

## Apologetics

**“Come now, and let us reason together,’ says the LORD” (Isaiah 1:18).**

**“Always be prepared to . . . give the reason for the hope that you have” (1 Peter 3:15).**

Our nation has entered into a crisis, one that seems irreversible and that will bring terrible consequences. It’s a crisis of belief – or more precisely, it’s a willful refusal to believe in God. People in every institution and endeavor in America are now fulsomely, almost gleefully, expressing their unbelief in God. In the past, it would be fashionable among elites to express unbelief, if it was ever necessary to say anything. Intellectuals boasted of their unbelief, but that would be in their own circles among their own colleagues. Then, it became more overt. Open expressions of unbelief in classrooms, media, and elsewhere became more prevalent and acceptable in public. But now, it’s totally different. An aggressive secularism, one that’s being militantly enforced, is increasingly taking control of America. Except in the privacy of one’s home or church, to publicly express belief in God, or to be identified as a believer, is becoming the mark of a backward bigot. Christians are being increasingly stigmatized.

Even in Christian institutions, there evidently is pressure to modify one’s stance. This has resulted in teachers and leaders making compromising statements. At one very well-known Bible college, for example, instructors say:

*“We can’t be certain God exists, but we can say His existence is more likely than not.” And this, “The data points demonstrate a high probability that Jesus rose from the dead.”*

God doesn’t simply *probably* exist. There’s no excuse for skepticism like this in the Church. There’s no need to make cautious, wishy-washy statements such as these, as if secular intellectuals would be more favorable toward Christianity if Christians were simply less dogmatic about their beliefs. Those making statements like this are flaunting their supposed intellectual prowess in being able to analyze and decide for themselves the validity of Scripture’s teaching. It’s a sign of the times: when surrounded by threatening unbelief, those who claim to know God, compromise.

This is why now more than ever we need to be teaching apologetics in the churches. Apologetics employs reason and logic to show the truth of Scripture and the total absurdity of unbelief. Apologetics is the defense of Christian beliefs and doctrines, the defense of a biblical worldview and its values. It also exposes how opposition to Christianity is not only groundless but foolishness; it demonstrates using logic that unbelief is irrational. Let’s think about apologetics.

Apologetics doesn’t attempt, and shouldn’t be used, to try to argue anyone into the Kingdom. It’s not a tool for doing evangelism. That’s not its purpose. The noetic effects of the Fall guarantees it cannot happen. No unbeliever is rational and honest with reference to arguments for God’s existence. Jesus pointed out that even if someone came back from the dead, he wouldn’t be believed. The use and value of apologetics is to defend and confirm belief for those who are already in the Kingdom. Apologetics is immensely valuable to believers in demonstrating how all the alternatives to Christianity fail in one way or another. Apologetics is also highly useful in pre-evangelism by showing evidences for the truths of Scripture.

Francis Schaeffer was one of America’s greatest Christian philosophers. Schaeffer’s greatest contribution was to show that Christian faith is no leap in the dark, as almost every secular intellectual today supposes and as some Christians foolishly suppose as well. Faith is not believing in something that may or may not be true, but that we hope is true. Rather, it is based on the fact that God actually entered time and space; He acted in real human history and left evidence of it. So we can know, truly *know*, that, although He transcends the visible, physical world we inhabit, He exists and loves us, and all that’s in Scripture is true. The basis of God demanding loyalty from Israel was that He physically delivered them from Egypt. The Israelites actually walked thru the Red Sea on dry ground with a wall of water on their right and on their left. The Apostles were sent into the world to evangelize the nations, at great personal risk, on the basis of having actually seen a resurrected Jesus. The Israelites and the Apostles left written testimony for us of what they experienced. So our faith is grounded in reality – so-called “evidences.” Evidentialism is the approach to doing apologetics that points to the evidences that support the truthfulness and trustworthiness of Scripture.

God called upon knowable evidence to encourage belief in His Old Testament people (see, for example, Isaiah 41:22-29; 42:9; 44:7; and 45:21). Jesus and the Apostles practiced what we call evidentialism. In Lk.24:44, Jesus used fulfilled prophecy as evidence. In Acts 17, Paul referred to the O.T. Messianic prophecies to persuade his audience. I Cor. 15:5-8 is an evidentialist argument based on eyewitness accounts as well as fulfilled prophecy. John and Peter based the truths

of their written propositions on actual evidence (I Jn. 1:1-3 and II Pet. 1:16-18). The O.T. Messianic prophecies and the resurrection of Christ are the most compelling evidences available to the Church, although there are lots others.

The Enlightenment gave Western civilization the slogan, “Reason, not Revelation.” This was supposed to mean that enlightened, intelligent people would rely on reason, that is, drawing conclusions from what can be empirically known in the real world (or, what later would be Science) to determine truth, and not the Bible. It was humanistic and it was anti-theistic; it was the deliberate effort to replace Scripture with what would have to be nothing more than human speculation. The notion lives on today in the secular West. But that “reason versus revelation” dichotomy is phony.

Apologetics shows how reason can be deployed in the support of God’s revelation. For example, we all, everyday, accept as true things that cannot be empirically proved, and we likewise everyday accept as true – depending on the integrity of the one doing the revealing – that which comes to us by revelation. Refusing to believe in a transcendent God because His existence cannot be empirically proved is actually the height of irrationality. If the invisible, infinitely immense God cannot be experienced by us, physical beings, how can anyone logically say He doesn’t exist? It is, however, totally reasonable to expect that a transcendent God who loves us but who cannot be known by our senses would initiate a revealing of Himself to us, and that the most reasonable way to do it would be in the form of writing. It is reasonable to expect that a sovereign God who has given us free will (a measure of it, anyway) and who holds us accountable for how we exercise it would reveal Himself to us in a totally trustworthy and truthful way; justice requires this. Paul repeatedly (often successfully) used reason to evangelize both Jews and pagans (Acts 17, for example).

And the use of logic by those who do apologetics easily shows that all systems opposed to Christianity are irrational. Cornelius Van Til was a philosopher who recognized that we all use presuppositions in making any kind of conclusions, and that the presuppositions of Christianity were fully logical, whereas those of other systems of thought were absolutely not. Van Til’s thesis is that the presuppositions of biblical Christianity are fully able to counter unbelievers’ attempts to refute Christianity. His dialogues between “Mr. White” and “Mr. Black” are brilliant and loaded with insight. Anyone interested in apologetics should read those dialogues. Atheists will no longer publicly debate Christian apologists who employ Van Til’s method because they know they cannot win.

Van Til’s approach is today called presuppositionalism. But to do presuppositionalism requires the prior regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. So it cannot supplant the role of evidences in pre-evangelism, and it isn’t intended to do that. Presuppositionalism can’t be used for evangelism. We don’t do apologetics by assuming the truth of God’s existence and of Scripture. That’s a logical fallacy, trying to prove God’s existence by first presupposing His existence.

One more thing: Van Til was not opposed to the use of evidences. Unfortunately, presuppositionalists disdain evidentialists, and vice versa, reflecting the general absence of grace and brotherly love in the church today. Each camp tries to show how clever they are by highlighting the other’s logical weaknesses. But in reality they both contribute positively to the field of apologetics. Presuppositionalism versus evidentialism is not an either/or situation. These are just two different but complementary philosophical methods or approaches to doing apologetics.

The Bible college instructors (above) mentioned “probability.” Probability can be used or abused. Some intellectuals in the Church, trained as both theologians and philosophers, in an attempt to use reason to understand Scripture, have tried to calculate the probability that the resurrection of Christ occurred. It’s a foolish exercise, in my opinion, because they don’t know what numbers should be put into their equations. But based on the evidences, it’s totally irrational not to accept the resurrection as true, an event that occurred in real history, as William Lane Craig showed in his 2006 debate with Bart Ehrman. (The transcript is on the Internet.) It is possible to calculate probabilities for the fulfillment in history of the O.T. prophecies regarding cities, nations, and the coming Messiah. Doing that demonstrates the absolute truthfulness of Scripture and the sheer absurdity of unbelief. Sadly, “probably” can also be used as a hedge that allows for the uncertainty of an assertion, as in the quotes above.

Even if our entire nation goes berserk with animosity toward belief in God or toward Christianity, or toward *us*, we can know that we are on the side of truth. Reason is on our side. We need to be courageous and stand firm, regardless what is thrown at us, because all rational thought supports biblical theism. Any attempt to compromise our beliefs only winds up removing the rational basis of Christianity. So, no compromises! With love and humility, let us proclaim, publicly, what we know to be true truth. Because for truth to have value, it must be shared with others.