

## WHAT IS APOLOGETICS

I remember the first time I ever came across the word “apologetics”. I remember thinking what an odd looking word; it was unlike any word I had ever seen before. What possible meaning could it have?

The reason why the area of study we are currently considering is called apologetics is that the word is derived from the Greek word *apologia* which is transliterated *apologia*. The word *apologia* is translated eight times as defense in the English Standard Version. These occurrences are Acts 22:1; Acts 25:16; 1 Cor 9:3; 2 Cor 7:11; Phil 1:7, 16; 2 Tim 4:16 and 1 Peter 3:15.

Down through the ages, starting at the very first century the claims of Christianity, especially those of Christ have come under severe scrutiny. The task of apologetics is to offer answers to the perplexing questions of the age in which the person engaged in apologetics lives. In the second century Christianity was accused of cannibalism and being a threat to society, it was the task of apology to defend Christianity against such charges. In the medieval era the apologetic task was to defend Christianity against Islam and Judaism. During the enlightenment the task was to defend Christianity against the rationalism of the scientific method. The Christian apologetic defends Christianity from those who seek to oppose it. In this sense, apologetics can be considered to be a form of Spiritual warfare. (2 Cor.10: 4-5)

Apologetics is both a science and an art. Apologetics task is to defend the faith. Apologetics chief concern is the honour of the Lord Jesus Christ. Today the prime task is to defend Christianities claim to have the final definition of truth. We shall take a close look at this issue towards the end of this essay. It is easy to see the vital role apologetics plays in Christianity.<sup>1</sup>

Apologetics can be regarded as a branch of theology or a related but separate discipline.<sup>2</sup>

Apologetics attempts to present a persuadable defense of Christianity to the contemporary world.

Today there is a need for the church to arise from the clutches of apathy and engage in effective apologetics. We live in a day when orthodox Christianity needs to be defended apologetically from those outside of the Church. Sadly at times this task has to be extended to those within the church who plainly teach false doctrine.

Apologetics is faith forming to the non-Christian and faith sustaining and building to the Christian. W G Phillips shows that this belief forming and sustaining function of apologetics is apparent in the scriptures themselves. From the very beginning the Scriptures present God as the one who always has existed and the one who created all things. (Gen 1:1). From the very beginning the Bible is theistic there is no room for atheism, pantheism, animism or any other form of ism. Because God is the one who created the universe and humanity, all of creation derives its significance from the event of creation. (Gen 1, 2 and also Pss.33, 104, 136). The Bible depicts God as the one who is sovereign over history and who will ultimately resolve the problem of evil (Gen. 50:20; Job 1-2; 38-41). Throughout the pages of the Old Testament the Bible presents what Phillips calls a “moral

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid

<sup>2</sup> W G Phillips page 82

apologetic: those who break God's covenants will be judged, those who keep God's covenant will be blessed and God's plan will ultimately be vindicated in history."<sup>3</sup>. The apologetic element was extended to the New Testament for in the Gospels the apostles explain that Jesus' death on the cross was part of God's eternal plan of redemption (Mark 2:10-12; John 5:36, 10: 37-38). The remainder of the New Testament was also written for apologetic purposes. Romans presents God coherent and logical plan of salvation. Hebrews demonstrates why Christianity is superior to Judaism. Other parts of the New Testament such as Galatians, Colossians and 1 John defend Christianity against heresy and false teaching.<sup>4</sup> This apologetic intent of the New Testament can also be seen throughout the Book of Acts.

A substantial portion of the Scriptures emphasis the task of apologetics, the writings have been designed to persuade the reader and hearer that following Christ is the path to truth, life and the way. Apologetics is no dry academic subject but an area of study that cuts to the very center of our belief, faith and reason. How we think apologetically will have a substantial bearing on the way that we conduct our practical lives.

The real difference between Christians and Non- Christians, as Dr Greg Beshen argues is a matter of worldviews. These worldviews rest upon a set of presuppositions. The challenge for the Christian Apologists is to bring the non- believer to critically challenge their set of presuppositions. "Pre-suppositional apologetics calls for the Christian and non-Christian to set side by side their two worldviews and do an internal examination of them both (and their respective "inner logics"). In such a comparison the evidential power of Christ's resurrection is easily set forth."<sup>5</sup>

The need to critically address the contemporary issues of the day, including the presuppositions, was what gave rise to apologetics in the first place. Apologetics emerged out of the early church's need to define what it believed in light of tendencies for error to creep into popular teaching, as a means of answering questions from inquirers and as a means of proclaiming the gospel.

There were two main types of early apologetics, the first kind was political apologetics and it aimed to make Christianity a legitimate and acceptable form of worship in society. The second branch of apologetics was more religious and sought to "win converts from both Judaism and paganism"<sup>6</sup> Some of the finest minds in early Christianity eagerly engaged in apologetics. Prominent of these were Augustine and Anselm.

Dr Moreland argues that throughout most of Church History "the church could out think her critics."<sup>7</sup> Sadly in recent times this is one area where the Church has lost its vitality, this is reflected in the way that by and large we have a relatively ineffectual impact on Western Society What is needed today is for Christians to learn to think in an intellectual manner. God is the supreme intelligence, this was supremely seen in the life of Jesus and the Lord wants his followers to be able to address the modern culture intelligently. Modern culture is dominated by advertising that makes an emotional appeal to our senses rather than our intelligence. What this does is create an intellectual void that is dominated by a select few. This is not God's intent for mankind and can only be altered by Christians learning to love the Lord with our minds by learning to think intelligently. In order to do this we must come to the place where we value intelligent thinking as much as prayer, fellowship and worship.

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<sup>3</sup> W G Phillips page 82

<sup>4</sup> W G Phillips page 82

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.cmfnow.com/cgi-bin/nextpg?cmd=NextPg!18111&dir=s7!articles&tpl=PA206.htm>

<sup>6</sup> C H Pinnock page 37

<sup>7</sup> [http://hisdefense.org/audio/jp\\_audio.html](http://hisdefense.org/audio/jp_audio.html) Dr J P Moreland "Love Your God with all your mind" listened to on Real Player 6.00 minutes in 23 February 2002

Moreland argues that Romans 12: 1-2 urges that the way to begin to think intelligently is to have our minds renewed by the Scriptures. This is because what we believe determines the way that we act. What we believe is not under the control of our will. However, we can will to study a particular area until our thinking on that area becomes our belief. <sup>8</sup> When this happens we are equipped to adequately provide an apologetic for the Christian faith.

1 Peter 3:15 addresses a group of people who are being intimidated for their faith. Peter urges the believer to set apart and honor Christ in this situation, it is His name not ours that we are called to defend. Peter points out that in order to provide an adequate defense one must be prepared. This can only happen as one sets out to study and understand the current issues of the day and meet these issues biblically.

Richard M Riss argues that apologetics is not solely for great Christian intellects but is the responsibility of every believer. All people throughout the world have the same basic questions whether they are very intelligent or not. Every Christian therefore has the responsibility to use their God given intellectual capacities to attempt to answer these questions. Riss cites Francis Schaeffer of having stated

“There is indeed the danger of falling into a proud intellectualism. But there is also the danger of lacking a love and compassion for men great enough to inspire the hard work needed to understand men's questions and to give them honest answers. Throughout his ministry, Paul talked to people with this kind of love and compassion, and he wrote this way, for example, in Romans 1-2. Christ, too, gently answered questions and discussed issues during his earthly ministry.”<sup>9</sup>

In recent history, Pinnock argues apologetics has suffered severely since it encountered in the European Enlightenment a spirit of skepticism towards theology, metaphysics and a wholesale assault upon traditional Christian beliefs. Men like Hume and many others came to feel that the whole of Christianity needed to be revised and reworked subjected the apologetic arguments of earlier centuries to withering critique. “ Kant declared that the human mind was incapable of knowledge beyond the phenomenal mind. In future, he said, theology would have to be content to function within the limits of reason and reduce its claims to knowledge. A gauntlet was thrown down in the path of apologetics. Religion can be practiced in the realm of existence or morality, but it cannot be advanced, as previously on rational ground.”<sup>10</sup>

For many decades Christianity to a large extent was content to function within the limits that enlightened thinkers confined Christianity to. However in the last century men like C S Lewis and Francis A Schaeffer attempted to break free of these restrictions and stimulate interest in every day Christians having the ability to logically and rationally defend their faith. In the later half of the twentieth century one of the worlds most popular apologists was Josh McDowell and the work that forms the backbone for much of this essay “The New Evidence that Demands a verdict” sought to equip students with the ability to do just that. As the title of the book suggests McDowell’s focus was on evidential apologetics.

Norman Geisler has defined “apologetics as the discipline that deals with a rational defense of Christian faith. It comes from the Greek word *apologia* which means to give a reason or

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<sup>8</sup> This is what Christian meditation is about.

<sup>9</sup> Richard M Riss Christian Evidences [http://www.grmi.org/renewal/Richard\\_Riss/evidences/1validity.html](http://www.grmi.org/renewal/Richard_Riss/evidences/1validity.html) cites Francis A. Schaeffer, *The New Super Spirituality* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1972), p. 20.

<sup>10</sup> C H Pinnock page 37

defense”<sup>11</sup> Christians should engage in the Bible because the Bible commands it. The Apostle Peter commanded; “But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.”(1Peter 3: 15). What Peter in effect was saying was that if we acknowledge Christ as Lord then we should always be prepared to provide a reasoned response to anyone who asks us for an explanation of the faith that is in us. Furthermore the Apostle Paul stated that we are to “demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ” (2 Cor.10: 5). Every Christian has a duty to honestly face the issues that arise in their own minds that prevent them from growing in the true knowledge of God as well as the expressed thoughts of those who are yet to profess faith in Christ. This is not only the task of the academic apologist but also the task of every Christian (Jude 3). The Apostle Paul acknowledged that part of his ministry was to defend and confirm the gospel (Phil 1: 7,16) and instructed Titus that the ability to refute those who oppose the gospel was one of the requirements for Church leadership (Titus 1:9).

It could be asked why it is necessary to study apologetics in a study of theology, Paul Enns provides an answer to this question when he points out that one of the key tasks of the theologian is to provide a basis for Christians to rationally defend their beliefs against those opposed to the Christian faith, this need is intensified by the fact that we live in an age that has seen in the west “the emergence of humanism, Communism, cults, and Eastern religions.”<sup>12</sup> Paul Enns goes on to point out that another vital task of the theologian is to provide a knowledge, understanding and assertion of foundational truths to enable believers to go on to maturity. My contention is that spiritual maturity can only be obtained if a person is able to defend, understand and apply foundational truth in ones life. Hence it is absolutely vital that the believer, and especially the theologian be able to provide an apologetic for the Christian worldview.

In our quest to provide an apologetic for a Christian worldview we shall endeavor to begin our quest with no preconceived notions, an open mind and logic. A preconception is an attitude, belief or idea that is formed in a persons mind before all the evidence has been examined and evaluated, a preconception prevents a person from approaching the topic under review with an open mind. The difficulty any student faces is that preconceptions can be extremely difficult to discern and even more difficult to isolate in our thinking. C S Lewis in his book “An experiment in Criticism” observed; “that we must begin by laying aside as completely as we can all our own preconceptions, interests, and associations.... We must use our eyes. We must look, and go on looking till we have certainly seen exactly what is there. We sit down before the picture in order to have something done to us, not that we may do things with it. The first demand any work of art makes upon us is surrender. Look. Listen. Receive. Get yourself out of the way.”<sup>13</sup>

Donald Pensgard defines the quality of having an open mind as “a willingness to honestly consider and thoroughly analyse new ideas. An open mind does not include blind acceptance”<sup>14</sup> but rather the discarding of ideas that can logically proved to be false. Open mindedness should be distinguished from gullibility that accepts and shows equal tolerance of all ideas. If we are going to have an open mind then we need to have the same attitude that Nicodemus, the teacher of Israel demonstrated when he approached Jesus with a willingness to listen and be open to fresh understanding of truth (John 3:1-2). A person with an open mind approaches a subject with

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<sup>11</sup>Geisler, N. L. (1999). Article “Apologetics, Need For.” *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian apologetics* Baker reference library (Page 37). Grand Rapids, Michigan Baker Books

<sup>12</sup>Enns, P. P. (1997, c1989). *The Moody handbook of theology* Chicago, Ill.: Moody Press page 149

<sup>13</sup> Francis Arthur Pyles Article “The language theory of C S Lewis” in Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. (1983; 2002) *Trinity Journal Volume 4* (Vol. 4 Page 87) Trinity Evangelical Divinity School cites C. S. Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism* (Cambridge: University Press, 1961) 19.

<sup>14</sup> Donald Pensgard page 33

a disposition that allows that person to face reality as it truly is and the freedom to ask the question “What does this all mean?”

Finally in evaluating a worldview one must use logic. Logic can be thought of in terms of “valid reasoning efficiently leading from an axiom to a necessary conclusion.”<sup>15</sup> Geisler expresses what logic fundamentally is when he writes “*Logic is a way to think so that we can come to correct conclusions by understanding implications and the mistakes people often make in thinking.*”<sup>16</sup> Logic builds upon a foundation of self-evident principles. A self-evident principle is a principle that we know is “true, even before we can explain why they are true. That something exists is known by direct intuition. It is obvious and immediate”<sup>17</sup>

Norman Geisler has identified four self- evident principles of logic these are

- “A. Law of non-contradiction (A is not non-A).
- B. Law of identity (A is A).
- C. Law of excluded middle (either A or non-A).
- D. Laws of valid inference.”<sup>18</sup>

Geisler asserts that; “the *law of non-contradiction* (A is not non-A) says that no two contradictory statements can both be true at the same time and in the same sense.”<sup>19</sup>

Geisler defines the law of identity as stating “that something is itself; A is A.”<sup>20</sup> The law of excluded middle “affirms that, if one truth proposition is true, all propositions opposed to it must be false”<sup>21</sup> or “if A is true, then all non-A is false”<sup>22</sup> The law of valid inference can also be referred to as the law of rational inference and it enables an inference from a series of premises to be validly drawn to a verifiable conclusion.

By using these first principles Rene Descartes developed the famous Latin argument “*cogito ergo sum*” when he “set about methodically doubting all and any received certainties in order to discover the criterion and content of indubitable truth.”<sup>23</sup> Descartes’ commences with the premise that the most foundational assumption that we can make is that as people we are able to think, without the ability to think we could not reason or communicate<sup>24</sup>. The next premise he introduces is that “those who think exist.”<sup>25</sup>, this premise could be reworded to read “thoughts

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<sup>15</sup> Pensgard page 32

<sup>16</sup>Geisler, N. L., & Brooks, R. M. (1990). *Come, let us reason: An introduction to logical thinking* (Page 13). Grand Rapids, Mich. Baker Book House

<sup>17</sup>Geisler, N. L. (1999). *Baker encyclopedia of Christian apologetics* Baker reference library (Page 635). Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Books.

<sup>18</sup>Geisler, N. L., & Brooks, R. M. (1990). *When skeptics ask* (Page 272) Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books

<sup>19</sup>Geisler, N. L., & Brooks, R. M. (1990). *Come, let us reason: An introduction to logical thinking* (Page 16). Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House

<sup>20</sup> Geisler, N. L., & Brooks, R. M. (1990). *Come, let us reason: An introduction to logical thinking* (Page 16). Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House

<sup>21</sup>Geisler, N. L. (1999). *Baker encyclopedia of Christian apologetics* Baker reference library (Page 238). Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Books.

<sup>22</sup>Geisler, N. L. (1999). *Baker encyclopedia of Christian apologetic* Baker reference library (Page 238). Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Books

<sup>23</sup>S N Williams article “Rene Descartes” in Ferguson, S. B., & Packer, J. (2000, c1988). *New dictionary of theology* (electronic ed) Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press page 193

<sup>24</sup> Derived from Pensgard page 39 and 40

<sup>25</sup> Pensgard page 50

require a thinker”<sup>26</sup> By deductive reasoning if a person thinks, and thinkers exist then a person who is thinking exists. For Descartes “the very act of doubting one’s own existence constitutes a demonstration of that existence, for only an existing self can think or doubt.”<sup>27</sup> Descartes argument does not mean; “existence is inferred from the consciousness of thought; but that the consciousness of thought involves the consciousness of existence.”<sup>28</sup> From this starting point Descartes went on to develop a causal argument for the existence of God: if the soul exists, a finite thing, it must have a cause great enough to produce it. And one’s idea of God, a perfect being, must likewise have a sufficient cause. No imperfect being is sufficient for that; therefore, a Perfect Being must exist.<sup>29</sup>

The next term we need to define is the word “worldview”. A worldview provides a framework for understanding who a person is, the world around them, the predicament of evil and brokenness as well as a solution to the dilemma of life. A worldview can only be sustained if it conforms to reality and provides both meaning and direction to life. Norman Geisler has identified two tests for evaluating the truthfulness of a worldview. “First, it must be logically consistent; second, it must explain all the relevant facts. These join as one single criterion called “systematic consistency.”<sup>30</sup> R C Sproul has identified five essential elements that determine a persons worldview these are (1) “*Epistemology* is our process of evaluating knowledge to determine truth. (2) *Metaphysics* is our view of what lies outside the scope of our senses. (3) *Theology* is our study of God. (4) *Anthropology* is our study of humanity. (5) *Ethics* is our study of right or wrong.”<sup>31</sup>

In this essay we argue that only a worldview that is based on the Bible is a verifiable and therefore valid worldview. But from the outset we should ask why is this important. The reason why this is this important is that as R C Sproul has pointed out “the Bible declares that as a man thinks in his heart, so he is...Many ideas are briefly entertained by the mind without ever penetrating the heart. Those ideas that continually hold our attention are the ideas that shape our lives. We are what we think. When our thoughts are corrupted, our lives follow suit<sup>32</sup> Elsewhere Sproul has correctly stated; “the mission of Christ’s people is broader than just saving souls from hell. It has also to do with transforming the mind and society”<sup>33</sup> In order to transform minds and society it is important to understand the times in which we live as well as something of the various cultures. In order for us to relate effectively to the people we meet we need to understand something of the worldview they have. Once we have this understanding then we are able see the world as others experience it which opens the way for us to introduce those we meet to the one who able to transform both the lives of individuals and wider society.

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<sup>26</sup> Pensgard page 51

<sup>27</sup>S N Williams article “Rene Descartes” in Ferguson, S. B., & Packer, J. (2000, c1988). *New dictionary of theology* (electronic ed) Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press page 193

<sup>28</sup>Hodge, C. (1997). *Systematic theology*. Originally published 1872. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc. page 377

<sup>29</sup>AF Holmes article “Rene Descartes” in Douglas, J. D., Comfort, P. W., & Mitchell, D. (1997, c1992) *Who's who in Christian history*. Illustrated lining papers. Wheaton, Ill: Tyndale House.

<sup>30</sup>Geisler, N. L. (1999). Article *Baker encyclopedia of Christian apologetics* Baker reference library (Page 117) Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Books.page 117

<sup>31</sup>Sproul, R. (2000, c1994). *Vol. 4: Before the face of God: Book four: A daily guide for living from Ephesians, Hebrews, and James*. Includes indexes. (electronic ed.). Logos Library System; Before the Face of God Grand Rapids: Baker Book House; Ligonier Ministries page 360

<sup>32</sup>Sproul, R. C. (1996, c1992). *Essential truths of the Christian faith* Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House. Preface

<sup>33</sup>Sproul, R. (2000, c1992). *Vol. 1: Before the face of God: Book One: A daily guide for living from the book of Romans*. Includes indexes. (electronic ed) Logos Library System; Before the Face of God Grand Rapids: Baker Book House; Ligonier Ministries. Part 9 Evangelisms and Worldviews.

