Dodwell

That is not to say that dissenting voices could not be heard. Henry Dodwell (1700–1784) in his *Christianity Not Founded on Argument* (1742) attacked the prevailing theological rationalism as antithetical to true Christianity. Dodwell was so out of step with his times that he has even been suspected of being an unbeliever who appealed to an arational, subjective basis for religious faith as a subterfuge for undermining the rationality of Christianity. It seems to me, however, that Dodwell is to be taken straightforwardly as a spokesman for the anti-rationalistic religious tradition, which was not altogether absent even during the Enlightenment.

---

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.19.4.

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics

Dodwell argues that matters of religious faith lie outside the determination of reason. God could not possibly have intended that reason should be the faculty to lead us to faith, for faith cannot hang indefinitely in suspense while reason cautiously weighs and re-weighs arguments. The Scriptures teach, on the contrary, that the way to God is by means of the heart, not by means of the intellect. Faith is simply a gift of the Holy Spirit. What then is the basis of faith? Dodwell answers, authority—not indeed the arbitrary authority of the Church but rather the inner light of a constant and particular revelation imparted separately and supernaturally to every individual. Dodwell’s appeal is thus to the inner, faith-producing work of the Holy Spirit in each individual’s heart. His subjectively based apologetic appears to have generated no following among the scholars of his day, but later a similar emphasis on the witness of the Spirit by the Wesleys and Whitefield was to be an earmark of the great revivals that opened fresh springs for the dry souls of the English laity.

## CONTEMPORARY

During the present century, theological discussion of the relationship between faith and reason has replayed many of these same themes.

### **Karl Barth and Rudolph Bultmann**

Both the dialectical theology championed by Karl Barth (1886–1968) and the existential theology propounded by Rudolf Bultmann (1884–1976) were characterized by a religious epistemology of authoritarianism.

According to Barth, there can be no approach to God whatsoever via human reason. Apart from God’s revelation in Christ, human reason comprehends absolutely nothing about God. The fundamental reason for this agnosticism concerning human knowledge of God seems to be Barth’s firm commitment to the thesis that God is “wholly other” and therefore transcends all categories of human thought and logic. This belief led Barth to deny the Roman Catholic doctrine of an analogy of being between God and man. According to that doctrine, creation as the product of its Creator shares in an analogous way certain properties possessed most perfectly by God such as being, goodness, truth, and so forth. According to Barth, God is so transcendent that no analogy exists between him and the creature. Hence, it follows that there can be no natural knowledge about God at all. But God has revealed himself to man in Jesus Christ; indeed, Christ is the revelation or Word of God. In him alone there is found an analogy of faith that affords some knowledge of God. But even this seems to be experiential rather than cognitive: it is a personal encounter with the Word of God, who confronts us now and again through different forms, such as the Bible or preaching. Even in his self-disclosure God remains hidden: “He meets us as the One who is hidden, the One about whom we must admit



# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

that we do not know what we are saying when we try to say who He is."<sup>13</sup> God remains incomprehensible and the propositions we assert about him are true in an incomprehensible way.

This might lead one to think that for Barth fideism is the only route by which someone might come to the knowledge of God. This does not, however, seem to be precisely correct. For Barth emphasizes that the personal encounter with the Word of God results entirely from the sovereign, divine initiative. Lost in sin, man cannot even begin to *move* in the direction of faith, so that even a leap of faith is impossible for him. No, it must be God who breaks into man's indolent sinfulness to confront him with the Word of God. As Barth writes, "Knowledge of God is a knowledge completely effected and determined from the side of its object, from the side of God."<sup>14</sup> Or again, "*the fact that he did come to this decision, that he really believed, and that he actually had freedom to enter this new life of obedience and hope—all this was not the work of his spirit, but the work of the Holy Spirit.*"<sup>15</sup> Barth believed that the Reformation doctrine of justification by grace through faith is incompatible with any human initiative—even fideism. If knowing God depends wholly on God's grace, then even the act of faith would be a sinful work were it not wholly wrought by God. If it be asked how one knows that it is indeed the Word of God that confronts him and not a delusion, Barth would simply respond that such a question is meaningless. When the Word of God confronts a man, he is not free to analyze, weigh, and consider as a disinterested judge or observer—he can only obey. The authority of the Word of God is the foundation for religious belief.

Like Barth, Bultmann also rejects any human apprehension of the Word of God (which he seems to identify primarily with the call to authentic existence embodied in the gospel) apart from faith. Bultmann construes faith in epistemological categories, opposing it to knowledge based on proof. In the existentialist tradition, he considers it essential to faith that it involve risk and uncertainty. Therefore, rational evidence is not only irrelevant, but actually contrary to faith. Faith, in order to be faith, must exist in an evidential vacuum. For this reason Bultmann denies any significance for the Christian message to the historical Jesus, apart from his bare existence. Bultmann recognizes that Paul in 1 Corinthians 15 does "think that he can guarantee the resurrection of Christ as an objective fact by listing the witnesses who had seen him risen."<sup>16</sup> But he characterizes such

---

<sup>13</sup> Karl Barth, *The Knowledge of God and the Science of God According to the Teaching of the Reformation*, trans. J.L.M. Haire and I. Henderson (New York: Scribner's, 1939), p. 27.

<sup>14</sup> Karl Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline*, trans. G.J. Thomson (New York: Philosophical Library, 1947), p. 24.

<sup>15</sup> Barth, *Knowledge*, p. 109.

<sup>16</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments*, 7th ed., ed. O. Merk (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1961), p. 295.

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

historical argumentation as “fatal” because it tries to produce proof for the Christian proclamation.<sup>17</sup> Should an attempt at proof succeed, this would mean the destruction of faith. Only a decision to believe wholly apart from evidence will bring one into contact with the existential significance of the gospel. Bultmann emphasizes that this does not mean such a step is made arbitrarily or light-heartedly. No, the existential issues of life and death weigh so heavily that this decision to believe is the most important and awesome step a person can take. But it must be taken in the absence of any rational criteria for choice.

This might lead one to think that Bultmann is a pure fideist; but again this does not seem quite correct. For he insists that the very authority of the Word of God strips away all demands for criteria: “As though God had to justify himself to man! As though every demand for justification (including the one concealed in the demand for criteria) did not have to be dropped as soon as the face of God appears!”<sup>18</sup> As Pannenberg explains, the “basic presupposition underlying German Protestant theology as expressed by Barth or Bultmann is that the basis of theology is the self-authenticating Word of God which demands obedience.”<sup>19</sup> Thus, it would seem that in both dialectical and existential theology the final appeal is authoritarian.

## Wolfhart Pannenberg

Pannenberg’s rigorously evidential approach to theological questions has been widely acclaimed as ushering in a new phase in European Protestant theology. In 1961 a circle of young theologians for whom Pannenberg served as the principal spokesman asserted in their manifesto *Offenbarung als Geschichte (Revelation as History)* that revelation ought to be understood exclusively in terms of God’s acts in history, not as some self-authenticating Word.

Because this “Word,” which was understood as God’s self-disclosure in a divine-human encounter, needs no external authentication, theology, according to Pannenberg, has depreciated the relevance of history to faith and walled itself off against secular knowledge. On the one hand, Bultmann’s existentialist theology has neglected objective historical facticity in favor of finding the conditions for authentic human existence in the apostolic proclamation, to which historical facts are thought to be strictly irrelevant. On the other hand, Barth’s understanding of peculiarly Christian events as belonging, not to

---

<sup>17</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, “Reply to the Theses of J. Schniewind,” in *Kerygma and Myth*, ed. H.-W. Bartsch, trans. R.H. Fuller (London: SPCK, 1953), 1: 112.

<sup>18</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, “The Case for Demythologizing: A Reply,” in *Kerygma and Myth*, 2: 191.

<sup>19</sup> Wolfhart Pannenberg, ed. *Revelation as History*, trans. D. Granskou (London: Macmillan, 1968), p. 9.

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

the course of ordinary, investigable history, but rather to redemptive history, which is closed to historical research, equally devalues real history. Both schools share a common motive in their depreciation of the importance of history for faith, namely, the desire to secure for faith an impregnable stronghold against the assaults of modern historical-critical studies. Dialectical theology fled into the harbor of supra-history, supposedly safe from the historical-critical floodtide, while existential theology withdrew from the course of objective history to the subjective experience of human authenticity. Theology's attempt at self-isolationism backfired, however, because the secular sciences turned upon it to criticize and contradict it. "For much too long a time faith has been misunderstood to be subjectivity's fortress into which Christianity could retreat from the attacks of scientific knowledge. Such a retreat into pious subjectivity can only lead to destroying any consciousness of the truth of the Christian faith."<sup>20</sup>

Therefore, if Christianity is to make any meaningful claim to truth, it must, according to Pannenberg, submit to the same procedures of testing and verification that are employed in the secular sciences. This method of verification will be indirect, for example, by means of historical research. A theological interpretation of history will be tested positively by "its ability to take into account all known historical details," and negatively by "the proof that without its specific assertions the accessible information would not be at all or would be only incompletely explicable."<sup>21</sup> Since the Christian faith is based on a real past event, and since there is no way to know the past other than by historical-critical research, it follows that the object of Christian faith cannot remain untouched by the results of such research. On the one hand, a kerygmatic Christ utterly unrelated to the real, historical Jesus would be "pure myth"; and on the other hand, a Christ known only through dialectical encounter would be impossible to distinguish from "self-delusion."<sup>22</sup> Therefore, the unavoidable conclusion is that the burden of proving that God has revealed himself in Jesus of Nazareth must fall upon the historian.

Pannenberg acknowledges that if the historical foundation for faith were removed, then Christianity should be abandoned. He is, however, confident that given the historical facts that we now have, this eventuality will not occur. Pannenberg realizes that the results of historical investigation always retain a degree of uncertainty, but nevertheless, through this "precarious and provisional" way a knowledge of the truth of Christianity

---

<sup>20</sup> Wolfhart Pannenberg, "The Revelation of God in Jesus of Nazareth," in *New Frontiers in Theology*, vol. 3: *Theology as History*, ed. J.M. Robinson and J.B. Cobb, Jr. (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), p. 131.

<sup>21</sup> Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Redemptive Event and History," in *Basic Questions in Theology*, trans. G. Kehm (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970), 1: 78.

<sup>22</sup> Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus—God and Man*, trans. L. L. Wilkins and D.A. Priebe (London: SCM, 1968), pp. 27–8.

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

is possible. Without this factual foundation logically prior to faith, faith would be reduced to gullibility, credulity, or superstition. Only this evidential approach, in contrast to the subjectivism of modern theology, can establish Christianity's truth claim. The historical facts at the foundation of Christianity are reliable, and therefore we can base our faith, our lives, and our future on them.

## Alvin Plantinga

Appealing to what he (erroneously, I think) calls the Reformed objection to natural theology, Alvin Plantinga has recently attacked theological rationalism with regard to belief in God. Plantinga wants to maintain that belief in God is rational wholly apart from any evidentiary foundations for the belief.

This brings him into conflict with what he calls the evidentialist objection to theistic belief. According to the evidentialist, one is rationally justified in believing a proposition to be true only if that proposition is either foundational to knowledge or is established by evidence that is ultimately based on such a foundation. According to this viewpoint, since the proposition "God exists" is not foundational, it would be irrational to believe this proposition apart from rational evidence for its truth.

But, Plantinga asks, why can't the proposition "God exists" be itself part of the foundation, so that no rational evidence is necessary? The evidentialist replies that only propositions that are properly basic can be part of the foundation of knowledge. What, then, are the criteria that determine whether or not a proposition is properly basic? Typically, the evidentialist asserts that only propositions that are self-evident or incorrigible are properly basic. For example, the proposition "The sum of the squares of the two sides of a right triangle is equal to the square of the hypotenuse" is self-evidently true. Similarly, the proposition "I feel pain" is incorrigibly true, since even if I am only imagining my injury, it is still true that I *feel* pain. Since the proposition "God exists" is neither self-evident nor incorrigible, it is not properly basic and therefore requires evidence if it is to be believed. To believe this proposition without evidence is therefore irrational.

Now Plantinga does not deny that self-evident and incorrigible propositions are properly basic, but he does ask how we know that these are the *only* properly basic propositions or beliefs. If they are, then we are all irrational, since we commonly accept numerous beliefs that are not based on evidence and that are neither self-evident nor incorrigible. For example, take the belief that the world was not created five minutes ago with built-in memory traces, food in our stomachs from the breakfasts we never really ate, and other appearances of age. Surely it is rational to believe that the world has existed longer than five minutes, even though there is no evidence for this. The evidentialist's criteria for

## Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

proper basicity must be flawed. In fact, what about the status of those criteria? Is the proposition “Only propositions that are self-evident or incorrigible are properly basic” *itself* properly basic? Apparently not, for it is certainly not self-evident nor incorrigible. Therefore, if we are to believe this proposition, we must have evidence that it is true. But there is no such evidence. The proposition appears to be just an arbitrary definition—and not a very plausible one at that! Hence, the evidentialist cannot exclude the possibility that belief in God is a properly basic belief.

And in fact, Plantinga maintains, following John Calvin, belief in God is properly basic. Man has an innate, natural capacity to apprehend God’s existence even as he has a natural capacity to accept truths of perception (like “I see a tree”). Given the appropriate circumstances—such as moments of guilt, gratitude, or a sense of God’s handiwork in nature—man naturally apprehends God’s existence. In the same way that certain perceptual beliefs, like “I see a tree,” are properly basic given the appropriate circumstances, so belief in God is properly basic in appropriate circumstances. Neither the existence of the tree nor of God is *inferred* from one’s experience of the circumstances. But being in the appropriate circumstances is what renders one’s belief *properly* basic; the belief would be irrational were it to be held under inappropriate circumstances. Thus, the basic belief that God exists is not arbitrary, since it is properly held only by a person placed in appropriate circumstances. Similarly, taking belief in God as properly basic does not commit one to the relativistic view that virtually any belief can be properly basic for a normal adult. In the absence of appropriate circumstances, various beliefs taken as basic by certain persons will be arbitrarily and irrationally held. Even in the absence of an adequate criterion of proper basicity to replace the flawed evidentialist criterion, the fact is that we can know that some beliefs are just not *properly* basic. Thus, the Christian who takes belief in God as properly basic can legitimately reject the proper basicity of other beliefs. Plantinga thus insists that his epistemology is not fideistic; the deliverances of reason include not only inferred propositions, but also properly basic propositions. God has so constructed us that we naturally form the belief in his existence under appropriate circumstances, just as we do the belief in perceptual objects, the reality of the past, and so forth. Hence, belief in God is among the deliverances of reason, not faith.

Plantinga emphasizes that the proper basicity of the belief that God exists does not imply its indubitability. This belief is defeasible; that is to say, it can be defeated by other incompatible beliefs which come to be accepted by the theist. In such a case, the individual in question must give up some of his beliefs if he is to remain rational, and perhaps it will be his belief in God that is jettisoned. Thus, for example, a Christian who encounters the problem of evil is faced with a potential defeater of his belief in God. If he is to remain rational in his Christian belief, he must have an answer for the defeater. This is where Christian apologetics comes in; it can help to formulate answers to potential

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

defeaters, such as the Free Will Defense in response to the problem of evil. But Plantinga also argues that in some cases, the original belief itself may so exceed its alleged defeater in rational warrant that it becomes an intrinsic defeater of its ostensible defeater. He gives the example of someone accused of a crime and against whom all the evidence stands, even though that person knows he is innocent. In such a case, that person is not rationally obligated to abandon belief in his own innocence and to accept instead the evidence that he is guilty. The belief that he did not commit the crime intrinsically defeats the defeaters brought against it by the evidence. Plantinga makes the theological application by suggesting that belief in God may similarly intrinsically defeat all the defeaters that might be brought against it. Intriguingly, Plantinga intimates that the circumstances which could produce so powerful a warrant for belief in God are the implanted, natural sense of the divine (Calvin's *sensus divinitatis*), deepened and accentuated by the testimony of the Holy Spirit.<sup>23</sup>

Plantinga argues that belief in God is not merely *rational* for the person who takes it as properly basic, but that this belief is so warranted that such a person can be said to *know* that God exists. A belief that is merely rational could in fact be false. When we say that a belief is rational, we mean that the person holding it is within his epistemological rights in so doing or that he exhibits no defect in his noetic structure in so believing. But in order that some belief constitute knowledge, it must be true and in some sense justified or warranted for the person holding it.

The notion of warrant, which is necessary in order for a true belief to be knowledge, is philosophically controversial, and it is to the analysis of this notion that Plantinga's most recent, creative work has been dedicated. He first exposit and then criticizes all major theories of warrant which are offered by epistemologists today, such as deontologism, reliabilism, coherentism, and so forth. Fundamentally, Plantinga's method of exposing the inadequacy of such theories is to construct thought experiments or scenarios in which all the conditions for warrant stipulated by a theory are met and yet in which it is obvious that the person in question does not have knowledge of the proposition which he believes because his cognitive faculties are malfunctioning in forming the belief. This common failing suggests that rational warrant inherently involves the notion of the proper functioning of one's cognitive faculties. But this raises the troublesome question, what does it mean for one's cognitive faculties to be "functioning properly"? Here Plantinga drops a bomb into mainstream epistemology by proposing a peculiarly theistic account

---

<sup>23</sup> See Alvin Plantinga, *The Twin Pillars of Christian Scholarship* (Grand Rapids: Calvin College and Seminary, 1990), pp. 53–5.

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

of rational warrant and proper functioning, namely, that one's cognitive faculties are functioning properly only if they are functioning as God designed them to.

Although he adds various subtle philosophical qualifications, the basic idea of Plantinga's account is that a belief is warranted for a person just in the case his cognitive faculties are, in forming that belief, functioning in an appropriate environment as God designed them to. The more firmly such a person holds the belief in question, the more warrant it has for him, and if he believes it firmly enough, it has sufficient warrant to constitute knowledge. With respect to the belief that God exists, Plantinga would hold that God has so constituted us that we naturally form this belief under certain circumstances; since the belief is thus formed by properly functioning cognitive faculties in an appropriate environment, it is warranted for us, and, insofar as our faculties are not disrupted by the noetic effects of sin, we will believe this proposition deeply and firmly, so that we can be said, in virtue of the great warrant accruing to this belief for us, to know that God exists.

## ASSESSMENT

"How do I know Christianity is true?" Probably every Christian has asked himself that question. "I believe God exists, I believe Jesus rose from the dead, and I've experienced his life-changing power in my life, but how do I *know* it's really true?" The problem becomes especially acute when we're faced with someone who either does not believe in God or Jesus or who adheres to some other world religion. They may demand of us how we know Christianity is true and to prove it to them. What are we supposed to say? How *do* I know that Christianity is true?

In answering this question, I think we need to distinguish between *knowing* Christianity to be true and *showing* Christianity to be true.

## KNOWING CHRISTIANITY TO BE TRUE

Here I want to examine two points: first, the role of the Holy Spirit, and second, the role of argument and evidence.

### Role of the Holy Spirit: Self-Authenticating Witness

May I suggest that, fundamentally, the way we know Christianity to be true is by the self-authenticating witness of God's Holy Spirit? Now what do I mean by that? I mean that the experience of the Holy Spirit is veridical and unmistakable (though not necessarily irresistible or indubitable) for him who has it; that such a person does not need supplementary arguments or evidence in order to know and to know with confidence that he is in fact experiencing the Spirit of God; that such experience does not function in

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

this case as a premiss in any argument from religious experience to God, but rather is the immediate experiencing of God himself; that in certain contexts the experience of the Holy Spirit will imply the apprehension of certain truths of the Christian religion, such as “God exists,” “I am condemned by God,” “I am reconciled to God,” “Christ lives in me,” and so forth; that such an experience provides one not only with a subjective assurance of Christianity’s truth, but with objective knowledge of that truth; and that arguments and evidence incompatible with that truth are overwhelmed by the experience of the Holy Spirit for him who attends fully to it. It seems to me that the NT teaches such a view with respect to both the believer and unbeliever alike.

## *The Believer*

First, let’s look at the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. When a person becomes a Christian, he automatically becomes an adopted son of God and is indwelt with the Holy Spirit: “for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. ... And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’ ” (Gal 3: 26; 4: 6). Paul emphasizes the point in Romans 8. Here he explains that it is the witness of the Holy Spirit with our spirit that allows us to know that we are God’s children: “for you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of sonship. When we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’ it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God” (Rom 8: 15–16). Paul uses the term *plerophoria* (complete confidence, full assurance) to indicate that the believer has knowledge of the truth as a result of the Spirit’s work (Col 2: 2; 1 Thess 1: 5; cf. Rom 4: 21; 14: 5; Col 4: 12). Sometimes this is called “assurance of salvation” by Christians today; now assurance of salvation entails certain truths of Christianity, such as “God forgives my sin,” “Christ has reconciled me to God,” and so on, so that in having assurance of salvation one has assurance of these truths.

The apostle John also makes quite clear that it is the Holy Spirit within us that gives believers conviction of the truth of Christianity. “But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all know ... the anointing which you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that any one should teach you; as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie, just as it has taught you, abide in him” (1 John 2: 20, 27). Here John explains that it is the Holy Spirit himself who teaches the believer the truth of divine things. John is clearly echoing the teaching of Jesus himself, when he says, “But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you” (John 14: 26). Now the truth that the Holy Spirit teaches us is not, I’m convinced, the subtleties of Christian doctrine. There are too many Spirit-filled Christians who differ doctrinally for that to be the case. What John is talking about is the inner assurance the Holy Spirit gives of the



# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

basic truths of the Christian faith. This assurance does not come from human arguments but directly from the Holy Spirit himself.

Now someone might point to 1 John 4: 1–3 as evidence that the testimony of the Holy Spirit is not self-authenticating, but needs to be tested:

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are of God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit which confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit which does not confess Jesus is not of God. This is the spirit of antichrist ...

17

But such an understanding would be a misinterpretation of the passage. John is not talking about testing the witness of the Spirit in our own hearts; rather he's talking about testing people who come to you claiming to be speaking by the Holy Spirit. He referred to the same people earlier: "Children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come; therefore we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not of us ..." (1 John 2: 18–19). John never encourages the believer to doubt the witness of the Spirit in his own heart; rather he says that if someone else comes claiming to speak by the Holy Spirit, then, since the situation is external to oneself and involves additional truth claims not immediately apprehended, we must test that person in order to determine if his claim is true. But in our own lives, the inner witness of God's Spirit is sufficient to assure us of the truths to which he testifies.

John also underlines other teachings of Jesus on the work of the Holy Spirit. For example, according to Jesus it is the indwelling Holy Spirit that gives the believer certainty of knowing that Jesus lives in him and that he is in Jesus, in the sense of being united with him.

And I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Counselor, to be with you for ever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him; you know him, for he dwells with you, and will be in you. ... In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you (John 14: 16–17, 20).

John teaches the same thing: "And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit which he has given us. ... By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his own Spirit" (1 John 3: 24; 4: 13). John uses his characteristic phrase "by this we know" to emphasize that as Christians we have a confident knowledge that our faith is true, that we really do abide in God, and God really does live in us. In fact John

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

goes so far as to contrast the confidence which the Spirit's testimony brings to that brought by human evidence:

This is he who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ, not with the water only but with the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the witness, because the Spirit is the truth. There are three witnesses, the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree. If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater; for this is the testimony of God that he has borne witness to his Son. He who believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself. He who does not believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has borne to his Son (1 John 5: 6–10).

The “water” here probably refers to Jesus’ baptism, and the “blood” to His crucifixion, those being the two events which marked the beginning and end of his earthly ministry. “The testimony of men” is therefore nothing less than the apostolic testimony to the events of Jesus’ life and ministry. Though John had laid such great weight on precisely that apostolic testimony in his gospel (John 20: 31; 21: 24), here he declares that even though we quite rightly receive this testimony, still the inner testimony of the Holy Spirit is even greater! As Christians we have the testimony of God living within us, the Holy Spirit who bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.

Thus, although arguments and evidence may be used to support the believer’s faith, they are never properly the basis of that faith. For the believer, God is not the conclusion of a syllogism; he is the living God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob dwelling within us. How then does the believer know that Christianity is true? He knows because of the self-authenticating witness of God’s Spirit who lives within him.

## *The Unbeliever*

But what about the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of an unbeliever? Since the Holy Spirit does not indwell him, does this mean that he must rely only upon arguments and evidence to convince him that Christianity is true? No, not at all. According to the Scripture, God has a different ministry of the Holy Spirit especially geared to the needs of the unbeliever. Jesus describes this ministry in John 16: 7–11:

It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will convince the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no more; concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

Here the Holy Spirit's ministry is three-fold: he convicts the unbeliever of his own sin, of God's righteousness, and of his condemnation before God. The unbeliever so convicted can therefore be said to know such truths as "God exists," "I am guilty before God," and so forth.

This is the way it has to be. For if it weren't for the work of the Holy Spirit, no one would *ever* become a Christian. According to Paul, natural man left to himself does not even seek God: "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands, no one seeks for God" (Rom 3: 10–11). Man in himself cannot understand spiritual things: "The unspiritual man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor 2: 14). And he is hostile to God: "For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, indeed it cannot" (Rom 8: 7). As Jesus said, men love darkness rather than light. Left to himself, natural man would never come to God.

The fact that we do find people who are seeking God and are ready to receive Christ is evidence that the Holy Spirit has already been at work, convicting them and drawing them to him. As Jesus said, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him" (John 6: 44).

Therefore, when a person refuses to come to Christ it is never just because of lack of evidence or because of intellectual difficulties: at root, he refuses to come because he willingly ignores and rejects the drawing of God's Spirit on his heart. No one in the final analysis really fails to become a Christian because of lack of arguments; he fails to become a Christian because he loves darkness rather than light and wants nothing to do with God. But anyone who responds to the drawing of God's Spirit with an open mind and an open heart can know with assurance that Christianity is true, because God's Spirit will convict him that it is. Jesus said, "My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me; if any man's will is to do his will, he shall know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority" (John 7: 16–17). Jesus affirms that if anyone is truly seeking God, then he will know that Jesus' teaching is truly from God.

So then for the unbeliever as well as for the believer, it is the testimony of God's Spirit that ultimately assures him of the truth of Christianity. The unbeliever who is truly seeking God will be convinced of the truth of the Christian message.

Therefore, we find that for believer and unbeliever alike it is the self-authenticating work of the Holy Spirit that supplies knowledge of Christianity's truth. Thus, I would agree that belief in the God of the Bible is a properly basic belief, and emphasize that it is the ministry of the Holy Spirit that supplies the circumstances for its proper basicity. And because this belief is formed in response to the self-disclosure of God himself, who needs

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics

no external authentication, it is not merely rational for us, but constitutes knowledge. We can be confident of Christianity's truth.

## Role of Argument and Evidence

But what about the second point: the role of argument and evidence in knowing Christianity to be true? We've already said that it's the Holy Spirit who gives us the ultimate assurance of Christianity's truth. Therefore, the only role left for argument and evidence to play is a subsidiary role. I think Martin Luther correctly distinguished between what he called the magisterial and ministerial uses of reason. The *magisterial use* of reason occurs when reason stands over and above the gospel like a magistrate and judges it on the basis of argument and evidence. The *ministerial use* of reason occurs when reason submits to and serves the gospel. Only the ministerial use of reason can be allowed. Philosophy is rightly the handmaid of theology. Reason is a tool to help us better understand and defend our faith; as Anselm put it, ours is a faith that seeks understanding. A person who knows Christianity is true on the basis of the witness of the Spirit may also have a sound apologetic which reinforces or confirms for him the Spirit's witness, but it does not serve as the basis of his belief. Should a conflict arise between the witness of the Holy Spirit to the fundamental truth of the Christian faith and beliefs based on argument and evidence, then it is the former which must take precedence over the latter, not vice versa.

## A Danger

Now there is a danger in all this so far. Some persons might say that we should never seek to defend the faith. Just preach the gospel and let the Holy Spirit work! But this attitude is unbalanced and unscriptural, as we shall see in a moment. For now, let us just note in passing that as long as reason is a minister of the Christian faith, Christians should employ it.

## An Objection

Some people disagree with what I've said about the role of argument and evidence. They would say that reason can be used in a magisterial role, at least by the unbeliever. They ask how else we could determine which is true, the Bible, the Koran, or the Baghavad-Gita, unless we use argument and evidence to judge them? Now I've already answered that question: The Holy Spirit teaches us directly which teaching is really from God. But let me suggest two other reasons I think those who support the magisterial role of reason are wrong.

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

First, such a role would consign most believers to irrationality. The vast majority of the human race have neither the time, training, nor resources to develop a full-blown Christian apologetic as the basis of their faith. Even the proponents of the magisterial use of reason at one time in the course of their education presumably lacked such an apologetic. According to the magisterial role of reason, these persons should not have believed in Christ until they finished their apologetic. Otherwise, they would be believing for insufficient reasons. I once asked a fellow seminary student, "How do you know Christianity is true?" He replied, "I really don't know." Does that mean he should give up Christianity until he finds rational arguments to ground his faith? Of course not! He knew Christianity was true because he knew Jesus, regardless of rational arguments. The fact is that we can know the truth whether we have rational arguments or not.

Second, if the magisterial role of reason were valid, then a person who had been given poor arguments for Christianity would have a just excuse before God for not believing in him. Suppose someone had been told to believe in God because of an invalid argument. Could he stand before God on the judgment day and say, "God, those Christians only gave me a lousy argument for believing in you. That's why I didn't believe"? Of course not! The Bible says all men are without excuse. Even those who are given no good reason to believe and many persuasive reasons to disbelieve have no excuse, because the ultimate reason they do not believe is that they have deliberately rejected God's Holy Spirit.

Therefore, the role of rational argumentation in knowing Christianity to be true is the role of a servant. A person knows Christianity is true because the Holy Spirit tells him it is true, and while argument and evidence can be used to support this conclusion, they cannot legitimately overrule it.

## SHOWING CHRISTIANITY TO BE TRUE

Such are the roles of the Holy Spirit and of argument in *knowing* Christianity is true. But what about their roles in *showing* Christianity is true? Here things are somewhat reversed.

### **Role of Reason: Systematic Consistency**

Let's look first at the role of argument and evidence in showing Christianity is true. Here we're concerned about how to prove to another person that our faith is true. Even if I myself know personally on the basis of the Spirit's witness in my heart that Christianity is true, how can I demonstrate to somebody else that what I believe is true?

The task of showing that Christianity is true involves the presentation of sound and persuasive arguments for Christian truth claims. Accordingly, we need to ask ourselves

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics

first how it is that one proves something to be true. A statement or proposition is true if and only if it corresponds to reality—that is to say, reality is just as the statement says that it is. Thus, the statement “The Cubs won the 1993 World Series” is true if and only if the Cubs won the 1993 World Series. In order to prove a proposition to be true, we present argument and evidence which have that proposition as the conclusion. Such reasoning can be either deductive or inductive.

In a sound deductive argument, the conclusion follows inevitably from the premisses. The two prerequisites of a sound deductive argument are that the premisses be true and the logic be valid. If the premisses are true, but the logic is fallacious, then the argument is invalid. An example of an invalid argument would be:

1. If God exists, objective moral values exist.
2. Objective moral values exist.
3. Therefore, God exists.

Although both the premisses are true, the conclusion does not follow logically from them, because the argument commits the fallacy known as “affirming the consequent.” On the other hand, an argument can be logically valid but still unsound, because it has false premisses. An example of such an unsound argument would be:

1. If Jesus were not Lord, he would be a liar or a lunatic.
2. Jesus was neither a liar nor a lunatic.
3. Therefore, Jesus is Lord.

This is a valid argument, inferring the negation of the first premiss’ antecedent based on the negation of its consequent. But the argument is still unsound, because the first premiss is false: there are other unmentioned alternatives, for example, that Jesus as described in the gospels is a legend. Hence, in presenting a deductive argument for some Christian truth we need to be careful to construct arguments which are logically valid and have true premisses.

An inductive argument is one for which it is possible that the premisses be true and the logical inferences valid, but the conclusion still be false. In such reasoning the evidence and rules of inference are said to “underdetermine” the conclusion; that is to say, they

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

render the conclusion plausible or likely, but do not guarantee its truth. For example, a sound inductive argument would be:

1. Groups A, B, C were composed of similar persons suffering from the same disease.
2. Group A was administered a certain new drug, group B was administered a placebo, and group C was not given any treatment.
3. The rate of death from the disease was subsequently lower in group A by 75% in comparison with both groups B and C.
4. Therefore, the new drug is effective in reducing the death rate from said disease.

The conclusion is quite likely true based on the evidence and rules of inductive reasoning, but it is not inevitably true; maybe the people in group A were just lucky or some unknown variable caused their improvement. Although inductive reasoning is part and parcel of everyday life, the description of such reasoning is a matter of controversy among philosophers. Some suggest that we utilize a hypothetico-deductive model of inductive reasoning: we frame a hypothesis to account for the facts and then deduce from the hypothesis predictions which, if true, would prove the hypothesis false; we then test those predictions and if they do not come true, our hypothesis is corroborated. Other philosophers advocate what they call inference to the best explanation: confronted with certain evidence, we infer what explanation would, if it were true, provide the best explanation of that evidence. What qualities go toward making an explanation best is a disputed issue (simplicity, explanatory power, and so on), but minimally such an explanation must fit all the facts of experience and be logically consistent. These minimal conditions will apply on either model to a sound inductive inference.

In both deductive and inductive reasoning, then, logic and facts are the keys to showing soundly that a conclusion is true. Since a proposition that is logically contradictory is necessarily false and so cannot be the conclusion of a sound argument, and since a proposition validly inferred from factually true premisses ought to be regarded as factually true, one may generalize these notions to say that a world view ought to be regarded as true just in case it is logically consistent and fits all the facts known in our experience. Such a test for truth has been called *systematic consistency*: “consistency” meaning obedience to the laws of logic and “systematic” meaning fitting all the facts

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

known by experience.<sup>24</sup> Notice that such a test does not guarantee the truth of a world view. For more than one view could be consistent and fit all the facts yet known by experience; or again, a view which is systematically consistent with all that we now know could turn out to be falsified by future discoveries. Systematic consistency thus underdetermines world views, and so, as in the case of inductive reasoning, we must be content with plausibility or likelihood, rather than rational certainty.

Now some Christian believers might be troubled by the notion that one's apologetic case for Christianity yields only probability rather than certainty. But the fact that Christianity can only be shown to be probably true need not be troubling when two things are kept in mind: first, that we attain no more than probability with respect to almost everything we infer (for example, that smoking contributes to lung cancer or that it is safe to cross the street) without detriment to the depth of our conviction and that even our non-inferred, basic beliefs may not be held with any sort of absolute certainty (for example, my memory belief that I had waffles for breakfast on Monday); and second, that even if we can only *show* Christianity to be probably true, nevertheless we can on the basis of the Spirit's witness *know* Christianity to be true with a deep assurance that far outstrips what the evidence in our particular situation might support (think analogously of the person convinced of his innocence even though all the evidence stands against him). To demand logically demonstrative proofs as a pre-condition for making a religious commitment is therefore just being unreasonable.

We should, then, test world views by their logical consistency and by how well they fit the facts known by experience. In our day and age, however, certain people, under the influence of Eastern mysticism or its Western step-child, the New Age Movement, deny that consistency is a test for truth. They affirm that reality is ultimately illogical or that logical contradictions correspond to reality. They assert that in Eastern thought the Absolute or God or the Real transcends the logical categories of human thought. They are apt to interpret the demand for logical consistency as a piece of Western imperialism. Trying to reason with such people can be very frustrating, because they will cheerfully concede that their view is logically incoherent and yet insist that it is true.

What such people seem to be saying is that the classical law of thought known as the Law of Excluded Middle is not necessarily true; that is to say, they deny that of a proposition and its negation, necessarily, one is true and the other is false. Such a denial could take two different forms. It could be interpreted on the one hand to mean that a proposition

---

<sup>24</sup> Edward John Carnell, having borrowed this notion from Edgar Sheffield Brightman, popularized it among evangelical apologists (Edward John Carnell, *An Introduction to Christian Apologetics* [Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1948], pp. 56–64). My explication of this notion is, however, different than Carnell's.



# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

and its negation *both* can be true (or both false). Thus, it is true both that God is love and, in the same sense, that God is not love. Since both are true, the Law of Contradiction, that a proposition and its negation cannot both be true (or both false) at the same time, is also denied. On the other hand, the original denial could be interpreted to mean that of a proposition and its negation *neither* may be true (or neither false). Thus, it is not true that God is good and it is not true that God is not good; there is just no truth value at all for such propositions. In this case, it is the classical Principle of Bivalence, that for any proposition, necessarily that proposition is either true or false, that is denied along with the Law of Excluded Middle.

Now I am inclined to say that such claims are frankly crazy and unintelligible.<sup>25</sup> To say that God is both good and not good in the same sense or that God neither exists nor does not exist is just incomprehensible to me.

In our politically correct age, there is a tendency to vilify all that is Western and to exalt Eastern modes of thinking as at least equally valid if not superior to Western modes of thought. To assert that Eastern thought is seriously deficient in making such claims is to be a sort of epistemological bigot, blinkered by the constraints of the logic-chopping Western mind. But this attitude is far too simplistic. In the first place, there are thinkers within the tradition of Western thought alone who have held the mystical views under discussion (Plotinus would be a good example), so that there is no need to play off East against West in this matter. Secondly, the extent to which such thinking represents “the Eastern mind” has been greatly exaggerated. In the East the common man—and the philosopher, too—lives by the Laws of Contradiction and Excluded Middle in his everyday life; he affirms them every time he walks through a doorway rather than into the wall. It is only at an extremely theoretical level of philosophical speculation that such laws are denied. And even at that level, the situation is not monochromatic: Confucianism, Hinayana Buddhism, pluralistic Hinduism as exemplified in Sankhya-Yoga, Vaishesika-Nyaya, and Mimasa schools of thought, and even Jainism do not deny the application of the classical laws of thought to ultimate reality.<sup>26</sup> Thus, a critique of

---

<sup>25</sup> I'm reminded of a delightful anecdote related by a Christian professor about the day he told his philosophy class (including the Dean, who was sitting in that day) as seriously as he could that “This piece of chalk is not a piece of chalk,” and thereafter asked them what they had learned. The students, and the hapless Dean as well, tried vainly to extract some knowledge from this self-contradictory nonsense, until finally an inner-city black pastor in the class exclaimed in frustration, “Man, I ain't learned nothin' at all!” The professor said he was relieved that at least one person in his class could still think rationally. Somebody needs similarly to tell the post-modernist (see below) that the emperor is wearing no clothes.

<sup>26</sup> For a good discussion, see Stuart C. Hackett, *Oriental Philosophy* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1979).

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics

Eastern thought from within Eastern thought can be—and has been—made. We in the West should not therefore be embarrassed or apologetic about our heritage; on the contrary, it is one of the glories of ancient Greece that her thinkers came to enunciate clearly the principles of logical reasoning, and the triumph of logical reasoning over competing modes of thought in the West has been one of the West's greatest strengths and proudest achievements.

Why think then that such self-evident truths as the principles of logic are in fact invalid for ultimate reality? Such a claim seems to be both self-refuting and arbitrary. For consider a claim like “God cannot be described by propositions governed by the Principle of Bivalence.” If such a claim is true, then it is not true, since it itself is a proposition describing God and so has no truth value. Thus, such a claim refutes itself. Of course, if it is not true, then it is not true, as the Eastern mystic alleged, that God cannot be described by propositions governed by the Principle of Bivalence. Thus, if the claim is not true, it is not true and if it is true, it is not true, so that in either case the claim turns out to be not true. Or consider the claim that “God cannot be described by propositions governed by the Law of Contradiction.” If this proposition is true, then, since it describes God, it is not itself governed by the Law of Contradiction. Therefore, it is equally true that “God can be described by propositions governed by the Law of Contradiction.” But then which propositions are these that are so governed? There must be some, for the Eastern mystic is committed to the truth of this claim. But if he produces any, then they immediately refute his original claim that there are no such propositions. His claim thus commits him to the existence of counter-examples which serve to refute that very claim.

One might try to escape the above self-refuting situation by maintaining that when one denies the validity of such logical principles for propositions about God, one is talking in a meta-language (or higher level language) about propositions in another, lower level language, much as one could talk in English, for example, about the rules for German grammar, and that since the principles of the lower level language don't apply to the meta-language, no self-refuting situations arise. For example, when I say, “If you have a subordinate clause, the verb goes at the end of the clause,” that statement is true for the German language, and I do not refute myself in asserting it because it is a statement in another language (English) and so doesn't need to have the verb go at the end of the subordinate clause which it itself contains. In the same way someone could say that when we deny the validity of logical principles for propositions about God, we are speaking in a meta-language, which is governed by those principles, about ordinary language, which is not. But the futility of this response with respect to propositions about God is evident in the fact that one could then use the meta-language to describe God, since you *can* talk about God in it in a logical way and the restrictions only apply to the *lower* language.

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

Furthermore, apart from the issue of self-refutation, the mystic's claim is wholly arbitrary. Indeed, no reason can ever be given to justify denying the validity of logical principles for propositions about God. For the very statement of such reasons, such as "God is too great to be captured by categories of human thought" or "God is wholly other," involves the affirmation of certain propositions about God which are governed by the principles in question. In short, the denial of such principles for propositions about ultimate reality is completely and essentially arbitrary.

Some Eastern thinkers realize that their position, as a position, is ultimately self-refuting and arbitrary, and so they are driven to deny that their position really is a position! They claim rather that their position is just a technique pointing to the transcendent Real beyond all positions. But if this claim is not flatly self-contradictory, as it would appear, if such thinkers literally *have no position*, then there just is nothing here to assess and they have nothing to say. This silence is perhaps the most poignant illustration of the bankruptcy of the denial of the principles of logical reasoning.

This same debate between certain Eastern/New Age modes of thought and classical logical thinking is being played out on another stage of the contemporary scene: the debate between modernism and radical post-modernism. Modernism is that mode of thought which is more or less synonymous with Enlightenment rationalism, whereas post-modernism is a much heralded new mode of thought that rejects Enlightenment epistemology and tends to denigrate rational metaphysics, deny moral absolutes, and exalt pluralism. Post-modernism is frequently accompanied by deconstructionism, which seeks to dismantle traditional, rational, objective notions found in modernism. Now in rejecting Enlightenment theological rationalism in favor of the self-authenticating witness of the Holy Spirit as the ground of our knowledge of the Christian faith, I have already, in one sense, opted for a "post-modern" epistemology; similarly, the provisional character of systematic consistency accords with the intellectual humility advocated by post-modernism. But really radical post-modernists would scorn these sops. They reject altogether Western rationality and metaphysics, claiming that there is no objective truth about reality. "The truth," as John Caputo says, "is that there is no truth."<sup>27</sup> But such a claim falls prey to precisely the same objections as above—indeed, the post-modernist claim is not really distinguishable from certain Buddhist philosophies. To assert that "The truth is that there is no truth" is self-refuting and arbitrary.<sup>28</sup> For if this statement is true,

---

<sup>27</sup> John D. Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), p. 156.

<sup>28</sup> For a trenchant critique of post-modern (ir)rationality, as well as attempted responses, see the discussion in James L. Marsh, John D. Caputo, and Merold Westphal, *Modernity and Its Discontents* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1992), pp. 18–19, 89–92, 168–74, 199–201. See also the entertaining discussion in Plantinga, *Twin Pillars*, pp. 17–23.

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

it is not true, since there is no truth. So-called deconstructionism thus cannot be halted from deconstructing itself. Moreover, there is just no reason that can be given for adopting the post-modern perspective rather than, say, the outlooks of Western capitalism, male chauvinism, white racism, and so forth, since post-modernism has no more truth to it than these perspectives. Caught in this self-defeating trap, some post-modernists have been forced to the same recourse as Buddhist mystics: denying that post-modernism is really a view or position at all. But then, once again, why do they continue to write books and talk about it? They are obviously making some cognitive claims—and if not, then they literally have *nothing* to say and no objection to our employment of the classical canons of logic.

Some of the same mystical traditions that reject classical logic would also appear to reject the requirement that a true world view must fit the facts known by experience as well as be logically consistent. For they subscribe to a sort of phenomenal illusionism according to which the world apprehended by the five senses is ultimately unreal. Again such illusionism is not unrepresented in Western thought (Parmenides, for example), nor universal among Eastern philosophical traditions and is, in any case, operative only at extremely speculative metaphysical levels in those traditions that do affirm it. The contemporary Western equivalent of such views seems to be the hypothesis that you are just a brain in a vat being stimulated by electrodes to have sensations of the external world as you apprehend it. The veridicality of your senses cannot be justified by your senses themselves, since they are the very mechanisms being questioned. Rather a deeper epistemological theory, such as those discussed by Plantinga, is needed to explain why our senses are to be trusted in their deliverances. Perhaps a simpler route is also open to us. For phenomenal illusionism does not in a sense deny that an adequate world view must explain the facts known through experience. It denies that we know, for example, that the external world exists, but it does provide some account of our experience of the world as it appears to us. It makes some attempt to explain the data of experience; it does not simply deny that we have an experience of the external world and the things in it. The question, then, is what is the best explanation of our experience of the world, that it is illusory or that we have some apprehension of the world as it is? The arguments for illusionism have been generally recognized as failures, so that there is no reason to abandon our common sense belief in the general veridicality of our senses.

So in showing a proposition to be true, we must present either deductively or inductively sound arguments for the proposed conclusion. In general we shall try to show that the Christian world view is systematically consistent, that is to say, that it is logical and fits the facts known through experience.

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

But there is more to showing Christianity to be true than just the provision of sound arguments in its favor. A successful apologetic must also be persuasive. If this second condition is unmet, the task of providing sound arguments for Christianity can become utterly trivial. For example, consider the following argument on behalf of the Christian faith:

1. Either Christianity is true or I'm a monkey's uncle.
2. I am not a monkey's uncle.
3. Therefore, Christianity is true.

This is a logically valid argument, and, since Christianity is in fact true and I am not a monkey's uncle, its premisses are true. Accordingly, it is a sound argument for the Christian faith. But nobody would regard this as much of an apologetic! The argument has no power to persuade, since nobody who is not already convinced of the truth of Christianity will be prepared to accept the first premiss. In showing Christianity to be true, therefore, we must use arguments that are not only sound, but also convincing. This raises a difficulty, since persuasiveness is to some degree person-relative. Some people are easy to convince, while others simply refuse to be convinced. Plantinga has observed that you can actually reduce someone from knowledge to ignorance by presenting him with a valid argument containing premisses he knows to be true for a conclusion which he simply refuses to accept, so that he has to deny one of the premisses he knew to be true. No better illustration of this can be given than the natural man's refusing to believe in God or Christ at the expense of adopting some outlandish hypothesis which he ought to know is false (for example, that the universe came into being uncaused out of nothing or that Jesus was a man from outer space). Since we cannot hope to persuade everybody, our aim should be to make our cumulative apologetic case as persuasive as possible. This can best be done by appealing to facts which are widely accepted or to intuitions that are commonly shared (common sense). When we appeal to expert testimony, our authorities should not be partisan, but neutral or even anti-Christian. And of course, the persuasiveness of an argument as it is presented on any particular occasion may depend on a host of arational considerations, such as courteousness, openness, genuine concern for the listener, and so forth.

In showing Christianity to be true, therefore, we try to prove that the Christian world view is systematically consistent by appealing to common sense and widely accepted facts about the world.

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

## Role of the Holy Spirit

Now we come to the second point: the role of the Holy Spirit in showing Christianity to be true. The role of the Holy Spirit is to use our arguments to convince the unbeliever of the truth of Christianity. When one presents reasons for his faith, one is not working apart from or against the Holy Spirit. To return to a point mentioned earlier: it is unbalanced and unscriptural to simply preach the gospel *if* the unbeliever has questions or objections.

First, it's unbalanced because it assumes the Holy Spirit works only through preaching. But he can work through rational argumentation, too. We should appeal to the head as well as to the heart. If an unbeliever objects that the Bible is unreliable because it is a translation of a translation of a translation, the answer is not to tell him to get right with God. The answer is to explain that we have excellent manuscripts of the Bible in the original Greek and Hebrew languages—and *then* tell him to get right with God!

But second, it's unscriptural to refuse to reason with an unbeliever. Look at Paul. It was Paul's standard procedure to present reasons for the truth of the gospel and so defend the faith:

And Paul went in, as was his custom, and for three weeks he argued with them from the scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead. ... So he argued in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the market place every day with those who chanced to be there. ...

And he entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, arguing and pleading about the kingdom of God. ...

And he expounded the matter to them from morning till evening, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the law of Moses and from the prophets. And some were convinced by what he said, while others disbelieved (Acts 17: 2–3, 17; 19: 8; 28: 23–4).

Indeed, Scripture actually *commands* us to be prepared to give such a defense to an unbeliever: "... always being ready to make a defense to every one who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you" (1 Pet 3: 15b). So as Christians, we are to have an apologetic case ready to show that Christianity is true. To ignore the unbeliever's questions or objections is therefore both unbalanced and unscriptural. Of course, it is true that we can never argue anyone into the kingdom of God. Conversion is exclusively the role of the Holy Spirit. But the Holy Spirit may use our arguments to draw people to himself.

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

## *A Danger*

Now there is also a danger in all this. There is the danger that we may focus our attention on the argument instead of on the sinner. We must never let apologetics distract us from our primary aim of communicating the gospel. Indeed, I would say that with most people there is no need to use apologetics at all. Only use rational argumentation after sharing the gospel and when the unbeliever still has questions. If you tell him, "God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life," and he says he doesn't believe in God, don't get bogged down at that point in trying to prove the existence of God to him. Tell him, "Well, at this point I'm not trying to convince you what the Bible says is *true*; I'm just trying to share with you what the Bible *says*. After I've done that, then perhaps we can come back to whether there are good reasons to believe what it says is true." Remember our primary aim is to present Christ.

## *An Objection*

Some would disagree with what I've said about the role of the Holy Spirit in showing Christianity to be true. They would contend that the believer and the unbeliever have no common ground on which to argue; therefore it is futile to try to convince an unbeliever that Christianity is true. I think I've already indicated what our common ground with unbelievers is: the laws of logic and the facts of experience. Starting from these, we build our case for Christianity.

But in addition, I think that the example of Jesus and the apostles confirms the validity of such an approach. Jesus appealed to miracles and to fulfilled prophecy to prove that his claims were true (Luke 24: 25–27; John 14: 11). What about the apostles? In dealing with Jews, they appealed to fulfilled prophecy, Jesus' miracles, and especially Jesus' resurrection. A model apologetic for Jews is Peter's sermon on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2. In verse 22 he appeals to Jesus' miracles. In verses 25–31 he appeals to fulfilled prophecy. In verse 32 he appeals to Christ's resurrection. By means of these arguments the apostles sought to show Jews that Christianity is true.

In dealing with non-Jews, the apostles sought to show the existence of God through his handiwork in nature (Acts 14: 17). In Romans 1, Paul says that from nature alone all men can know that God exists (Rom 1: 20). According to Michael Green in his book *Evangelism in the Early Church*, the standard procedure of the apostles in dealing with Gentiles was to point to nature to show God's existence. Paul also appealed to eyewitness testimony of the resurrection of Jesus to show further that Christianity is true (1 Cor 15: 3–8). So it is quite apparent, I think, that both Jesus and the apostles were not afraid to argue for the truth of Christianity. This doesn't mean they didn't trust the Holy Spirit to bring people to God. Rather they trusted the Holy Spirit to use their arguments to bring people to God.

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

Therefore, in showing Christianity to be true, it is the role of argument and evidence to show that the Christian *Weltanschauung* is the most systematically consistent position one can hold. And it is the role of the Holy Spirit to use these arguments, as we lovingly present them, to bring people to him.

## CONCLUSION

In summary, we've seen that in answering the question "How do I know Christianity is true?" we must make a distinction between *knowing* it is true and *showing* it is true. We *know* Christianity is true primarily by the self-authenticating witness of God's Spirit. We *show* Christianity is true by demonstrating that it is systematically consistent.

What, then, should be our approach in apologetics? It should be something like this: "My friend, I know Christianity is true because God's Spirit lives in me and assures me that it is true. And you can know it is true, too, because God is knocking at the door of your heart, telling you the same thing. If you are sincerely seeking God, then God will give you assurance that the gospel is true. Now to try to show you it's true, I'll share with you some arguments and evidence that I really find convincing. But should my arguments seem weak and unconvincing to you, that's my fault, not God's. It only shows that I'm a poor apologist, not that the gospel is untrue. Whatever you think of my arguments, God still loves you and holds you accountable. I'll do my best to present good arguments to you. But ultimately you have to deal, not with arguments, but with God himself."

## PRACTICAL APPLICATION

The foregoing discussion has profound practical application both in our Christian walk and in our evangelism. With regard to our Christian walk, it helps us to have a proper assurance of the truth of our faith. A student once remarked to me after class, "I find this view so liberating!" He had struggled for some time to sort out the relation between faith and reason, but without success. Christians often fall into the extremes of fideism or theological rationalism. But the view just expounded enables us to hold to a rational faith which is supported by argument and evidence without our making that argument and evidence the foundation of our faith. It is tremendously liberating to be able to know that our faith is true and to commend it as such to an unbeliever without being dependent upon the vagaries of argument and evidence for the assurance that our faith is true; at the same time we know confidently and without embarrassment that our faith is true and that the unbeliever can know this, too, without our falling into relativistic subjectivism.

This view also underlines the vital importance of cultivating the ministry of the Holy Spirit in our lives. For though all Christians are indwelt by the Spirit, not all are filled with the Spirit. The New Testament teaches that we can grieve the Holy Spirit of God by



# Lion and Lamb Apologetics

sin (Eph 4: 30) and quench the Spirit by repressing his working in our lives (1 Thess 5: 19). The Christian who is not filled with the Spirit may often be wracked with doubts concerning his faith. I can testify personally that my intellectual doubts seem most poignant when I am in a carnal condition. But when a Christian is walking in the Spirit, then, although his intellectual questions may remain, he can *live* with those questions, without their robbing his faith of its vitality. As the source of the assurance that our faith is true, the Holy Spirit's ministry in our lives needs to be cultivated by spiritual activities that help us to walk close to God, such as Bible study, prayer, devotional reading, inspirational music, evangelism, and Spirit-filled worship.

In evangelism, too, this view enables us to give the unbeliever rational arguments and evidence for the truth of the Gospel, instead of challenging him to "just have faith." I have met many non-Christians who came from conservative Christian backgrounds and who were turned off to the gospel by having their honest questions squelched and being told to just believe. By contrast, let me tell you about the experience of one university student I shared the gospel with. After I finished, he asked, "But how do you know this is all true?" I replied, "Well, we need to have some test for truth. What is your test for truth?" When he confessed he did not have one, I continued, "What about systematic consistency?" I explained that notion to him, and to my surprise that was enough—he did not even ask me to show him that Christianity was systematically consistent! All he needed was just to hear a test for truth that could be applied to Christianity. With tears in his eyes, he then prayed with me to receive Christ.

At the same time, however, this view reminds us that unbelief is at root a spiritual, not an intellectual, problem. Sometimes an unbeliever will throw up an intellectual smoke screen so that he can avoid personal, existential involvement with the gospel. In such a case, further argumentation may be futile and counterproductive, and we need to be sensitive to moments when apologetics is and is not appropriate. If we sense the unbeliever's arguments and questions are not sincere, we may do better to simply break off the discussion and ask him, "If I answered that objection, would you then really be ready to become a Christian?" Tell him lovingly and forthrightly that you think he's throwing up an intellectual smoke screen to keep from confronting the real issue: his sin before God. Apologetics is thus most appropriate and effective when the unbeliever is spiritually open and sincerely seeking to know the truth.

That leads to a final point. Many times a person will say, "That argument wasn't effective because the unbeliever I shared it with was not convinced." Here we have to be very careful. In the first place, don't expect an unbeliever to just roll over and play dead the minute he hears your apologetic argument. Of course, he's going to disagree! Think of what's at stake for him! You need to be prepared to listen carefully to his objections and

## Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

questions, to engage him in dialogue, and to continue the conversation as long as is profitable. Effectiveness in using apologetics in evangelism requires study, practice, and revision in light of experience, not just pat answers. Second, remember that being “convincing” is person-relative. Some people will simply refuse to be convinced. Hence, an argument cannot be said to be ineffective because some people remain unconvinced by it. When one reflects on the fact that “the gate is small, and the way is narrow that leads to life, and few are those who find it” (Matt 7: 14), it should not surprise us if most people find our apologetic unconvincing. But that does not mean that our apologetic is ineffective; it may only mean that many people are close-minded. Of course, if *nobody* finds our arguments convincing, then they can be said to be ineffective, even if they are cogent.

What we need to develop is an apologetic that is both cogent and persuasive to as many people as possible. But we must not be discouraged and think our apologetic is ineffective if many or even most people find our arguments unconvincing. Success in witnessing is simply communicating Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit and leaving the results to God. Similarly, effectiveness in apologetics is presenting cogent and persuasive arguments for the Gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit, and leaving the results to God.<sup>29</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> Craig, W.L. (1994). *Reasonable faith: Christian truth and apologetics* (Rev. ed., pp. 17–50). Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books.