Lion and Lamb Apologetics

A Short History of Apologetics

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The history of the defence of Christian faith is coterminous with the history of Christianity itself.[1] This is the case because Christianity, unlike religions of the East, such as Buddhism and Hinduism, is non-syncretic: Christianity asserts that religious truth can ultimately be found only in Jesus Christ and Christian revelation (John 14:6, Acts 4:12). From this it follows that religious claims contradicting Christian faith cannot be true and must be opposed, and negative criticisms of the truth of the Christian position must be answered.

Covenant theology bifurcates the history of salvation, treating it in terms of Old Testament or Covenant, and New Testament. Dispensationalists prefer to divide salvation history into numerous epochs, often seven in number. We shall try to satisfy both! The major divide in the history of apologetics occurs at the time of the 18th-century so-called "Enlightenment," when secular thinkers such as Thomas Paine endeavoured to replace the "Book of Scripture" with the "Book of Nature"; subsequently, apologetics followed a very different path from that of the preceding centuries. Prior to that massive ideological divide, Christianity had occupied stage centre in Western intellectual history; afterwards, it found itself relegated to the wings.

But the expanse of apologetic history from biblical times to the 21st century can also be discussed in terms of seven epochs or styles of defence, and we shall briefly comment on each of them in turn: (1) Apologetics in the Bible itself; (2) Patristic defence of the faith; (3) Medieval apologetics; (4) Renaissance and Reformation; (5) Apologetics at the zenith of the "classical Christian era"; (6) Response to the Enlightenment in the 18th and 19th centuries; (7) Apologetics today. In our final section, we shall have opportunity to reflect on the weaknesses of the apologetic situation in today's church.

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[1] Readers interested in the history of apologetics may wish to consult: Bernard Ramm, *Varieties of Christian Apologetics* (rev. ed.; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1961 [evangelical]; Joseph H. Crehan, "Apologetics," *A Catholic Dictionary of Theology*, vol. 1 (London: Thomas Nelson, 1962); Avery Dulles, *A History of Apologetics* (New York: Corpus; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971) [Roman Catholic bias—as with Crehan]; L. Russ Bush (ed.), *Classical Readings in Christian Apologetics A.D. 100–1800* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1983) [evangelical]; William Edgar and K. Scott Oliphint (eds.), *Christian Apologetics Past and Present: A Primary Source Reader* (2 vols.; Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009–2010) [presuppositionist bias]. It should be noted that these works treat inadequately, or not at all, the 21st century scene.

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Apologetics in the Bible

Charles Finney was supposed to have downgraded apologetic argument by remarking: "Defend the Bible? How would you defend a lion? Let it out of its cage and it'll defend itself!" But, in point of fact, the Bible, unlike the Qur'an and the "holy books" of other religions, does not expect its readers to accept its revelational character simply because the text claims to be true. In the Old Testament, Elijah competes with the false prophets of Baal, and the superior miraculous demonstration by the power of the God of Israel wins the day (1 Kings 18). In the Gospels, Jesus makes the truth of his entire ministry depend on a single sign—that of his resurrection from the dead (Matthew 12:39–40). In the Epistles, not only is Christ's physical resurrection asserted, but the Apostle is concerned as well to provide a list of eyewitnesses to the risen Christ (1 Cor. 15:4–8).

The biblical apologetic focuses in four areas, and these are subsequently employed throughout Christian history: *miracle, fulfilled prophecy, natural revelation,* and *personal experience* (what the philosophers term "subjective immediacy"). Three caveats: (1) natural revelation (proofs of God from nature), though present in the Bible (e.g., Ps. 19:1), is the least emphasised apologetic; (2) personal experience never "floats free": the subjective is always grounded in one or more of the objective areas of proof—generally miracle and prophecy; (3) occasionally, a "double-barreled" argument is made through *miracle* being the object of *prophecy,* as in the case of the Virgin Birth of our Lord (Isa. 7:14; Mt. 1; Lk. 1–2).

Since the biblical plan of salvation centres on God's revealing himself in real history, through prophets, priests, and finally by the incarnation of his eternal Son, Jesus Christ, the biblical apologetic is essentially one of asserting and demonstrating the *factual* nature of the events recounted. The Apostle is willing to make the entire truth of the faith turn on the reality of Jesus' resurrection (1 Cor. 15:17–20). The case for biblical truth, then, connects with the nature of Christianity as "historical religion": it is in principle falsifiable—and, in this case, verifiable—thereby removing Christianity from the analytical philosophers' category of a meaningless metaphysical claim and placing it in the realm of the empirical and the synthetic, along with historical events in general.

Patristic Apologetics

The church fathers closest to the New Testament understandably followed its apologetic lead: prophecy and miracle were their preferred arguments. The earliest of them (Irenaeus, for example) favoured the prophecies of the Old Testament fulfilled in Christ, since in his time the gospel was being proclaimed and defended "to the Jew first." Moreover, the Gnostic heretics employed pseudo-miracles (sherbet in Eucharistic wine!),

but had no fulfilled prophecies to support their views. As Christian evangelism reached a predominately Gentile audience, miracle evidence came to the fore. Eusebius of Caesarea, in his *Ecclesiastical History*, employs a testimonial argument in support of Christ's miraculous resurrection from the dead, sarcastically asking whether it would be reasonable to suppose that the Apostles, had they known that Jesus did not rise from the dead, would have lost all they had and ultimately been martyred whilst maintaining that he *had* in fact conquered death. Tertullian's oft-quoted phrase, "*Credo quia absurdum*," rather than being an invitation to irrationality, expressed the belief that the Christian gospel was almost too good to be true—as the children in C. S. Lewis' Narnian chronicles would later discover.

The bridge between the Patristic and medieval worlds was Augustine of Hippo. He was converted from neo-Platonism to Christianity and offered an apologetic of a Platonic nature to the intellectuals of his time, convinced as they were that Plato was the summation of classical philosophy. For Plato, one must rationally (and for neo-Platonists, rationally *and* spiritually) rise from the world of phenomena to the world of ideas/ideals—of which the highest expression is the Good, the True, and the Beautiful. Augustine identified that realm with the God of the Bible. He also, in his *Confessions*, made a compelling argument from personal experience: "Thou hast made us for thyself, O God, and our hearts are restless until they rest in thee." In the 20th century, Edward John Carnell would expand on this in his axiological apologetic, *A Philosophy of the Christian Religion*.

Medieval Defense of the Faith

Theodore Abu Qurra, an Eastern theologian (9th century) set forth an apologetic parable demonstrating comprehension of the apologetic task well in advance of his time; it raises the critical question as to how one can test multiple revelation claims (in his case, Islam vs. Christianity). For Abu Qurra, one asks each religion what it says of God, what it says of sin, and what sort of remedy it offers for the human condition—thereby demonstrating the superiority of Christianity.[2]

Although a primitive form of the ontological argument for God's existence can be found in St. Augustine, St. Anselm of Canterbury provided its classic formulation in the 11th century. The argument purports to prove God's existence from the concept of God itself: God is "that than which no greater can be conceived"; he must therefore have all properties; and since *existence* is a property, God exists! The argument rests on the idealistic assumption that ideas have reality untouched by the phenomenal world (so rational idealists have been somewhat comfortable with it), but the overwhelming fallacy

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[2] See Montgomery, *Faith Founded on Fact* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1978), pp. 119–21.

in the argument is simply that "existence" is not a property alongside other properties; *existence* is the name we give to something that in fact *has* properties. To determine whether a something (God?) exists, we need to investigate the empirical evidences of its/his reality. Thus the far better Christian argument is that "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself" (2 Cor. 5:19). This critique having been offered, it is worth noting that neo-Orthodox theologian Karl Barth (*Anselm: Fides Quaerens Intellectum*) was quite wrong that Anselm was not trying to do apologetics but was simply preaching to the converted.[3]

The most influential medieval apologist of western Christendom was its most influential theologian: Thomas Aquinas. Though probably having never met a pagan, he wrote his *Summa contra gentiles* ("Summation against the pagans"). By his time—the 13th century—Aristotle had replaced Plato as the most favoured classical philosopher, so Aquinas developed his apologetic along Aristotelian lines. He took over Aristotle's traditional proofs for God's existence, and argued that they can establish a foundation of Reason upon which Faith can operate. This stress on the Aristotelian proofs would have a tremendous influence on all subsequent Christian apologetics.

Contemporaneous with Aquinas was Ramon Lull (or Lullius), a Catalonian who is considered to be the first European missionary to the Muslims. Lull was a philosopher, but not a scholastic in the Aristotelian tradition. He developed an original "method" for the conversion of the infidel through the combining of theological and philosophical concepts and the illustrative use of rotating, interlocking disks. He now figures in the prehistory of the modern computer.[4] Lull also practiced literary apologetics by way of his apologetic novel, *Blanquerna.*

Renaissance and Reformation

By the time of the Italian Renaissance (15th–16th centuries), the world was opening up to exploration and Plato had returned to philosophical prominence. Thus the apologists of that era directed their efforts to adventurous thinkers committed to a Platonic view of the world. Thomas More, in his *Utopia,* well illustrates this. The Utopians pray each night that "if there is a better and truer faith, may God bring it to us." More's explorers reach Utopia and present the Christian religion as that better faith. The Utopians, in seeking the Good, the True, and the Beautiful, accept the God of Christian revelation.

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[3] Cf. Montgomery, *Where Is History Going?* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1969), pp. 109–110.

[4] See Montgomery, "Computer Origins and the Defence of the Faith," 56/3 *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* (September, 2004), 189–203.

The Protestant Reformers were not concerned with apologetics as such; they had more than enough to do cleaning up the theology of the medieval church. But their work had much indirect value for apologetics. Thus, Luther's insistence on *sola Scriptura* and thoroughgoing christocentricity were healthy counteractives to medieval Aristotelian/Thomistic emphases.[5] And when the Roman Catholic opponents of the Reformation argued that the Bible is an obscure book, requiring the Roman Church to interpret it, Protestants such as Andreas Althamer produced books defending the clarity ("perspicuity") and non-contradictory nature of the teachings of Holy Scripture. Such writings are the forerunners of modern treatises that deal with and refute claims to alleged errors and contradictions in the Bible.

17th-Century Apologetics

This was the last century of "old Western man"—the last century when Christian thought dominated the intellectual landscape of the West. It was the era of "system"—Protestant systematic theology, the musical summation of the Western musical tradition in the labours of Lutheran J. S. Bach, the literary summation in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, the architectural summation in Wren's magnificent churches constructed after London's Great Fire of 1666.

As for apologetics, Hugo Grotius, the father of international law, published in 1622 his *De Veritate religionis Christianae* ("On the truth of the Christian Religion"). This seminal work was widely translated and in print until the 19th century. It sets forth a modern, historical apologetic for the soundness of Jesus' claims in the New Testament.

Even more famous and influential was the apologetic work of Blaise Pascal, a Roman Catholic but a follower of the Port Royal, Jansenist movement, which was regarded by its conservative Catholic enemies as tantamount to Protestantism—owing to its great appreciation for St. Augustine and central stress on salvation by grace through faith. Pascal's posthumously collected *Pensées* ("Thoughts") offer a powerful apologetic for the truth of biblical revelation and the saving work of Christ. His "wager" (even if Christianity were false, in accepting it you would be better off, for you would obtain the best ethic and the best human example—Jesus) was not intended as the totality of his apologetic (as his philosophical critics generally maintain, in order to make it appear silly), but only as a device for getting the unbeliever's attention. Having been struck by the force of the wager, the unbeliever would then have powerful reason to examine the

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[5] In an otherwise very useful handbook, Boa and Bowman's classification of Luther as an apologetic "fideist"—and the placing of him in the same bed with Kierkegaard, Karl Barth, and Donald Bloesch— would be ludicrous if it were not so factually wide of the mark: Kenneth D. Boa and Robert M. Bowman, Jr., *Faith Has Its Reasons* (2d ed.; Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2005).

full gamut of evidence for the faith and thereby come to see that the probabilities are overwhelmingly in favour of Christian commitment.[6]

The Great Divide and Its Apologetic Aftermath

The 18th century was characterised politically by the French and American Revolutions and ideologically by Deism: the belief that one could and should dispense with the "revealed" religion of historic Christianity, contaminated by superstition (blood sacrifice, miracles, etc.) and substitute a "religion of Nature," focusing on a God of immutable natural law and morality.[7] "Enlightenment" philosophers included Immanuel Kant, who claimed that the traditional proofs of God's existence were inadequate and that only an absolute ethic could be established (the "categorical imperative"); Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, who dug his "Ditch" between absolute, philosophical truth on the one hand, and what he considered the inadequacies of history (including biblical history), on the other; and David Hume, who claimed that, owing to "uniform experience," miracles could always be rejected out of hand, since it would always be more miraculous if the witness were telling the truth than that the miracle actually happened.

These attacks were devastating and historic Christianity lost much intellectual ground as a result of them. The identification of the churches with the privileges of monarchy and the Old Régime only made matters worse. But apologists for the faith heroically entered the fray.

In the 18th century itself, William Paley (*Natural Theology; Evidences*) argued for the soundness of the biblical witness—both as to God's hand in nature and as to the soundness of the New Testament portrait of Jesus[8]; and Thomas Sherlock pointed out, in his legally-orientated work, *The Tryal of the Witnesses of the Resurrection of Jesus*, that people of the 1st century were as capable as those of his own "enlightened" time to distinguish between a dead body and a live one—and that the case for Jesus' resurrection could not therefore be dismissed philosophically.[9]

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[6] Boa and Bowman also incorrectly classify Pascal as a "fideist"! For a proper understanding of Pascal, see the writings of Emile Cailliet; also, Montgomery, "Computer Origins …" (*loc. cit.*).

[7] Cf. Montgomery, *The Shaping of America* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1976).

[8] Paley's continuing relevance is evidenced by the fact that atheist Richard Dawkins makes him his foil in arguing for biological evolutionism (*The Blind Watchmaker*). Paley, incidentally, was a barrister and wrote as a lawyer with Christ as his client; he was roundly (and unfairly) criticised for doing apologetics "in the spirit of the advocate rather than of the judge" by the great classicist Benjamin Jowett: *The Interpretation of Scripture and Other Essays* (London: George Routledge and Sons, n.d.), p. 129.

[9] Sherlock's *Tryal* is photolithographically reprinted in Montgomery (ed.), *Jurisprudence: A Book of Readings* (rev. ed.; Strasbourg, France: International Scholarly Publishers, 1980); available from www.ciltpp.com.

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The most famous defence of faith in the 18th century was Bishop Butler's *Analogy of Religion,* which attempted to convince the Deist using his own reasoning: the Scriptural teaching, said Butler, was directly *analogous* to the work of God in nature—and since the Deist accepted the latter, he had no ground for rejecting the former. Examples: nature displays seeds falling into the ground and dying, followed by life again every spring, and Scripture presents the crucifixion followed by the resurrection; human society survives only because each person acts for others by doing work the other cannot do, and Scripture makes divine substitution the key to salvation.

The 19th century dealt a further, perhaps even more crushing, blow to the faith. With the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species* in 1859, even the Deist's God of Nature could be discarded: natural selection could allegedly account for all development of flora and fauna. Defenders of the faith offered two very different apologetic approaches to this incipient atheism that culminated, at the end of century, in Nietzsche's famous declaration that "God is dead."

The great Roman Catholic (former Anglican) apologist John Henry Newman doggedly fought the revelational battle on epistemological and historical grounds (*Essays on Miracles; Grammar of Assent*): he refined the notion of historical probability with his concept of the *illative sense*: when "congeries" (concatenations) of facts inexorably point to the same conclusion—as in the testimonies to the resurrection of Christ—they raise the level of the argument to a practical certainty and cannot rationally be dismissed.

Lay philosopher and theologian Søren Kierkegaard, the father of existentialism, took an inner route: for him, "truth is subjectivity." As finite creatures, we cannot, à la Hegel and German idealistic philosophy, discover the "essence" of things; we can only experience our own "existence"—which, owing to the fall, is *Angst* and estrangement without Christ. But his successor existentialists in the 20th century (Heidegger, Sartre), left with only their own subjectivity, did not find Christ, but a valueless, atheistic world, both microcosmically and macrocosmically. By discounting the value of probability and historical reasoning to vindicate Christian revelation, Kierkegaard ended up substituting an unstable, subjective experientialism for the objectivist *hubris* of the unbelieving philosophers he opposed. Modern evangelicalism has frequently made the same mistake.

Apologetics Today

In the early decades of the 20th century, what appeared to be a powerful case against all metaphysical and religious thinking appeared on the scene. This stemmed from Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* and from the so-called Vienna Circle of analytical philosophers and logical positivists. They argued that truth claims, including metaphysical and religious views, were meaningless unless they could be verified. Many

theologians and most metaphysicians tried to counter this position by discounting the need for verification (a Pyrrhic victory if there ever was one!). In point of fact, as this essayist has maintained in his major work (*Tractatus Logico-Theologicus*[10]), whereas secular metaphysical systems and virtually all non-Christian religions do in fact entirely lack testability, Christian faith alone offers the solid, empirical, historical evidence of its truth by way of the case for Jesus Christ.

The 20th century and the onset of the 21st have been marked by a number of influential Christian apologists and by several apologetic schools of thought. Needless to say, the liberal churches did not carry on apologetic activity, since inherent to theological liberalism has always been an accommodating of the faith to secular ideology rather than a defending of it over against secularism (cf. liberal theologian Willard L. Sperry's *"Yes, But"—The Bankruptcy of Apologetics*). The Scopes evolution trial drove many American evangelicals into a radical separation from mainline intellectual life and therefore from apologetic activity: the only choice they saw was to pluck "brands from the burning" through revival campaigns and personal testimony. But even the twelve popular, paperbound volumes that introduced the term "fundamentalist" into the language (*The Fundamentals,* 1910) contained fine apologetic defences of historic Christianity by such notables as James Orr and B. B. Warfield.

Warfield, as a Princeton Theological Seminary professor, commanded great respect. His defence of scriptural inerrancy (*The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*) had immense impact, especially in Reformed theological circles. Later, this would be blunted by the Westminster Theological Seminary theologian Cornelius Van Til, who criticised Warfield's evidential argumentation as not being sufficiently Calvinistic—since it did not insist on starting from the presupposition of the truth of the faith and God's sovereignty, above and beyond evidential considerations.

In the 1940's, Moody Bible Institute instructor and Bible commentator Wilbur M. Smith wrote his book, *Therefore Stand: A Plea for a Vigorous Apologetic*. Essentially a work of historical apologetics, this book had wide influence: its author could be trusted as not being a closet intellectual or one critical of the evangelical lifestyle. *Therefore Stand* remains a classic, demonstrating on every page the wide learning of the preeminent theological bibliographer of 20th century evangelicalism.

Smith would later accept a chair at the newly founded Fuller Theological Seminary. There (before Fuller gave up its inerrancy position) apologist Edward John Carnell produced exceedingly important works: *An Introduction to Christian Apologetics* and *A Philosophy of*

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[10] Montgomery, *Tractatus Logico-Theologicus* (4th ed.; Bonn, Germany: Verlag fuer Kultur und Wissenschaft, 2009), *passim*. Available from www.ciltpp.com.

the Christian Religion. The *Introduction* endeavours, without success, to combine a Van Tilian presuppositionalism with E. S. Brightman's truth test of "systematic consistency" (a true assertion must be logically consistent and must also fit the facts of the external world)—but the second part of the book contains masterful responses to a host of common objections to biblical religion: the problem of evil, evolutionary theory, anti-miraculous views, etc.

The mid–20th century was also marked by the writings of the most influential of all English-language apologists of the time: C. S. Lewis. To apply the terminology of William James, Lewis successfully practised both "toughminded" and "tenderminded" apologetics. His broadcast talks (later combined under the title *Mere Christianity*) brought many to the faith in England: my Cornell professor, the late literary critic David Daiches, remarked that more had been converted through Lewis than in the British revival campaigns of Billy Graham! *Miracles* dealt with Hume's attempt to short-circuit historical investigation through philosophical speculation[11]; *The Problem of Pain* was a superb popular justification of the God of the Bible against the standard argument that an all-powerful and loving God could not exist in the face of the evils of the world. On the tenderminded front, Lewis' science-fiction trilogy (*Out of the Silent Planet, Perelandra, That Hideous Strength*) and his Narnian chronicles brought many who were indifferent to traditional apologetics to see the truth of the faith on the level of "deep myth."[12]

A number of "schools" of apologetics came into existence in the latter years of the 20th century and continue to influence the intellectual climate. We have mentioned above the *presuppositionalist* approach. Its major representatives have been philosopher Gordon Clark and theologian Cornelius Van Til; its epicentre is the Westminster Theological Seminary (Philadelphia) and its advocates include John Frame and the late Greg Bahnsen. Though there are important differences among these thinkers, they are all convinced that, owing to the fall of man, facts cannot be used to convince unbelievers of Christian truth; as Van Til put it: "All is yellow to the jaundiced eye." Generally (but not in every case) this presuppositionalism is combined with an ultra-Calvinist understanding of predestination.

Philosopher Alvin Plantinga's "Reformed epistemology" can be regarded as a variant of the presuppositionalist position. For Plantinga, historical argumentation is necessarily inadequate and no demonstration that Christianity is true will succeed with the unbeliever: the apologetic task cannot go beyond showing that Christian theism is a

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[11] Cf. more recent—and systematic—decimations of Hume: philosopher (and non-Christian) John Earman, *Hume's Abject Failure: The Argument Against Miracles* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); and David Johnson, *Hume, Holism and Miracles* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999).

[12] Cf. Montgomery (ed.), *Myth, Allegory and Gospel* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1974).

legitimate option, plausible and "warranted"—unable to be discounted epistemologically. This position has been severely critiqued for its weakness by non-presuppositionalists[13]—and by presuppositionalists of the stricter variety as well.[14] But Plantinga's *God and Other Minds* is one of the best treatments of the problem of evil, and, almost single-handedly, he has been responsible for making Christian thinking respectable in secular philosophical circles in America.[15]

Over against presuppositionalism are the *evidentialists* and the self-styled *classical apologists*. Evidentialists hold that the fall, though certainly keeping sinful man from re-entering Eden by human effort or will, did not destroy his capacity to distinguish fact from non-fact, even in the religious realm (when God calls to Adam in the garden after he has eaten the forbidden fruit, Adam can still recognise God's voice). The apologetic task consists, then, of marshalling the full panoply of factual evidence to show that Christianity is true and its rivals false. Among prominent evidentialists are the author of this article; Gary Habermas; and the many advocates of the "Intelligent Design" movement (the most important being William Dembski).

"Classical" apologists, such as Norman Geisler, R. C. Sproul, and William Lane Craig, insist that, prior to making a factual, historical case for Jesus Christ, one must establish God's existence—generally using the classical, Aristotelian proofs, or sophisticated variants on those proofs (such as Craig's favourite, the medieval, Arabic *kalam* cosmological argument). Evidentialists almost invariably take the christocentric route, focusing their apologetic on the case for Jesus Christ and especially his resurrection—and approaching issues of God's existence by way of the incarnate Christ (Jesus to Philip: "he who has seen me has seen the Father"—John 14:8–9).

As Edward John Carnell once remarked, "There are as many apologetics as there are facts in the world." One should therefore expect specialised apologetic approaches in particular factual areas. Intelligent Design is such an approach—focusing on scientific fact. Other examples include *literary apologetics,* as exemplified by G. K. Chesterton, the Inklings (C. S. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien, Charles Williams), and contemporary literary scholars such as Gene Edward Veith[16]; and *juridical* (or *legal*) *apologetics,* where the

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[13] E.g., Jason Colwell, "The Historical Argument for the Christian Faith: A Response to Alvin Plantinga," 53/3 *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* (2003), 147–61.

[14] E.g., K. Scott Oliphint, "Plantinga on Warrant," 57/2 *Westminster Theological Journal* (1995), 415–35, and "Epistemology and Christian Belief," 63/1 *Westminster Theological Journal* (2001), 151–82.

[15] In England, respect for the philosophical defence of Christian faith has not needed rehabilitation; see, for example, the valuable apologetic work of Richard Swinburne.

[16] See Montgomery, "Neglected Apologetic Styles: The Juridical and the Literary," *Evangelical Apologetics,* ed. Michael Bauman, David Hall, and Robert Newman (Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, 1996), pp. 119–133.

sophisticated evidential techniques of the law are applied to the collection and interpretation of evidence in behalf of the faith. Historical representatives of legal apologetics would certainly include Thomas Sherlock (*The Tryal of the Witnesses of the Resurrection of Jesus*) and Simon Greenleaf (*The Testimony of the Evangelists*[17]); contemporary work in the field has been carried out by the author of this article, and by others such as Craig Parton and Ross Clifford. A recent survey of the area is William P. Broughton's *The Historical Development of Legal Apologetics, with an Emphasis on the Resurrection*.[18]

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And there are what might be termed non-apologetic apologists, such as Regent College's John G. Stackhouse (*Humble Apologetics: Defending the Faith Today*). Stackhouse is highly critical of the kind of decisiveness represented by the title of Josh McDowell's influential book of popular apologetics, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, as well as aggressive attempts to defend the faith through public debates with unbelievers (he particularly dislikes the approach of William Lane Craig). Stackhouse seems to favour a postmodernist style of non-confrontation: the building of relationships with unbelievers rather than argumentation.[19]

How effective is the contemporary Christian apologetic? In spite of fine examples, there is much room for improvement. Here are three serious difficulties, as the present essayist sees them:

A continuing, virtually endemic disinterest on the part of many evangelical denominations, pastors, and laymen for the kind of rigorous academic study apologetics demands—and a corresponding preference for non-intellectual, subjective religiosity ("the devotional life"), group activities within the church ("fellowship"), and church-growth activism ("megachurchism"). This may appear on the surface as spirituality, but it is just the opposite—since it leaves the seeking unbeliever without an adequate witness.

The self-defeating nature of presuppositional and "humble" apologetic approaches. In the Apostolic witness of the New Testament (Paul on the Areopagus, for example), the Christian starts from a common ground with the unbeliever, moving him or her to the cross of Christ. One does not argue that the non-Christian's worldview is utterly inadequate and that only by starting from the Christian presupposition can any proper knowledge be arrived at. And the Apostles certainly did not fear confrontation or insist first on establishing personal "relationships" before the case for Christianity could be made. Our modern secular world is much like the pagan world

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[17] Reprinted in Montgomery, *The Law Above the Law* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1975).

[18] Xulon Press, 2009.

[19] For an interesting critique of this approach, by Canadian judge Dallas Miller, see 4/3 *Global Journal of Classical Theology*, October, 2004: http://phc.edu/gj_1_toc_v4n3.php

of the Apostles, and it would behove us to consider seriously their defence of the faith as the proper model for ours.

Overemphasis on issues of God's existence rather than on the case for incarnation. We have seen how, owing to Aquinas' baptism of the traditional Aristotelian proofs for God's existence, these proofs became central to Roman Catholic apologetics and to much of Protestant defences of the faith during and even after the 18th-century "Enlightenment." We are not questioning the underlying logic of these proofs, but we are questioning the emphasis placed upon them. Salvation does not depend on believing in God: Scripture tells us that "the devils also believe, and tremble" (James 2:19). Salvation requires coming to terms with Jesus Christ—as the only Saviour from sin, death, and the devil. Thus the Christian apologetic needs to be, root and branch, an apologetic for Jesus Christ—not a disguised exercise in the philosophy of religion.[20]

The history of apologetics is really a special case of the history of evangelism. And the more secular the modern world becomes, the more important it is. If we neglect to answer the legitimate intellectual concerns of the unbelievers of our time, we are admitting that we do not really care about their eternal destiny. Apologetics does not save; only Jesus Christ is able to do that. But apologetics can—and should—serve as a John the Baptist, making the paths straight, facilitating routes to the cross of Christ.[21]

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[20] Cf. Montgomery, "Apologetics for the Twenty-first Century," *Reasons for Faith,* ed. Norman L. Geisler and Chad V. Meister (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), pp. 41–52.

[21] Montgomery, J. W. (2012). "A Short History of Apologetics". In K. A. Sweis & C. V. Meister (Eds.), *Christian Apologetics: An Anthology of Primary Sources* (pp. 21–28). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.