

DEFENDING THE HOPE THAT IS IN US: APOLOGETICS FOR THE 21st CENTURY*

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I. Where We Are & Why This Is Important

Christian believers concerned with defending the Faith once delivered to the saints need to recognise the unique cultural situation in which we find ourselves at the turn of the new millennium. This uniqueness stems from a combination of factors, by no means limited to increased secularism and secular self-satisfaction. The major factors are: (1) An enlargement of what Canadian sociologist Marshall McLuhan termed “the Global Village”: the exponential increase in world communications, resulting in continual, unavoidable contact between believers and unbelievers. (2) Pluralism, to an extent unknown in past ages, even during the Hellenistic period; its consequence being a multiplying of sects, religious and philosophical viewpoints, and the interpenetration of worldviews (e.g., Eastern religions transmogrified into Western “New Age” orientations). (3) Increased sophistication on the part of religionists. Examples, among many, include Scientology’s use of legal intimidation to stifle criticism of the movement, paralleling the employment of legal teams by multinational

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corporations to protect their public image;¹ also, al-Qaeda's use of highly sophisticated computer technology to further their integrist and terrorist agendas.² (4) A growing realisation, stemming in large part from the events of 11 September 2001, that all religions are *not* in fact "saying the same thing"—in spite of what we were told by generations of liberal clergy and comparative religion teachers.

Why are these considerations so important? Recognition of the current situation is vital because *only by knowing it, will we direct our Apologetic to the real needs of the unbeliever*. The bedrock principle here is:

[1] Apologetics ≠ Dogmatics.

By this we mean that, whereas Dogmatics begins with God's special revelation of himself in Holy Scripture and expounds its content, Apologetics begins where the unbeliever is: "becoming all things to all people, that we might save some"—"a Jew to the Jew and a Greek to the Greeks."³ This does not mean, to be sure, that in Apologetics we alter the eternal message to fit the unbeliever's situation or needs. That message is the same, yesterday, today, and forever. Our methods of communicating the everlasting gospel will be developed, however,

¹ As an English barrister, I was consulted on the *Bonny Woods v. Church of Scientology* matter a few years ago. Woods and her husband were converted from Scientology to Evangelical Christianity and began a counter-cult ministry to assist others to leave Scientology. Thereupon they were sued for defamation by the Church of Scientology. With its vast financial resources, the Church could easily have bankrupted the Woods, even though the latter were in the right legally. Our strategy was to apply to the Court for discovery of all the foundational records of the Church—on the ground that the only way to know if the Church had in fact been defamed was to find out what it really believed and practiced vis-à-vis its members and how it proselytised. As we expected, the Church dropped the action rather than revealing what it was up to.

² Cf. Reuel Marc Gerecht, "The Gospel According to Osama bin Laden," *Atlantic Monthly*, January 2002, pp. 46-48.

³ Classically, to be sure, Dogmatics and Apologetics were treated as two of the three branches of Systematic Theology (the third being Ethics). Today, in theological faculties, Apologetic instruction has virtually disappeared. At best, it sometimes appears in bastardised form in courses in Philosophy of Religion.

according to the personal, social, and cultural context—which never remains constant. If this fundamental distinction is not understood, *either* Dogmatics will be absorbed into Apologetics (to the loss of the gospel) *or* Apologetics will be swallowed up in Dogmatics (so that the defence of the gospel will make sense only to those who already believe it). The first of these errors is that of the religious liberal; the second is endemic among religious conservatives.⁴

II. Avoiding 20th Century Mistakes

We have just observed that there are mistakes characteristic of the two chief theological polar-opposites. Let us now observe a few of the other particularly unfortunate errors of doctrinaire religious liberals and conservatives—as background to a discussion of how to move forward on a much more solid apologetic basis.

The Conservatives. The “Bible Christian” often sees no distinction between preaching and revivalism, on the one hand, and evangelism and apologetics on the other. He or she will use tracts which do little more than quote Bible passages; one thinks of R. A. Torrey’s little booklet consisting of non-Christian questions, accompanied with Bible texts supplying the answers. The difficulty (should it not be obvious?) is that in the year 2002 one can hardly assume that the non-Christian is really a lapsed Christian who knows that the Bible is true

⁴ See my book, *Faith Founded on Fact* (available, together with most of my Apologetics writings, from the Canadian Institute for Law, Theology, and Public Policy, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada); website: www.lights.com/caninst/. Sadly, the great Calvinist dogmatician Cornelius Van Til believed that his great apologetic accomplishment, over against B. B. Warfield, was to make the God who reveals Himself in Scripture the starting-point for Apologetics as well as for Dogmatics. Warfield, however, knew what he was doing: an Apologetic which insists that the non-Christian start where the Christian starts is really no Apologetic at all. At best it is preaching; at worst it is simply counterproductive.

but has fallen into a life inconsistent with it. With a plethora of alternative “holy books” (Qur’an, Bhagavad-Gita, Book of Mormon, etc., etc.), we presume at our peril that the unbeliever will simply accept whatever we quote from the Bible. The very term “Revival”—used so frequently in evangelical circles as equivalent to “Evangelism”—shows how unrealistically we view the condition of the average non-Christian today. In point of fact, we must *demonstrate the revelational character of the Holy Scriptures*—over against competing claims to inscripturated truth. And our personal “holiness” is hardly a proof of biblical revelation—any more than our failings remove from its veracity. As Luther nicely put it: the entire gospel is *extra nos*.

Some learned conservatives make the deadly mistake of *confusing Apologetics with Philosophy*. How do they do this? They spend their energies discussing questions which have little or no bearing on the truth of the faith or relevant to the acceptance of it. Example: the relationship of Time to Creation: could God have logically functioned before the creation of temporality? (At a meeting of the Evangelical Philosophical Society in the U.S.A. a few years ago, I made myself unpopular by citing St Augustine, who, when confronted with the question, “What was God doing before He created the world?,” replied: “Preparing Hell for people who ask questions like that.”) We are thus brought to our next axiomatic truth:

[2] Apologetics ≠ Philosophy.

This is true not merely because, as apologist Edward John Carnell was wont to say, there are as many Apologetics as there are facts in the world—that is to say, Apologetics employs every true fact and every true discipline in its behalf: history, science, jurisprudence, literature, art. The particular reason why

Apologetics must not be reduced to Philosophy is that the abstract questions of traditional philosophy are either purely *formal*, dealing with issues of logic and not with issues of fact, or are so arcane that they do not touch the central elements of the gospel (acceptance of the death of our Lord for our sins and His resurrection for our justification). The gospel is a matter of *fact*, and its acceptance will necessarily depend on whether the documentary records of Jesus ministry are sound; whether the testimonies to His life and work are accurate; and whether one can accept His claims and His resurrection from the dead. Important philosophical issues do indeed bear on this case (issues such as the legitimacy of miracle evidence), but the case is, in the last analysis, a *factual* one. Metaphysical problems can be discussed from now until just after the Last Judgement and the crucial question of the facticity of the gospel still remain untouched. And it is the gospel's factual truth which constitutes, and has always constituted, the heart of the Christian proclamation and the heart of the Christian apologetic.

Related to the error just discussed is the conservative tendency to think that the best apologetic strategy consists of showing that Christian affirmations are indeed philosophically "meaningful," i.e., not irrational or technically nonsensical. One of the most influential and important Christian philosophers of our time has succeeded in showing, for example, that the existence of evil is not logically incompatible with the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient Deity. Fine! But logical possibility is hardly the same as *de facto* existence! There is nothing *logically* absurd in a claim that the Big Bang was the product of a Divine Burp, but that hardly means that such occurred.

There is no substitute for evidence in our defence of the faith. Life is bigger than logic; and, again and again, things apparently irrational have turned out to be true on the basis of the factual evidence in their behalf. Thus, the

physical characteristics of light (particulate and undulatory) are mutually inconsistent, since waves are not particles and particles are not waves. But the evidence is incontrovertible, and so the Photon. The parallel issue of the Trinity will be assisted only peripherally by philosophical discussions of the meaningfulness of the concept. Our apologetic thrust must be the historical evidence that Jesus, in rising from the dead, validated His claim to Deity, and thus His affirmations that He and the Father are One,⁵ that the Holy Spirit is “another” (Gk., *allos*, “of the same kind qualitatively”) as Himself,⁶ and that the church is to baptise in the name (*one* name) of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. If these facts are genuine, we have put paid to the question. We do not understand the mechanism—any more than we do in the case of the nature of light—but that does not alter the factual character of things in the least.

The Liberals. We have already noted that the religious liberal’s overwhelming tendency is that of accommodation to the secular climate, thus losing the message which he is endeavouring to communicate. Here is a sad example: In 1950, the Revd Leslie Badham published a solid volume of Christian Apologetics, titled, *Verdict on Jesus: A New Statement of Evidence*. Badham was a distinguished conservative churchman and a fine communicator. For some thirteen years he was Vicar of Windsor and Chaplain to Her Majesty the Queen (who has never been happy with broad-church liberalism). During his ministry he was equally at home in the pulpit and on the airwaves as a radio broadcaster. *Verdict on Jesus* was expanded in a second edition in 1971. After Badham’s death, his son, presently Dean of Theology in the University of Wales at Lampeter, took over the book. There followed third (1983) and fourth (1995) editions, the text of which remained substantially that of the original

⁵ John 14: 8-11.

⁶ John 14:16.

author. However, Badham's son supplied new introductions to these editions, purportedly to update the book. The point of the original volume was to argue for the de facto reliability of the biblical accounts of the life of Christ and the consequent veracity of His claims. Badham's son, however, having accepted the so-called "historical criticism" of the biblical narratives, supports John Hick's position in his work, *The Myth of God Incarnate*, that incarnation is but metaphorical in character. "Hence," the reader is told, "it is possible to make a total faith commitment to Jesus as God Incarnate while believing that the language is true in a metaphorical rather than an ontological sense."⁷ This, of course, not only constitutes heresy by the standards of the Ecumenical Creeds of the Universal Church, but also entirely evacuates of meaning his father's powerful original argument for Christian faith. As I have maintained elsewhere in my critique of Hick's position: once one accommodates to the poor scholarship of the higher criticism, the loss of fundamental Christian teaching is logically inevitable and an effective Apologetic rendered impossible.⁸

A second gross error of the religious liberal is to capitulate to Postmodern thinking in its the refusal to take seriously the objective character of external reality. It is the position of contemporary thinkers such as Jacques Derrida that to try to find a core of objective meaning in the world or in literary materials such as the Bible is a chimerical quest. There are necessarily as many valid interpretations as there are interpreters, we are told, and interpreters always approach objects of study from their own personal, cultural, and presuppositional viewpoints. Moreover, in the case of literary works, meanings

⁷ Paul Badham, Introduction to Leslie Badham, *Verdict on Jesus* (4th ed.; Wantage, U.K.: Ikon Productions, 1995), p. xv.

⁸ John Warwick Montgomery, "Why Has God Incarnate Suddenly Become Mythical?," in *Perspectives on Evangelical Theology*, ed. Kenneth S. Kantzer and Stanley N. Gundry (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1979), pp. 57-65.

are always multilayered and can never be fully understood by efforts to get at an author's original intention or purpose.⁹

Such a perspective is, of course, very hospitable to the religious liberal, who has never had a serious view of the unity of the Scriptures; has always regarded the Bible as a product of diverse human cultural experiences; and has had a powerful tendency to substitute for the doctrine that God created us in His image a humanistic theology of *our* creating God (and theology) in *our* image.

Religious liberals have never seemed to see the fundamental illogic in the view that reality outside of us—including biblical narrative—has no objective meaning, and that each person can never go beyond the limits of his or her own “personal story” in understanding the world, the Bible, or religious truth. In fact, this approach falls into an infinite regress of solipsism if carried to its logical conclusion.¹⁰ If the Bible (or anything else) has no objective meaning, neither do the writings and assertions of the Postmodernists! To communicate at all, we must assume that at least our own oral and written statements can be understood in the sense in which we have intended them. But if so, we can hardly claim that this is not the case for the communications of others—including those of our Lord, who said, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear,” and condemned those who perverted the clear word spoken by his Father through Moses and the prophets.¹¹ A sound Christian Apologetic requires a serious view of objective reality and of a Bible which does not speak with forked tongue.

⁹ See, *inter alia*, Stuart Sim (ed.), *The Icon Critical Dictionary of Postmodern Thought* (Cambridge, England: Icon Books, 1998)

¹⁰ Two excellent counteractives to such thinking are: Noretta Koertge (ed.), *A House Built on Sand: Exposing Postmodernist Myths About Science* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); and Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Leicester: Apollos/Inter-Varsity Press, 1998).

¹¹ Cf. Luke 16: 29-31.

Additionally, religious liberals—especially in England—readily succumb to a “Via Media” style of thinking. By this we mean the ability not to come down too hard on any side of any disputed question—for fear of offending someone, particularly the popular or lionised secularist. Here, again, the byword is accommodation: the utterly false assumption that Christianity can gain friends and converts by modifying its teachings to make them more palatable to the secular mindset.

Unhappily, this tendency is by no means limited to the religious liberal. In evangelical circles, especially in the United Kingdom and the European continent, it is becoming harder and harder to find those who will unqualifiedly affirm biblical *inerrancy*. “After all,” we are told, “the word isn’t mentioned in the Bible; and the gospel and Christian experience cannot be hurt by minor historical errors or contradictions in the Scriptures.” To which we reply: neither does the word “Trinity” appear in the Bible, but we dismiss it at our theological peril. And: if the biblical writers cannot accurately describe the Temple in Jerusalem, for example, what makes anyone think that they are correct when they talk about the Heavenly Jerusalem? One would think that the former would be far less demanding than the latter! Did not our Lord say, “If I have told you earthly things and you believe not, how shall you believe if I tell you of heavenly things?”¹²

We also have the sad, mediating concessions recently made by some evangelical thinkers to the so-called “Openness of God” theology, whereby, in the supposed interest of preserving human freedom, God’s omniscience is jettisoned. Certain charismatics, in particular, have thought that this provides a more human face for God and a more attractive Deity in the eyes of potential converts. Hardly! One ends up with a God who cannot promise anything on

which poor sinners can depend—since He, no less than His creatures, is limited to statistical prediction of the future. One of the greatest genuine apologetic appeals continues to be that which, according to the Venerable Bede, converted the Northumbrians in the 7th century: the argument that our life, like that of a sparrow flying briefly into a lighted hall and quickly disappearing again into darkness, is one of utter uncertainty and that “if this new teaching has brought any greater certainty, it seems fitting that it should be followed.”¹³

III. The Way Forward

To avoid the errors—both liberal and conservative—just delineated, what must we do? How can we achieve a vigorous, sound Apologetic for the 21st century? Consider five minimal requisites.

First, there must be *a vigorous attack on the utterly fallacious notion that one does not need Jesus Christ for a fulfilled life*. It has often been observed that those who cannot be convinced that they are sick will not go to a doctor. We need to employ the writings of the existentialists (Sartre—and especially Camus¹⁴) and of the depth psychologists and psychoanalysts to point out the misery of the human condition apart from a relationship with Christ. This should not be in the least difficult, since these thinkers have rung the changes on the meaninglessness of life and the void at the centre of the human

¹² John 3: 12.

¹³ Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, ii. 13. Cf. John Warwick Montgomery, *The Suicide of Christian Theology* (Newburgh, Indiana: Trinity Press, 1998), especially pp. 42-43. The great contemporary English Christian jurist Lord Hailsham of St Marylebone titled his second autobiography, *The Sparrow's Flight*; at his Memorial Service a poem of his composition was read at his request in which he referred to himself as just such a sparrow.

¹⁴ Though Camus is universally regarded as a secular existentialist, at the time he was killed in a car accident he was seriously considering Christian baptism from one of my students, then guest preacher at the American Church in Paris: see Howard Mumma, *Albert Camus and the Minister* (Brewster, Massachusetts: Paraclete Press, 2000).

heart. Carl Gustav Jung, to take one example, has analogised the human condition to that of the nursery character Humpty Dumpty: broken and unable to put himself back together again.¹⁵ And, what is even worse—as Jacques Lacan points out—“The analysand’s basic position is one of a refusal of knowledge, a will not to know (a *ne rien vouloir savoir*). The analysand wants to know nothing about his or her neurotic mechanisms, nothing about the why and wherefore of his or her symptoms. Lacan even goes so far as to classify ignorance as a passion greater than love or hate: a passion not to know.”¹⁶ “How,” the jocular question is put, “does a psychiatrist differ from a coal miner?” Answer: “The psychiatrist goes down farther, stays down longer, and comes up dirtier.” One of the very few positive results of the 11 September 2001 horror was that it drove many Americans back to church (at least for a time!). Why? Because they were reminded of the fragility of life, the inevitability of death, and their inability to control their own destinies. The 21st century apologist needs to drive these truths home, based upon universal human experience.

In the second place, the effective apologetist *must be willing to engage in an uncompromising, frontal attack on prevailing non-Christians worldviews*. Liberal accommodationism has to be rejected out of hand. Any gains from compromise are trivial when compared to the losses—losses in integrity and in the power of the gospel message.

How to attack secular viewpoints? Not on peripheral issues (their failure to live up to their own principles, for example), but *at the presuppositional heart of their beliefs*. The efficient way to destroy a condemned building is not to start on the roof, removing the tiles one by one; it is to blow up the foundations, after

¹⁵ Cf. John Warwick Montgomery, *Myth, Allegory and Gospel* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1974).

which the entire building will fall. Take the case of Marxism: its fundamental error is to assume that modifications in the means of production in society will produce “new men”—a proletariat—capable of creating a perfect, classless society.¹⁷ But, through human history, modifications of the environment external to man have *never* changed man’s selfish nature. The precise same fallacy lies at the heart of liberal western, utopian social planning. Tear down slums; replace them with clean, new buildings; put the same people into the new buildings—and the buildings soon become slums again. As Jesus summed it up (and human experience entirely confirms this): “That which comes out of the man, that defiles the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness. . . . All these evil things come from within, and defile the man.”¹⁸ Only a personal, living relationship with Jesus the Saviour can transform the heart: “If any man be in Christ he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.”¹⁹

Moreover, we must not be afraid to *attack the fallacious logic of non-Christian positions*. Even though, as pointed out earlier, the refutation of unsound viewpoints does not establish the truth of one’s own, it is vital to remove the false hopes which often keep non-Christians from even considering the case for Christianity. Take, as an obvious example, the Quranic picture of Jesus, contradicting the very essence of the New Testament description of Him as the unique Son of God, come to earth to die for the sins of the world. Since the New Testament testimony comes from eyewitnesses or close associates of

¹⁶ Bruce Fink, *A Clinical Introduction to Lacanian Psychoanalysis: Theory and Technique* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 7.

¹⁷ See John Warwick Montgomery, “The Marxist Approach to Human Rights: Analysis and Critique,” 3 *Simon Greenleaf Law Review* (1983-84), *passim*.

¹⁸ Mark 7: 20-23.

¹⁹ 2 Corinthians 5: 17.

eyewitnesses, whereas Mohammed's material appears on the scene six hundred years later, no-one with any historical sense would prefer the latter to the former.²⁰

Another classic piece of non-Christian illogic is the oft-heard argument that belief in a creator God solves nothing, since one is still left with the question, "Who created God?" However, since an infinite regress solves nothing, one must stop the reasoning process either with the universe or with a Creator of the universe; and since the universe is patently contingent (nothing in it can explain itself), it is far more sensible to appeal beyond it to non-contingent, absolute, creator God than to deify the universe by pretending—mythologically—that it really *isn't* contingent at all! Those who do the latter show that it is the unbeliever who is the myth-maker, not the theist—demonstrating, not so incidentally, that Freud had it exactly reversed when he asserted that believers in God mythologically create an illusion of divine existence. In point of fact, it is the theist who is the realist, and the atheist who creates the illusion that the world is self-sufficient, self-explanatory, and therefore absolute.²¹

In the third place, besides being willing and prepared to press home the hopelessness and illogic of non-Christian worldviews, the 21st century apologist *must offer positive, compelling evidence in support of the Christian claim*. Note carefully the Apostle's language: "Be ready always to give an answer [Gk., *apologia*] to every person who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you."²² Merely preaching the good news or announcing the hope is *never* enough! One must *always* give a *reason* for the hope. This can be stated axiomatically:

²⁰ See John Warwick Montgomery, "How Muslims Do Apologetics," 51 *Muslim World* (April and July 1961), reprinted in his *Faith Founded on Fact* (Nashville and New York: Thomas Nelson, 1978).

²¹ John Warwick Montgomery, *Christianity for the Toughminded* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1973), pp. 21-34.

²² 1 Peter 3:15.

[3] Apologetics ≠ Preaching.

What kind of positive evidence is to be presented? The focus must be a demonstration of the soundness of our Lord's claim to be "the Way, the Truth, and the Life," so that the seeker can appreciate why He declared that "no man comes to the Father but by Me." We are not in the business of persuading people to become deists, theists, or members of particular religious organisations. We are in the business of persuading people to accept Jesus as personal Saviour—as the only One who can "save them from their sins." To make this case, there is no way to avoid arguing for the soundness of the New Testament documents, the reliability of the testimony to Jesus contained therein, and the facticity of His resurrection from the dead as the final proof of His claims.²³

Such argumentation can benefit greatly from, for example, Theodor Zahn's great commentary on the Gospel of John, establishing the Apostolic authorship of the book; and Adolf Harnack's reasoning to support the dating of the Synoptic Gospels within the generation of Jesus's crucifixion (the Acts of the Apostles must have been written before A.D. 64-65, since it does not record the death of Paul, its central personage; Luke's Gospel, by the same author, had to have been written before Acts; and Luke employed Mark as one of his sources—driving the date of composition of Mark back even farther). In general, the pretensions and the subjective, bad scholarship of the form- and redaction-critics must be fought on every front. Higher criticism is the single most deadly foe

²³ See John Warwick Montgomery, *History, Law and Christianity* (Edmonton, Alberta: Canadian Institute for Law, Theology and Public Policy, 2002); *Where Is History Going? Essays in Support of the Historical Truth of the Christian Revelation* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1969). *Where Is History*

which the 21st century apologist must defeat.²⁴ To retreat into pietism or an Averroës-like doctrine of “two-fold truth” (“yes, the Gospels are historically unreliable, but no, our faith experience of Jesus remains firm”) is to destroy all the credibility of the Christian message and eliminate any meaningful Apologetic for its truth.

A fourth essential requisite for an effective contemporary Apologetic is the *willingness to address the most difficult issues troubling the unbeliever*. So often, Christians offer pat answers to minor difficulties (reconciliations of the king lists in the books of Kings and Chronicles; explanations for the apparent tension between “faith” in Paul and “good works” in James; etc.)—whilst ignoring or bypassing that which really keeps the non-Christian from becoming a Christian. We must be prepared to face such issues as the perceived irrationality and lack of justice in the world (the Holocaust; 11 September 2001). The unbeliever will balance these against our case for Jesus’ claims, and may think that the horrors entirely outweigh any argument for “God in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself.” Here we will need to break new ground. For example, we can point out that the critical consideration is not the number of horrific events in history weighed against the single event of Jesus Christ (a matter of quantity), but the *qualitative* issue of whether, even if only one instance of evil and irrationality existed in human history, would that be consistent with the existence of a loving God coming to earth to die for a fallen race? Since love entails freewill, and since the God of the Bible reveals Himself as perfectly good, irrationality and evil (on whatever scale) will be the creature’s fault, not the Creator’s; and God’s willingness to suffer undeservingly

Going? has been published in German under the title, *Weltgeschichte wohin?* (Stuttgart-Neuhausen: Haenssler Verlag, 1977).

for us should fill us with gratitude, rather than eliciting criticism of his morality. Such argumentation may not exhaust the question, but it at least does not sidestep the non-Christian's genuine concerns.

Finally, the 21st century Apologist needs to take Apologetics far more seriously. He needs to *incorporate Apologetics into every aspect of his or her ministry: every sermon, every class, every evangelistic activity*. We have woefully neglected our responsibility to train our young people in the solid case for Christianity, and then we wonder why they depart from the faith under the influence of secular university instruction. We give our parishioners and our missionaries no foundation in the defence of the faith, and then wonder why our evangelistic efforts show so little fruit in a world where people have long moved beyond accepting something just because someone else believes it.

In a word, we need to return to our biblical and theological foundations to find the place which Apologetics should have in Christian ministry. That place is absolutely clear. We are to do as the Apostle did: “While Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry. Therefore disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews, . . . in the market daily with them that met with him, . . . [and with] certain philosophers of the Epicureans and of the Stoics. . . .”²⁵ We are to become “all things to all people, that some might be saved, a Jew to the Jew and a Greek to the Greeks”—which necessarily entails giving reasons for the faith, since that is what so many of our contemporaries, Jews and Gentiles, require before they will commit themselves to a faith-position. We must not reduce the faith once delivered to the saints to a cultic matter of inner experience and personal

²⁴ The German works of Gerhard Maier are particularly to be commended in this regard; in English, see his *The End of the Historical-Critical Method*, trans. E. W. Leverenz and R. F. Norden (St. Louis, Missouri: Concordia, 1977).

²⁵ Acts 17: 16 ff.

testimony. There are enough irrational religions and sects in our 21st century world without giving the unbeliever the impression that Christianity is just another one of them.

And so, a final (and, this time, positive) axiom:

[4] APOLOGETICS = ALWAYS GIVING A *REASON* FOR THE HOPE.

APPENDIX: THE AXIOM SET

[1] Apologetics ≠ Dogmatics

[2] Apologetics ≠ Philosophy

[3] Apologetics ≠ Preaching

[4] APOLOGETICS = ALWAYS GIVING A *REASON* FOR THE HOPE