

how greatly we are dependent upon the forms of thought and of speech that rise out of our culture — that common ground which Christians share with non-Christians. How readily, for instance, we appeal to people today to take Christ "as their personal Savior." Yet these words would have had no meaning to men and women in New Testament times and for many centuries after. The concept of "the personal" is a very recent one. It is founded, indeed, upon the value which the New Testament place upon the *person* of Jesus Christ and of relating ourselves through faith to him. In these days of TV "personalities" and the like, the concept has been cheapened. Yet it still remains a valuable one by means of which we can convey to our contemporaries that through committing ourselves to the Son of God we may ourselves become sons of God, or *true persons*. But it was through apologetic witness, through entering upon the common ground of secular culture, that the concept became understandable. You can speak of a "personal Savior" and be understood only when you belong to a culture that also speaks about a "person-to-person" telephone call!

So, let us understand that the task of evangelization must include, inevitably, the willingness to take up the work of apologetics. Apologetics, like all good things, may be misused and misapplied. Whenever it becomes self-sufficient and is parted from its foundation in the Christ revealed in Scripture, then it can be dangerous and even come to be the enemy of the Gospel. The Word of God cannot be established through the explanations — those limited and culturally-conditioned explanations — that we give of it in terms of "worldly wisdom." The apologist may all too easily fall under the spell of his own cleverness in justifying the ways of God to man that we forget that it is God who justifies, and God alone who can declare that is true. But, in the Providence of God, men also can speak a human word to human beings like themselves that may be used by God to touch the mind and the heart of those who otherwise would not give heed to their salvation. Apologetics, in the service of evangelization, has a humble and subordinate part in breaking the Word of life so that men may partake of it. But it has a part, and we should not neglect that part. Some may find that their calling is to be, in a formal way, apologists in the service of the Gospel. All are called, as the time fits and as the occasion offers, to undertake informal apologetics. Part of the field that is the world to be won for Christ is the common ground where the Christian apologist meets the non-Christians.

APOLOGETICS IN EVANGELISM REPORT

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Preamble

It was agreed that the most urgent task in apologetics facing evangelicals is the contention of a deeply biblical theology of apologetics. This task could not be undertaken by a discussion convening in four and one-half hours, and remains to be done. The group confesses to its shame, however, that the majority of that time was not spent in that area. The discussion, albeit so, was very profitable. By the nature of things, this report cannot be a definitive statement on apologetics, but is, in fact, a survey of the areas covered by the discussion and of some points on which there was a measure of consensus.

1. After a resumé of the paper by Dr. Kenneth Hamilton, which all who read it agreed that it had been most helpful and profitable, we were faced by a number of issues which might be tackled, and it was thought to be preferable to tackle a selective number. Nevertheless, as this report will indicate, discussion was wide-ranging.

2. The group found the biblical mandates for apologetics in the doctrine of creation. Man being made in the image of God was approachable by the Christian on the basis of mental, physical and emotional needs.

Apologetics has its source in man's creation by God as creatures who have been made in order that they might know their Creator and to see the world as under his sovereign rule. The reconciling Word that is Christ the Redeemer — restoring our sinful nature so that we may once more know God and his love — makes possible our speaking words that point men to the reconciliation of the Cross insofar as our minds can comprehend God's purpose for us.

3. Apologetics is not the same as evangelism, yet it should not be separated from the evangelistic task. It can bring men to understand their fallen nature by admitting the poverty and futility of their lives apart from God and the failure of all human hopes to make a truly human community. It can help the believer to understand more fully the promises offered in the Gospel. Yet the direct preaching of the Gospel in its power can alone open men's hearts to the believing reception of the Good News and deliver them from sin and despair. It stands as a separate discipline, not merely as a tool for evangelism, but it does not stand in isolation. It is important that the dichotomy between prophet, apologist and evangelist should be corrected. If apologetics is related to, and based on, an adequate theological basis, this tension will be resolved.

4. The discussion forced us to begin to face some questions in relation to apologetics, such as: What is the effect of the fall on the unbelieving mind? What is the place of revelation in nature and conscience? What do we mean by a point of contact or common ground?

5. The role of apologetics in the witness of the Christian community is to open the mind to the truth that is in Christ. It should not be thought of narrowly as the presentation of Christian "endeavor" to convince the

unbeliever. The guidance of the Holy Spirit bringing us into all truth is operative in apologetics, confronting us with the realities of faith in such a way that we are able to see our human situation before God and in the light of his Word addressing us.

Apologetics is seeing the whole of life in the context of faith. We cannot take ourselves out of faith, for we stand on the ground of our faith. This will gratify the "commonness" of the ground upon which we stand in apologetics.

The task of apologetics is to give a vision of a world made by God, and redeemed by God, and to illuminate this world in the light of faith. Reason alone will not do this, either that of the speaker or the recipient, but insight given to both by the Holy Spirit.

6. How do we know that an apologetic is going to be "meaningful"? If we walk by faith we do not have finality. If the issue rests on the skill of debate, then our "success" depends upon our skill or lack of it. Furthermore, as C.S. Lewis put it, the danger of the apologist is that his God may become no more real than his defense of his God.

7. The development of an apologetic that shall speak to man's concrete situation is one which must be undertaken anew by each generation of Christians. Apologetics must address men where they are in their cultural and intellectual environment. The unchanging Gospel must be presented in terms of particular times and places, and apologetics have constantly to undertake this task, so that supposed obstacles to belief may be seen to be unimportant or fictitious, and that the Gospel may stand before men's eyes as the saving Truth which it is eternal.

8. The biblical context of the apologia is that of the law court — the setting forth of a defense of the faith, but a defense with a view to prosecution. In later church history the forum shifted to the lecture hall, the debating room and the written Word.

9. For the apologetic to be effective it must take place on common ground so that communication can take place. However, the Christian knows that this is not the same as "neutral ground." It is the ground of God's creation, of God's reality, and, insofar as the debate takes place in the arena of reality, it points to God's truth. However, in seeking to locate the common ground of a man-culture, thought processes and experience — the Christian apologist must avoid compromise. If we can maintain God's truth about God's world, with a total Christian world-and-life view, then there is no subject upon which the Good News of Jesus Christ has no bearing.

10. In Paul, cross-cultural preaching in Lystra and Athens, he starts from the point of a common Creator — "of one blood" — of whomself he has left evidence. Instances were given in the current Third World scene, in the Philippines, Taiwan, Tanzania, and among the Bantu, when an argument from creation is effective. As modern Western "cerebral" civilization breaks down perhaps we can return to Creation as a "common ground."

11. When this is valid, either or both of two lines of reasoning can develop from creation. Firstly, that of from creation to a creator, to One who has spoken, and who has revealed himself. Secondly, that of from

creation to the creatureliness of man, and his nature as neither animal nor God, responsible yet not sovereign (i.e. in the areas of ecology, politics, etc.).

12. What is the place of Scripture in this? The anti-authoritarian stance of many would make an appeal to Scripture qua Scripture unavailing. Yet out of God's revealed truth we can demonstrate its realism by its correspondence with the real world around. The truth of God does not have to be expressed in the enscripturalist form, nor with appeal to its authority, but because it expresses truth. At some point, however, we can well point out what we have been saying is precisely what Scripture says.

13. At this stage of our discussion the differing schools of apologetics were discussed; i.e. those who would argue from evidences (the historicity of the resurrection, etc.) or Ln Montgomery, and those who would follow Van Til in his establishment of the presuppositions of the unbeliever.

If common presuppositions are held concerning sense-perception, the nature of external reality etc., then the evidences can be presented and the issues pressed. If, however, they are not shared, then by questioning the presuppositions of the other can be drawn out, examined and shown to be inadequate or impossible to live by. One of the functions of apologetics is to press the non-Christian to the limit of the logical consequences of his position (as biblical radicalism pushes the Christian to the consistent end of what he holds to be true).

14. But this must be done with loving care so that we do not destroy a man by removing all his props and hiding places, and giving nothing in return. When the autonomy of a man's position collapses he is very vulnerable and we must be gentle while urgently persistent. Preferrably he calls the other to self-analysis rather than carrying him by assault.

Throughout our contact with him, we must remember that apologetics is for the whole man, intellectual, moral, social; and a relationship which is concerned and respectful is essential. It is not just a matter of reasoning, but of presenting and demonstrating the whole of life as a matter of faith.

The Christian apologist has the double task of locating with sensitivity the point of need, and meeting that appropriately, but not resting there, but rather presenting a whole Christian world-and-life view as a satisfying and acceptable concept. The pastoral concern for the other will seek to establish him in a new position, one of having the mind of Christ.

Epilogue

It was maintained that had we an adequate theology of apologetics, then many of the more pragmatic questions would be resolved. Be that as it may, the consensus of those participating underlined the urgent necessity of this theology of apologetics being rigorously and immediately undertaken.