

▸ 2. “Apologetics as Evangelism”

John Warwick Montgomery, “*Sensible Christianity*” [an audio series]

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I. ▸ **The Early Christians Amidst Pagans and Today’s Christian Amidst Pagans**

A. ▸ The first-century Christians operated in a secular situation.

1. ▸ They *knew* that Christianity had the answers.
2. ▸ They “turned the world upside-down.”

B. ▸ Today’s Christians are operating in a similar situation.

1. ▸ Historic Christianity *still* has the answers.
2. ▸ We again have the opportunity to again “turn the world upside-down.”
3. ▸ We must cease to be afraid of secular culture around us.

II. ▸ **Evangelical Arguments Against Apologetics: (1) Presuppositionalism**

A. ▸ (work of Cornelius Van Til (Westminster Seminary Philadelphia decades ago; later Pr. Dr. Greg Bahnsen)

1. ▸ sadly represented in LCMS dogmatics (Pieper, Vol. I)

B. ▸ is the first of the two most popular evangelical arguments against the use of apologetics

C. ▸ represents the *intellectual argument* against apologetics: “The sin of man eliminates any ‘common ground’ of positive argument against the unbeliever.”

1. ▸ non-Christian is a totally depraved sinner

2. ▸ non-Christian will not and cannot pay any serious attention to your arguments; rather, he will always pervert them.

a. ▸ Example: psychiatrist & patient who thought he was dead

i. ▸ solution: one fact: Dead men do not bleed

(1). ▸ anatomy texts, visits to morgue, etc. —> “O.K., Dead men do not bleed!”

ii. ▸ psychiatrist sticks him with a pin

iii. ▸ “Good grief! Dead men bleed after all!”

b. ▸ Lesson: If one is sufficiently convinced of a position, he can maintain that position *against all evidence*.

c. ▸ But normally, people will alter their views when the evidence becomes sufficiently powerful.

i. ▸ is a major principle of education: “If you are faced with the facts, brought into contact with the data, you need to modify your views in accordance with that data”

d. ▸ If denied, then problem *not* really an intellectual one, but a matter of the will

D. ▸ The real problem with the presuppositionalist: He does not properly understand the problem of sin.

1. ▸ needs to more accurately understand the concept of “total depravity” (that man is totally cut off from God)

- a. ▶ The Fall did *not* cause man to lose his ability to reason.
 - i. ▶ “Total depravity” does not mean that when man fell, he lost his reasoning powers and inferential capacity
 - ii. ▶ Adam’s reasoning ability remained intact after the Fall.
 - iii. ▶ could not have been any other way—to be otherwise would mean that there could be *no revelation*—of God’s grace or of anything else!
 - iv. ▶ The very presentation of a revelation assumes that man is able to draw conclusions from what he reads.
- b. ▶ What “total depravity” *really means* is that man is totally cut off from God, unable to bridge the gap between himself & God.
 - i. ▶ Sin, while it impairs our faculties, does not destroy them (“deterioration” vs. “destruction”)
 - ii. ▶ Fall from dominion, loss of the “state of integrity”
- c. ▶ What the Fall *does* do is prevent us from “climbing up to God.”
 - i. ▶ keeps us from “saving ourselves”
- 2. ▶ Presuppositionalist beliefs
 - a. ▶ Christian *cannot reason* with non-Christian
 - b. ▶ All Christian can do: show non-Christian that his non-Christian position is inconsistent
 - c. ▶ If successful, one simply preaches the Gospel to the non-Christian, looking to the Holy Spirit to do His converting work.
 - d. ▶ Question: Just how or why should the non-Christian pay attention to your arguments against his own position, since he or she is “unable to engage in sufficient inferential reasoning?”

III. ▶ **Evangelical Arguments Against Apologetics: (2) Pietism**

- A. ▶ s the *second* of the two most popular evangelical arguments against the use of apologetics
- B. ▶ represents the present *emotional argument* against apologetics
 - 1. ▶ “The Holy Spirit works through my testimony and life—not through arguments.”
 - 2. ▶ “We should simply present what Christ has done within us!”
 - 3. ▶ “The sanctified Christian man does not present the Gospel to the non-Christian through argument, but rather through the witness of his life.”
- C. ▶ The fallacy of the Pietist position:
 - 1. ▶ Scripture does *not* limit the presentation of the Gospel to “testimony concerning our personal lives.”
 - a. ▶ God *does* work through personal testimonies, but God does *not* work *only* through personal testimonies.
 - b. ▶ The pietist does not recognize that in Scripture itself, testimony is *not* the only means of presenting the Gospel.
 - c. ▶ is no possible way to show to the non-Christian that what goes on inside of you is really due to Christ

- i. ▶ no “testimony contests!”
 - ii. ▶ cannot allow the Christian Gospel to degenerate into “who is the happiest!”
 - iii. ▶ non-Christian’s usual conclusion: “Some people seem to have warm, spiritual lives of some kind, are ‘satisfied with their religion’”
- 2. ▶ Upshot: What we need to be able to do is “give a reason for our faith”—a reason which does *not* depend upon us or our lives”
 - a. ▶ “Personal testimony *does* have some value, but one must be able to go beyond it.
 - i. ▶ may be a good beginning, but it is *not* a proper stopping point
 - b. ▶ Problem of egotism: one’s “testimony & life” can testify to more than *oneself* than to Christ.
 - c. ▶ No matter how pious one appears at first, he or she is really never pious enough; people will always disappoint us.
 - d. ▶ Goal: to shift the attention *away* from ourselves and *toward* Christ
 - e. ▶ John the Baptist: “He must increase, but I must decrease.”
- 3. ▶ non-Christian has problems with regard to the facts of Christianity; therefore, *evidence* to support these facts need to be presented
 - a. ▶ example: Paul listed the many people who saw the resurrected Christ.
 - b. ▶ Christ’s resurrection happened *objectively*.
 - i. ▶ Implication: Skeptic can check out facts with all these witnesses.
 - c. ▶ When the apostles came into contact with unbelief, they constantly marshaled external, *objective evidence* for the truth of the Christian claim.
- 4. ▶ Example: Paul on Mars Hill
 - a. ▶ Paul did not “tell his experience” to the Stoic & Epicurean philosophers.
 - b. ▶ Rather, Paul started right where the Stoics & Epicureans were
 - i. ▶ quoted the well-known Stoic philosophical writings (thus showing his familiarity with secular sources)
 - c. ▶ Paul then showed that what was missing in their position is objectively supplied in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.
 - d. ▶ The number of people converted by that message is not the point of the story. The *point* is how Paul dealt with the secular situation.
 - i. ▶ Paul is an example of “meeting people where they are.”
 - ii. ▶ Paul felt responsible for the unbelievers of his day, was willing to go where they were.
 - iii. ▶ Paul realized the importance of delving into the hard study of the secular philosophers.
 - iv. ▶ Paul had engaged in hard study of the Stoics’ writings during his rabbinic training, so that he could refute the pagans’ position(s) and provide a Gospel corrective for them.
 - e. ▶ Paul’s motto (Richard Longnecker): “I will become all things to all men that by all means some might be saved.”

IV. ▶ **What Apologetics is: A Species of Evangelism and Missions**

- A. ▶ An “apologia” is a defense and “apologetics” is really a species of evangelism—the intellectual, “head-side” of evangelism.
 - 1. ▶ It provides intellectual arguments for the truth of the Christian Gospel.
 - 2. ▶ It deals with the honest intellectual difficulties that people have in coming to the cross of Christ.
 - a. ▶ Think of these as intellectual hurdles, potholes, obstructions on the road to salvation.
 - 3. ▶ must realize that we live in a pagan world, a truly secularized one
 - a. ▶ are all surrounded by pagans
 - b. ▶ need to learn the language of our audience, as well as learn how to show them that Christ is the answer to their real problems
 - c. ▶ means that “foreign missions” & “home missions” are very much alike
 - d. ▶ Paul “...became all things to all men,” provided both apologetics and foreign missions at the same time
 - B. ▶ Apologetics is also an intellectual argument for missiology
 - 1. ▶ The fundamental principle of mission work is “...to become all things to all men, in order that some may be saved.”
 - 2. ▶ The only difference between the “foreign” mission and the “domestic” mission is geography!
 - C. ▶ The fundamental thrust of apologetics is to push the unbeliever past his intellectual objections to the Gospel and to “the offense of the cross.”
 - 1. ▶ Goal is for skeptic to have to face the choice between (1) attempting to save himself or, (2) accepting Christ’s having died to save him.
 - 2. ▶ The “offense” is that man cannot save himself.
 - a. ▶ The idea is to get the non-Christian to understand that there is nothing he can do to win his salvation.
 - b. ▶ “Christianity is the easiest religion” (because God has done everything for us), and, “Christianity is the hardest religion” (because it forces us to admit that there is nothing that we can do to save ourselves).
 - 3. ▶ Goal: that if a man rejects the cross, insists on trying to save himself, that he does it for the real reason (the “offense” or “scandal” of the cross) and not for some “smokescreen” reasons.
- V. ▶ **What Apologetics is not: It is Not the Cause of Conversion for the Unbeliever**
- A. ▶ Apologetics works to tear down intellectual barriers to faith but is *by no means* “a creator of faith.”
 - 1. ▶ The Holy Spirit alone, through the Gospel of Jesus Christ, is the power that leads to salvation. (Rom. 1:16-17)
 - B. ▶ What *is* the place of the Holy Spirit in apologetics?
 - 1. ▶ The Holy Spirit “...convicts the world concerning sin, righteousness and judgment.”
 - 2. ▶ The work of the Holy Spirit is continuous, ever-present in apologetic activity.

3. ▶ Any “success” in bringing a person to Christ can be attributed *only* to the work of the Holy Spirit.
4. ▶ “Soli Deo Gloria!”
- C. ▶ Think of salvation as a house—a house that is “bigger on the inside than it is on the outside” (C.S. Lewis, *The Last Battle*)
 1. ▶ The roadway leading to the house is filled with potholes and obstacles.
 - a. ▶ Apologetics is the attempt to clear away those obstacles.
 2. ▶ When the unbeliever reaches the house, he sees a sign hanging above the door, a sign which says, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ!”
 - a. ▶ It is his belief in Christ (through the power of the Holy Spirit) that opens the door and allows him to enter the house.
 3. ▶ Then, once the new believer is in the house, he is immediately reminded that it was solely by God’s grace that he is now in the house—not by any kind of worldly works that he has done (Ephesians 2:8-9)

VI. ▶ **The Fundamental Technique of Christian Apologetics**

- A. ▶ The goal is for the unbeliever to understand that if he employs his “secular reasoning” and applies that reasoning to the Christian claim, Christianity will vindicate itself.
- B. ▶ Hume: “One cannot rely on the Gospel reports as evidence for Jesus’ life because His friends loved him and His enemies hated Him.
 1. ▶ Charge is that one cannot rely on the sort of evidence that one finds in the Gospels, because they are based on prejudicial fact.
 2. ▶ Refutation of Hume’s argument came from Richard Whateley, who proved that Hume’s argument was fallacious.
 - a. ▶ How?
 - b. ▶ by applying the same argument to the historical documentation concerning Napoleon Bonaparte
 - i. ▶ The French people loved Napoleon.
 - ii. ▶ The English people hated Napoleon.
 - iii. ▶ Napoleon, therefore, did not exist!?
 3. ▶ The irony of Whately’s work was that, at the time that Whately wrote this work, Napoleon was living in exile on Elba!
- C. ▶ Is it possible for the non-Christian to still reject the Gospel?
 1. ▶ Yes, he can.
 2. ▶ But when he does so, you can point out that he is rejecting the Gospel for *non-rational* reasons.
 3. ▶ His problem is, finally, *not* an intellectual one.
 4. ▶ In this case, he simply does not *want* to face the truth of the Gospel.