1. "Defending the Defense of the Faith"

Dr. John Warwick Montgomery, "Sensible Christianity" [an audio series]
Outline by Mary Kay Connolly (I.S.O.T., Spring 1991); ed. Jim Coffee (Concordia U. Irvine, Spring 1994); ed. Jennn Herzberg (Concordia U. Irvine, 2001)

I. **The Need for Apologetics Today**
   A. Three words which characterize our contemporary situation: "secular," "global" and "pluralistic"
      1. "Global"
         a. We now live in McLuhan's "global village."
         b. People are "bumping up against each other" more today than they ever have.
         c. Hence, a wide diversity of viewpoints, of opinions is inevitable, unavoidable.
      2. "Pluralistic"
         a. People are not only bumping up against one another [but also] but
         b. are a wide variety of beliefs; is no longer a "homogenous situation"
      3. "Secular"
         a. is *the* most characteristic word describing our society
         b. Classical Christian values no longer dominant in our culture
   B. C. S. Lewis spoke of a "Great Divide" in Western history.
      1. Lewis placed this "Great Divide" in the 19th century (French Revolution as the dividing point)
         a. *Prior* to the "Great Divide," Western people "thought Christian;" thought in Biblical & Christian categories and used Christian terminology; *after* the "Great Divide," they did not.
         b. Even atheist Thomas Hobbes, arguing his atheism in *The Leviathan,* used almost exclusively Christian terminology!
            i. (had he not, his writings would not have been understood by his readers!)
            ii. 17th century political theory reads like the King James Bible!
         c. Today, situation is the reverse.
            i. Only secular terminology is understandable to the average reader, [and]
            ii. Christian now has to express his faith to the non-Christian by using secular terminology.

II. **Three Centuries of Modern Secularism**
   A. Logical progression:
      18th century: *Bible* died→ 19th century: *God* died→ 20th century: *Man* died.
   B. 18th century: Confidence in the Bible died
      1. beginnings of modern secularism
      2. "Deism": the attempt to hang on to Christian ethics & morality after "throwing away" the Bible
         a. "Book of Nature" replaced Book of Scripture

- b. ‣ example: the Jefferson Bible:
    - i. ‣ All miracles were (literally!) cut out; Jefferson retained *only* the moral teachings.
- c. ‣ Thomas Paine's *The Age of Reason*
    - i. ‣ All we really need for revelation is the natural world (the "book of nature"); we do *not* need the "Book of Scripture."
- C. ‣ 19th century: Confidence in God died
    1. ‣ was no longer evident to secular man that there was a God, or that morality was based on any absolutes
    2. ‣ God no longer so clearly visible in nature; 19th century men looked at nature and, instead of seeing God there, they saw "the survival of the fittest!"
        - a. ‣ "Might Made Right!"
    3. ‣ Friederich Nietzsche: "God is dead!"
        - a. ‣ The "Übermensch" (super man) will transvaluate all values, create his own morality, create values for himself.
        - b. ‣ Jesus represented weakness (said that the poor, weak will inherit the earth); Nietzsche said the *mighty* will prevail.
- D. ‣ 20th century: Confidence in man died
    1. ‣ Hitler (an Übermensch?) established his own morality and six million Jews were destroyed.
    2. ‣ This is a consequence of getting rid of God and getting rid of man
- E. ‣ Note the logical progression: death of Bible, death of God, death of man
    1. ‣ is not accidental
    2. ‣ Without the Bible, you eliminate the clearest picture of God.
    3. ‣ Without God, man's importance is a matter of man's own assessment.
    4. ‣ Only the strongest survive; the stronger impress their values upon the weaker.
    5. ‣ Destruction of man in the 20th century greater than in all previously recorded history
- F. ‣ Moral: Logically, if you get rid of the Word of God, you get rid of man!
    1. ‣ Without the Word of God (the clearest picture of God), the picture of God is destroyed and man is doomed
    2. ‣ Seals his fate, dooms him to extinction

III. ‣ **Contemporary Secularism's Failure: "The Age of Anxiety"**

- A. ‣ The non-Christian today knows that secularism has "sold him short," not made good on its promises.
- B. ‣ Pendulum always swings from *arrogance* (the "halls of progress") to existential *despair*.
    1. ‣ Luther compared the history of the human race to a drunken man attempting to climb on a horse: first gets up on one side (arrogance) only to fall off the other (despair); then the cycle repeats itself
- C. ‣ 19th century arrogance

1. ‣ Was an almost universal confidence that elimination of the God of the Bible would make little difference; science & technology would produce a millennium on earth.
2. ‣ Then two World Wars changed people's minds.
3. ‣ People of our day no less sinners than were earlier men.
   a. ‣ Science and technology just make us more effective at destroying each other!
      i. ‣ are "more efficient" sinners
4. ‣ "The Great Exposition" (London, mid 19th century)
   a. ‣ J.G. Farrel's *The Siege of Krishnapur*
      i. ‣ belief in inevitable progress
      ii. ‣ Indian mutiny had same effect as First & Second World Wars did on people in general.
         (1). ‣ Man really *isn't* moral & clever.
5. ‣ The "train that could lay its own track"
   a. ‣ problem: was self-defeating (a train needs the stability of well-laid track)
   b. ‣ Without a fixed track, it is no more stable than a "non-train!"
   c. ‣ 19th century thought man could "lay his own tracks in front of him" (no need for any permanent foundation)

D. ‣ Reaction: Existential despair
1. ‣ reaction to drop in confidence in progress: pendulum swung to the *opposite* side!
2. ‣ 19th century optimism ("All answers would be found by secular man.")
3. ‣ Existential position: "No answers possible"
4. ‣ World offers *no* explanation(s)
5. ‣ Only "meaning" one has is the sense that one self-imposes on the world through one's own experience.

IV. ‣ The Situation Today

A. ‣ Inherited capital of belief in God & Bible has run out.
B. ‣ Valuation of man & ethics has run out.
C. ‣ Science & technology as "answer" recognized (at least by some) as no more than an ephemeral dream.
D. ‣ People today desperately searching for answers to their questions
1. ‣ "Substitute answers" abound ("Lo, here! Lo, there!")
   a. ‣ Ogden Nash's poem, "The Seven Spiritual Ages of Mrs. Marmaduke Moore"
   b. ‣ She ends up in Bahai!
      i. ‣ a symbol of our time: people looking for answers…there are too many!
      ii. ‣ our problem today is not too few answers, but *too many!*
2. ‣ Result: It is mandatory under these circumstances that Christians be prepared to give reasons for being a Christian
   a. ‣ is *not* enough today to just "shout louder than all the others!"

V. ‣ Proclamation in a Pluralistic Society

A. ▸ 100 years ago, there were two predominant kinds of people: (1) those who knew the Bible was true and, more or less, lived consistently with it, and (2) those who knew the Bible was true and did *not* live consistently with it (or who rejected Christianity).
   1. ▸ Problem was simply to convince people to be consistent with that which they already knew to be true
   2. ▸ Christian could simply pull out a book of Bible verses and quote to a person the verse which applied (e.g., R.A. Torrey's *Handbook of Christian Answers*)
B. ▸ But today, one finds many different systems.
   1. ▸ People of today's society are faced with a seemingly infinite number of choices.
      a. ▸ are many different worldviews, belief systems on the market
   2. ▸ You pull out your Bible or book of verses, and your friend will pull out the *Bhavad Gita!*

VI. ▸ **Two Christian Reactions to Secularism**
A. ▸ Theological liberalism's response: "If you can't beat 'em, join 'em!"
   1. ▸ a "chameleon theology," constantly changing as quickly as the cultural norms change
      a. ▸ As quickly as the secular articles change, so does liberal theology!
      b. ▸ Anything presented by secular society as "the answer," liberal theologians adopt, working these secular ideas into their schemata.
      c. ▸ Theological liberals always remake the content, the message, to fit the current situation.
   2. ▸ Examples of liberals fitting Christianity to the social scene:
      a. ▸ When culture enamored of evolutionism, Christianity described by liberals as "an evolutionary religion" (Caird, *The Evolution of Religion*)
      b. ▸ When culture became fascinated with existentialism, Christianity described by liberals as basically "existential"—a religion that deals with personal despair.
      c. ▸ When race relation issues fill the newspapers, Christianity described by liberals as, at root, "a theology of racial equality."
      d. ▸ When culture is involved in revolutions, i.e., Vietnam, Christianity becomes a "theology of liberation," etc.
   3. ▸ Liberals always understand well the current situation, *but* they have lost any eternal message, any concept of absolute remedy.
      a. ▸ Christianity, in essence, loses its identity; it is "blended into" the secular world.
      b. ▸ Result: people become indifferent to Christianity
         i. ▸ recognize that (as they hear it from liberals, at least) Christianity seems to have nothing to offer
         ii. ▸ Liberal theology continues to grow weaker and weaker.
            (1). ▸ Attendance at liberal churches is declining; seminaries declining in enrollment.
      c. ▸ Negative critique of liberalism: Peter de Vries, *The Mackeral Plaza*

i. ‣ Minister has a pulpit with each of four legs made of a different kind of fruitwood (to symbolize our inability to harmonize the materials found in the four Gospels!)
    ii. ‣ Sermon: "The final proof of God's omnipotence is that He need not exist in order to save us!"
    iii. ‣ When attendance declining at St. Paul's Cathedral in London, canons announced in newspaper that they would parachute off the top of the cathedral!
        (1). ‣ London newspaper response: "If God isn't dead, maybe He wishes He were!"
    d. ‣ John Updike's *Rabbit, Run*
        i. ‣ critique of contemporary American culture
        ii. ‣ young Rabbit, a former high-school basketball star
        iii. ‣ life of running, but without direction
        iv. ‣ Rabbit has no values, meaning
        v. ‣ Rev. Eccles (ecclesiology!) desires to help Rabbit, befriends him, listens to him, spends hours with him, plays golf with him—but has no worthwhile answers for him
        vi. ‣ Conservative Lutheran pastor irrelevant to Rabbit too—but for different reasons.
B. ‣ Christian "Fundamentalists' Response: "If you can't beat 'em, separate from them!"
    1. ‣ felt they could not fight evolutionary theory, Hegelian philosophy, etc.
    2. ‣ became "sociological fundamentalism" (the attempt to protect believers against the world in which they lived)
        a. ‣ threw up walls (via "blue laws") to protect the believing community
            i. ‣ (no card playing, drinking of alcohol, theatre, etc.)
            ii. ‣ Point: those activities which were associated with the saloon in frontier times (prostitution, cigar smoking, drunkenness, card playing, etc. all took place there)
            iii. ‣ Revivalist preachers were correct in locating sin there—but these activities later became entirely *separately* from the saloon.
            iv. ‣ convinces people that you became a Christian through *not* participating in certain activities
    3. ‣ invented linguistic barriers by which they could distinguish those "inside" (fundamentalists) from those "outside" (non-Christians)
        a. ‣ Fundamentalists developed a "specialized vocabulary."
            i. ‣ example: "fellowship" used as a verb—only by fundamentalists
                (1). ‣ In the rest of society word is, of course, a noun ("I have fellowship at St. Peter's.")
            ii. ‣ example: use of the word "just" in prayer—"Just help me, Lord"
            iii. ‣ Such things tell the non-Christian that if he subscribes to this odd "lingo" (behavior), he will be saved, viewed as righteous before God.

(1). ‣ is typical "ghetto phenomenon"

(2). ‣ like those immigrants who feared being "eaten up" by the culture

    (a). ‣ reaction: retained their own diet

    (b). ‣ reaction: retained use of the "mother tongue"

    (c). ‣ reaction: separated themselves & their children from the general culture

(3). ‣ Result: younger generation yearns to break free, totally identifies with the culture in order to escape extreme localization

    (a). ‣ Christian phenomenon of "preacher's kid" who, along with abandoning extreme fundamentalist peculiarities, abandons the Gospel

C. ‣ Wise apologists' response: adopt *neither* of the above positions. Instead, "Beat 'em!"

  1. ‣ is important to realize that the *answer* to the non-Christian's questions lie within *Christianity*—not in secularism or in anything that secularism has to offer

    a. ‣ arguments & evidence lie on the side of historic Christianity

    b. ‣ Today's secularism is in deep trouble (is like the emperor in "The Emperor's New Clothes"—stark naked!)

      i. ‣ But everybody is too scared to say so!

  2. ‣ recognize that *both* the liberal and the fundamentalist viewpoints operate out of *fear*

    a. ‣ Liberals fear secular culture so much that they see no other alternative than to capitulate to it.

    b. ‣ Fundamentalists are scared to death to the point that they feel that they must isolate themselves, protect themselves from the secular world's influence at all costs.

  3. ‣ Our situation today: Secularism has risen to a point of prominence, and Christians have an excellent opportunity right now to present the Christian faith on its own terms.

    a. ‣ begins with the elimination of our fear of the secular culture around us

    b. ‣ We eliminate this fear by thoroughly understanding the secularist's world-view

      i. ‣ is accomplished through hard intellectual work and discipline