

VITAL ISSUES SERIES

VITAL
APOLOGETIC
ISSUES

*Examining Reason and Revelation
in Biblical Perspective*

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Vital Apologetic Issues
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Preface

The Roman emperor Diocletian once erected a stone pillar with the inscribed words, “For having exterminated the name ‘Christian’ from the earth.”

However, his attempt to banish Christianity failed miserably—just like many similar attempts through the centuries. Atheists scoff at it, critics attack it, unbelievers reject it. Yet Christianity stands undaunted against all its assailants.

True, Christianity presents problems to thinking individuals. If God is all-powerful and all-loving, how can evil and calamities be explained? Is the Bible reliable in historical and scientific matters? How can the Bible predict events before they happen? Or were they recorded after the events and written as if they were predictive? Is the Bible any different from other books? In what sense is it “inspired”?

How can God have created the universe and plant, animal, and human life? Could not all life forms have evolved through the survival of the fittest? Or could God have created some forms of life, from which many others then evolved?

An intelligent defense of Christianity calls for thoughtful responses to these and related issues. This is the role of apologetics—to argue for the rationality of Christianity and the veracity of the Bible. This volume presents meaningful answers to these tough questions—answers that help point to the utmost reliability and ultimate truth of Christianity and its divine book, the Bible.

ROY B. ZUCK

About *Bibliotheca Sacra*

A flood is rampant—an engulfing deluge of literature far beyond any one person’s ability to read it all. Presses continue to churn out thousands of journals and magazines like a roiling, raging river.

Among these numberless publications, one stands tall and singular—*Bibliotheca Sacra*—a strange name (meaning “Sacred Library”) but a journal familiar to many pastors, teachers, and Bible students.

How is *Bibliotheca Sacra* unique in the world of publishing? By being the oldest continuously published journal in the Western Hemisphere—1993 marked its 150th anniversary—and by being published by one school for sixty years—1994 marks its diamond anniversary of being released by Dallas Seminary.

Bib Sac, to use its shortened sobriquet, was founded in New York City in 1843 and was purchased by Dallas Theological Seminary in 1934, ten years after the school’s founding. The quarterly’s one-hundred-and-fifty-year history boasts only nine editors. Through those years it has maintained a vibrant stance of biblical conservatism and a strong commitment to the Scriptures as God’s infallible Word.

I am grateful to Kregel Publications for producing a series of volumes commemorating both the journal’s sesquicentennial (1843–1993) and its diamond anniversary (1934–1994). Each volume in the Kregel *Vital Issues Series* includes carefully selected articles from the thirties to the present—articles of enduring quality, articles by leading evangelicals whose topics are as relevant today as when they were first produced. The chapters have been edited slightly to provide conformity of style. As Dallas Seminary and Kregel Publications jointly commemorate these anniversaries of *Bibliotheca Sacra*, we trust these anthologies will enrich the spiritual lives and Christian ministries of many more readers.

ROY B. ZUCK, EDITOR
Bibliotheca Sacra

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PART 1:

Problems in Christianity

CHAPTER 1

The Nature and Origin of Evil

Robert D. Culver

Not many years ago at a state college, a professor of sophomore ethics, more interesting than profound, proposed to refute by anecdote any Christian explanation of the problem of evil in history. The life of a child in the small college town had recently been taken by a careless hit-and-run automobile driver. At the funeral the pastor had administered the usual comfort. “God has taken this little one from scenes of this life to heaven.” The professor’s caustic comment to the sophomores, “God didn’t do that; a guilty hit-and-run driver did it!” The sophomores thought about the problem—and though no one phrased the question, everyone was thinking, In a world which most people in a Christianized culture think was created by God, how can gross evil be present? Is God not strong enough to eliminate it? Or is He not good enough? Or is He not wise enough to make a better world? Each of these refinements of the question leads to still further questions.¹

The usual Christian explanation starts with a distinction between natural evil(s) and moral evil. Examples of natural evils are floods such as the one in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, before the turn of the century, which destroyed many lives and much property; the epidemics of plague that decimate populations from time to time; great fires, such as the Chicago fire; earthquakes, such as the disastrous ones in Sicily, Turkey, Iran, Peru, and elsewhere. The evil in each natural calamity consists in harm to rational moral beings—men, women, and children, or to their environment. Examples of moral evils are murder, theft, adultery, each of which involves injury to other persons. Natural evils involve no moral dereliction in humans, it is thought; it is only God’s power, righteousness, and wisdom which are brought into question. Yet on reflection, man’s moral dereliction is frequently involved in “natural” evils. If the Johnstown engineers had done their duty as well as they should have, the dams up the river would not have

burst. If Mrs. O'Leary had watched where she set the lantern (granting that the famous story is not apocryphal), the cow would not have knocked it over and set Chicago afire. And if so many persons were not crowded into unsafe apartments about the world, neither plagues nor earthquakes would take such heavy tolls.

Significantly the Bible nowhere attempts to justify God (theodicy) in allowing evil in the world. The Book of Job is sometimes thought of as explaining the presence of evil and justifying God. Yet however much Job may tell the devout believer about right reactions to those "natural" evils—loss of property, family, and health—which a pagan cosmology calls "misfortune" or "bad luck," the book never once attempts either to blame or to justify God in letting it all happen. Rather God, who all the time is known to be holy, omnipotent, and omniscient, is acknowledged by a believing, but most fractious patriarch, to be so. The book focuses not on evil in the world, but on a good man's response to it. The climax of the book is reached, the denouement appears, when the chastened saint "answered and said, I know that Thou canst do all things, and that no purpose of Thine can be thwarted. . . . Therefore I . . . repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:1–2, 6).

The Place of Divine Providence

Furthermore the Bible does not hesitate to assign the existence of evil to the permission of God's government—providence. Amos asked, "If a calamity occurs in a city has not the Lord done it?" (Amos 3:6). Isaiah reported the Lord's words to Cyrus, "I am the Lord, and there is no other; besides Me there is no God. . . . The One forming light and creating darkness, causing well-being and creating calamity; I am the Lord who does all these" (Isa. 45:5–7). This language seems to assign natural evils to God's direct agency. It is, however, only a manner of speaking. It was clearly understood by the ones for whom the Bible was first written to apply to God's permissive providence operating through secondary causes toward certain ends that God's wisdom appoints. Second Samuel 24:1 reports an act of human disobedience to God as if it were brought about by direct divine agency. "The anger of the Lord burned against Israel, and it visited David against them to say, 'Go, number Israel and Judah.'" It turned out that the taking of a census was contrary to the moral will of God. It is also apparent that in both David's and the nation's cases previous sins had brought both to a stage where judgment was necessary. Thus the passage

conveys the message that God set this up as an occasion to bring matters to a head. But this is not the end of the matter. First Chronicles 21:1 indicates Satan's place in the matter as direct proximate cause of David's temptation to sin. "Then Satan stood up against Israel and moved David to number Israel" (a comparison of Rev. 13:2, 7–8 with 17:17 or a reading of 2 Thess. 2:7–12 reveals similar instances).

This latter text is not an effort to save the character of God. The texts simply present two parts of one truth. Evil is allowed in the world for reasons God has never seen fully fit to disclose and which human wisdom has not discovered. Yet it is not beyond God's control. This fact of providence prompted such a biblical saying as "For the wrath of man shall praise Thee" (Ps. 76:10). It also resulted in reports of how God raised up wicked tyrants such as the pharaohs of the oppression and Exodus "to proclaim My name through all the earth" (Ex. 9:16; cf. Rom. 9:17), and in prophetic declarations wherein God called an oppressive and destructive Nebuchadnezzar "My servant" (Jer. 25:9). In two prominent cases reported in Scripture divinely permitted evil was overruled for great good—both inevitably cited when this subject comes up. The first is the villainy of Joseph's brothers in kidnapping and selling him as a slave, thus leading to his enforced residence in Egypt where he rose to high political office whereby he saved from starvation not only many Egyptians, but also his own repentant brothers (Gen. 50:15–21; cf. 45:1–15). Joseph's words, "you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good" (50:20) can hardly be improved on. The other case is the crucifixion of Jesus. See Acts 2:23; 3:13–18; 4:27–28. When moral agents go too far in dallying with evil, God can so move in their own activity that even demonic acts fall in line to promote God's ultimate purposes. God sets limits on evil and even uses it, but He is not complicit in it. "Let no one say when he is tempted 'I am tempted of God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust" (James 1:13–14).

Thus although the Bible represents evil as a real problem in the world, it does not trace its origin or cause to the basic structure of the universe, as in all dualistic systems, nor to any element of nature or mankind, nor to God as its Creator. It is here by permission.

Theories on the Origin of Evil

Extensive treatment of the theories that have been proposed as to the nature of evil and its origin would divert this essay far from its immediate purpose. It will be pertinent only to take note of some of the theories that have taken root in Christian soil, so to speak.

The origin of sin—moral evil—and its nature are naturally considered together. They appear together in the Bible and appear together in many discussions on the subject.

In view of the plainness of the biblical presentations of the origin of sin in the present world order, and thereby also the basic nature of evil, it might be supposed that the nature and origin of sin—the best name for moral evil—would present little if any variety among theological writers. And there would not be such variation if human thinkers had been willing to abandon their own wisdom for divine wisdom. The chronicle of views proposed in modern times is interesting for its variety.² P. H. T. Halbach³ (1723–1789), a German, and C. A. Helvitius⁴ (1715–1771), a Frenchman, both representatives of the so-called Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, in common with many of their age, felt that entrenched religious conservatism and political conservatism of their own and earlier times—priests and politicians—were the cause and origin of social evil.⁵ A return to a state of nature would cure it. In this they followed the naturalism of Epicurus. What none of these thinkers seems to have realized is that such views deny freedom in mankind and make him fully a bondsman of ongoing history, one with the beasts, hardly capable of writing books on politics and philosophy.

Only a little earlier Thomas Hobbes⁶ (1588–1679) held a nearly reverse view, regarding evil as a primeval peril from nature. Man's natural reactions to sense stimulation whether positive (good) or negative (evil) provide the ultimate source of evil as well as of good. Government, preferably an absolute monarchy, he said, is the most important element in the restraint of evil!⁷

John Locke (1632–1704) shared with Hobbes the view that sin rises out of man's condition in a supposed state of nature.⁸ Though Locke never rejected the Bible or Christianity, he was caught up in the opinions of his day. He came to accept quite gratuitously, without support in Scripture or written history, the proposition that government arose in a social contract. In the next century

these ideas had great influence on the radical revolution of France and to a lesser extent on the conservative revolution in America. To Locke, sin derived from man's state in nature. Monarchical government is located in the natural state. Democratic government delivers from this state, and this form of government is established by social contract. Thus man's "freedom" exercised in the contract is a means of escape from sin rather than, as a sounder moral theory (and the biblical narrative) asserts, the origin of sin.

A lineal descendant of such a kind of thinking was the *laissez faire* philosophy of Adam Smith (1723–1790), a Scottish economist who provided a rationale for nineteenth-century capitalism.⁹ According to this outlook there is a preestablished harmony in nature which in the economic sphere, at least, will establish justice if government does not interfere. In the period after Charles Darwin this thinking came to be united with the "survival of the fittest" doctrine, with the result that some of the most unbiblical and unrighteous thinking in human history came to pass. It was a way of making economic robber barons—people who amassed fortunes in shipping, railroads, petroleum, coal, and so forth (men who frequently were quite unconcerned about anything but their own finances)—seem to be saints and knights of progress. These "physiocrats" and the "democrats," both finding the cause of sin in social institutions of one sort or another, were equally in error, for if sin lies anywhere in mankind, it is in his marvelous but perilous moral capacity involving voluntary use of freedom.

The next important state in the effort to find the root, cause, and source of evil in the social order itself is in a straight line from eighteenth-century "enlightenment" thinking. The problem still lies, it is said, in the relationship of mankind with nature. But it is not immediately religion or politics or government meddling, as such, but the fault of giving society an economic organization related to a class structure. Present-day governments and organized religion as well as all other instruments of social organization and control are the evil instruments to perpetuate this faulty class structure. Man was naturally good in his state of nature at that period of history when the primitive tribe was organized on equalitarian and communistic lines. As society developed into more advanced structures, classes developed. These are evil, practically the only evil. Good will come again when the classless communistic society again emerges. According to this theory there is no God; man is only an exceeding interesting locus

wherein apparently all goes on according to the same laws of motion that control the physical world. The theory has no adequate explanation of how mankind ever escaped from the “laws” that kept it snug in the original classless communistic society. The name of this theory is, of course, dialectical materialism, that of the German revolutionary, Karl Marx (1818–1883) and his associate, Friedrich Engels, a German manufacturer and socialist author (1820–1895).¹⁰

It will scarcely be denied that present-day efforts at “healing” evil in the world implicitly presuppose some theory of evil like these just reviewed. In the terminology of “sociology,” a science, hopefully, invented by Auguste Comte (1798–1857), with its assumption of Marx-like views of man and nature, sin—and crime as well—is thought of as simply antisocial conduct. Any referent called God, righteousness, or more recently, justice has been attacked as erroneous and nonexistent by the advanced practitioners of the social-scientism of our time. A populace of middle-aged and older people who have not yet apprehended that God has almost been banished from the world of scholarly enterprise, and that collective man, his supposed interests and presumed welfare, put in God’s place, are their offspring now in high school and college. If the Bible is true, no other result could rightly be expected.

The Biblical View on the Origin of Sin

Commonplace in the Christian world view is the fact that the residual magnificence of man by virtue of the image of God in him has been matched by the chronic misery of inborn sin. But there is more to be said. Evil in the universe is older than man. It is older than nature. But it is not as old as creation, for it is a disorder in creation. It is not a part of the stuff of the universe but it is in the universe nevertheless.

The nature of sin and its origin in the present world order are plainly presented in Genesis 1–3. The basic nature of sin was disobedience to God’s command. It entered at the opening of the human race’s course on earth. Paul’s comment summarizes the biblical teaching on this subject. “As through one man [Adam] sin entered into the world. . . . For as through the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners” (Rom. 5:12, 19a).

But this is not an account of the ultimate origin of sin in the universe. For, as is well known, a great evil being represented in

the Eden narrative as a serpent but afterward called “the great dragon . . . the serpent of old [a reference to the narrative of Gen. 3] who is called the devil and Satan,” and so forth (Rev. 12:9) was already present before man disobeyed. In the biblical view sin had its origin in the universe with this great evil being. But whence came Satan?

There are interesting theories regarding the origin of Satan among those who take the Bible seriously and accept its teachings as authoritative divine revelation. There are others who take the Bible seriously, yet find it impossible to accept either the existence of a personal devil or evil spirits called demons. These people are embarrassed by Jesus’ obvious acceptance of the reality of both the Devil and demons and the wealth of material in the New Testament on the subject. Still others who are interested in religions and the Bible only as cultural items to be integrated somehow into general knowledge, find the biblical teaching on Satan and demons quite outdated.¹¹

But these theories, interesting and instructive in themselves, are not important to this study and are essentially alien to one’s biblical presuppositions. The biblical presuppositions tell enough. God is Creator of all except Himself. Satan exists. Therefore Satan, in the biblical view, is a created being. God’s creation is good; therefore Satan was not originally evil. Moral evil originates in a wrong exercise of freedom on the part of a moral being—morality implies freedom. So Satan is a fallen being. Since he is associated frequently with superhuman “principalities and powers,” including angels, it is correct to speak of him as a fallen angel—though angel cannot be defined too narrowly in such a case.

First Timothy 3:6 suggests that Paul may have referred to some commonly assumed “Satan interpretation” of Lucifer in Isaiah 14:12–21. Paul wrote, “Not a new convert, lest he become conceited [“lifted up with pride”] and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil” (1 Tim. 3:6). This does suggest the boastful pride of Lucifer—“But you said in your heart, I will ascend into heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God . . . I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the most High” (Isa. 14:13–14).

Even without this striking but uncertain evidence, the Devil has quite clearly, if inadvertently revealed what his motives have been right along. When “that serpent of old” met the first pair in the Garden and suggested his own goal as a goal for the man and his

wife, he said, “Ye shall be like God” (Gen. 3:5). When “late in time” Satan met the “last Adam” in the temptation contest, and knowing, as did the demons, that he was the “holy One of God” (Mark 1:24; Luke 4:34), he tempted Jesus, “and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world, and their glory and he said to Him, ‘All these things will I give You, if You fall down and worship me’” (Matt. 4:8–9). This reveals an unmistakable ambition to be like God, to replace him as the object of universal worship. In other words Satan’s basic motive is pride or selfishness.

When the “man of sin,” Satan’s protégé, and perhaps embodiment, appears, it is predicted that he “takes his seat in the temple of God,” displaying that the goal of this Satan-inspired Antichrist-Beast shall be that everyone worship the beast (Rev. 13:11–18).

The Essence of Sin

Sin in its essence, then, is the act of preferring oneself or some other being to God. It is to place the ego of oneself ahead of love for and worship of the Creator. This is also suggested by the fact that the first of the Ten Commandments is, “You shall have no other gods before Me” (Ex. 20:3). This commandment, as enlarged in Deuteronomy 6:5, is lifted in eminence above any other moral requirement by Jesus. “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and foremost commandment” (Matt. 22:37–38).

There is no suggestion that either love of others or love of self is primary. Nor is love of neighbor equated with love of God. It is true that Jesus added that a proper love of self is the measure of loving one’s neighbor, and He said that the command to love one’s neighbor is “like” the command to love God (Matt. 22:39). Love of a fellow believer is said by James to be a test of genuine faith in God (James 2:14–17) and John wrote in the same vein: “But whoever has the world’s goods and beholds his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?” (1 John 3:17). But love of God is first. In the famous love chapter (1 Cor. 13) love is said to be the “greatest,” but before that love abides faith and hope—in God, of course. The clear teaching of the Bible is that no person loves another truly or well unless there is a basic faith-hope-love of God out of which that love may grow. Only thus, by beholding steadfastly and obediently the prior claim of God on the life of every individual is

one set free from that inborn selfishness, the debt to Adam that prohibits, spoils, and disqualifies every human affection from attaining to the quality of *agape* love.

This view of sin must be accepted before the biblical teachings regarding the control of Satan over the present world system and the corruption of sin said to run through it can be understood. If people are basically good, or at least perfectible, apart from spiritual renewal, then the Christian approach to reformation of society will inevitably be primarily through government-sponsored education and civil legislation. If sin is mere creaturely limitation, ignorance, poor heredity, or bad government, the conclusions are the same. The approach to society will be mainly by education and legislation or perhaps attempted improvement of heredity through biological manipulation of conception. But if the sin of the world is a form of slavery to evil, evil in humanity itself constantly encouraged by demonic evil in the world, then the Christian's hope for cleansing the world's educational and legislative processes will be realistic as well as real. He will not expect to change the processes of society for the better apart from doing something to make people better. Of course Christians should approve Christian social action through legislative and general educative processes. But believers know that hopes for enduring improvement from these quarters are apart from bringing sizable numbers of people into spiritual enlightenment. If people are dead in trespasses and sins, darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God, then inevitably the Christian approach to society must be primarily through prayer and evangelism. Furthermore long before the "state" becomes interested in doing "good unto all men" the church must be busy showing love to all men, not neglecting to care for her own. "While we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith" (Gal. 6:10).

CHAPTER 2

The Role of Apologetics and Evangelism

Frederic R. Howe

The purposes of this chapter are to seek to clarify the ongoing task of apologetics, to show its divergence from the work of evangelism, and to offer a challenge to the high and worthy task of carrying on both a biblically sound evangelism and a biblically consistent defense of the Christian faith. The words of Jude 3 epitomize the challenge as follows: “Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.”

The very existence of the common salvation of which Jude wrote rested on the redeeming grace of God which had been faithfully proclaimed to Jude’s readers in the work of New Testament evangelism. These believers who had been evangelized were to enter into the sphere of defense or apologetics, setting the clear-cut lines of difference between truth and error. This defense, which was a virtual polemic against false teachers, involved the kind of response stated in Jude 22: “And have mercy on some, who are doubting.” Granting the textual problems in this verse, one still can agree with the words of George Lawler concerning it:

It thus seems reasonable to take Jude’s admonition to mean that we are to extend mercy to those who may have leanings toward such things as are taught by apostates but who are hesitating in doubt. . . . It may well be that some of them are still hesitating, wavering, in doubt as to what is right or wrong and have taken no final step. Some may be disputatious, to be sure, and under the influence of the apostasy, and attempt to support claims made by apostates. In either case, and in both instances, we must make every effort to correct their mistaken views and impressions, even to the point of rebuke if need be.¹

Obviously Jude had primary reference to a specific type of false teaching which had set itself over against the believers. The

activity he urged on his readers at that time conceivably involved the field of polemics, in distinction from apologetics. However, these two fields in the present day have apparently overlapped significantly, so that the words of Jude can apply to the role of the defender of the faith today.

The Task of Apologetics

A description of the task of apologetics depends to a large degree on a number of contingent factors. These include such things as the place of apologetics in the theological encyclopedia, and the actual system of apologetics being developed. On surveying some of these positions, however, it becomes apparent that the work of apologetics involves the careful study of and response to systems of interpreting reality which are opposed to the Christian Trinitarian system.

It is necessary first to review briefly the history of terms pertinent to this field of inquiry and how they have been used. The term *polemics* appeared more frequently in the past than it does now, but it dealt with subject matter that differed from the realm of apologetics, as noted by Beckwith:

Polemics is that department of theology which is concerned with the history of controversies maintained within or by the Christian Church, and with the conducting of such controversies in defense of doctrines held to be essential to Christian truth or in support of distinctive denominational tenets. . . . Theologically, therefore, polemics finds a place after dogmatics and apologetics. . . . The limits of the subject depend upon practical circumstances, the needs of the period, and the disposition of the controversialist.²

The term *apologetics* has a definite relationship to the Greek words ἀπολογία and ἀπολογέομαι. In New Testament times the word ἀπολογία meant *defense*. Its technical usage was limited to a speech of defense, or a reply to some specific charge, and it appears in Acts 22:1 in this way. The apostle Peter wrote, “But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to every one who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence” (1 Peter 3:15). The English word *defense* translates the Greek word ἀπολογία. The dangers of oversimplification in applying the passage to the whole realm of the defense of the faith are clearly obvious. The verse functions in a context particularly meaningful to the readers in the first century. However, on the basis that all Scripture has a teaching content and a

vital applicatory message, believers of all ages can find a principle here, namely, that one must be ready to give a careful answer. Readiness to give a cogent statement clearly implies preparation. The preparation involves a knowledge of the position being defended, and the attacks brought against it. Along with an awareness of issues, furthermore, the apostle Peter stressed an attitude of dependence on God. If the call is issued for the act of giving defense on the basis of this verse, it is imperative also to issue the call for the proper attitude in this activity, an attitude exemplified by New Testament believers in their defense. The passage teaches that believers are encouraged to be prepared to give defense, but this defense is to be devoid of all arrogance, pride, or self-sufficiency, and is to be characterized by meekness, which means controlled strength, not weakness.

Some have felt that 1 Peter 3:15 has no bearing on the defense of the faith in modern times. They feel that the verse must be limited to the times faced by the first readers, when believers were called on to give specific and formal defense to the Roman world power. Passages in the book, such as 1 Peter 2:13–17, are cited to give credence to this viewpoint. The implication is thus drawn that 1 Peter 3:15 refers to only a technical answer in the face of immediate confrontation with the world situation at that time, namely, believers facing the official stance of the government and having to give answer in a formal trial. However, Stibbs evaluates this position in the following manner.

Be ready, says the Greek, *pros apologian*, i.e., with a view to an apology, explanation, or speech in defense. Note the use of this word in Acts 25:16; 2 Timothy 4:16, “answer”; and in Philippians 1:16–17, “defense.” The accompanying phraseology in this verse, however, combines forcibly to suggest something which might be called for at any time in the most informal and spontaneous manner. The verb *aitein*, asketh, suggests ordinary conversation rather than an official inquiry. The words *always* and *to every man* make the reference completely general and comprehensive. The Christian must remember that anybody at any time may ask him to explain and justify his Christian confidence. . . . The Christian is then to engage, not in an aggressive attack on the other person’s will or prejudice, but in a logical account (the word translated reason is *logos*), or reasoned explanation of the hope that is distinctive of the Christian community (cf. Heb. 10:23, RV).³

From the primary meaning of the word ἀπολογία is derived the term *apology*. An apology means a statement of defense, directed specifically against one or more charges brought against the speaker

and/or his viewpoint. By normal progression of thought, *apologetics* comes to mean the entire field of defense, a study of various attacks brought, and answers to those attacks.

Apologetics may therefore be defined as “a study of the clarification and defense of the total system of biblical Trinitarianism with reference to specific attacks against the total system, or against any of the basic elements inherent within the system.” Any definition of this subject will naturally reflect the method and approach of the one who gives the definition. It seems apparent, however, that certain elements are present in any definition given for this field of study.

First, there is obviously a core of truth to be defended and clarified. The first part of the definition refers to this core. It is not the task of apologetics to state or systematize this biblical core. However, in many cases, objections have been brought to points within this system, and the very nature of biblical defense demands that the position itself be stated clearly, so that no false ideas are present in the mind of the one who brings the charge.

Second, there is an ever-changing and ever-growing body of data assembled by opponents who bring attack against Christianity. Great sensitivity and awareness is demanded of the student of apologetics at this juncture. The defense must be firmly rooted in the biblical system, and at the same time the defender must be vitally and keenly committed to an awareness of what is being said against the position in contemporary situations.

The Task of Evangelism

A variety of opinions on what constitutes evangelism vie for attention and consideration. The Word of God gives the framework for this vital task. The Greek verb *εὐαγγελίζομαι* and its cognates are easily the central terms to be considered. The verb itself can be defined as “the action of proclaiming glad tidings,” referring specifically to the Christian message of salvation. An examination of Acts 8:35, 40; and 14:21 reveals that this activity has been carefully delineated in this description:

Evangelization refers to the initial phase of Christian ministry. It is the authoritative proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ as revealed in the Bible in relevant and intelligible terms, in a persuasive manner with the definite purpose of making Christian converts. It is a presentation—penetration—permeation—confrontation that not only elicits but demands a decision. It is preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ for a verdict.⁴

Both the activity involved in and the aims set for evangelism must be grounded in sacred Scripture.

According to the New Testament, evangelism is just preaching the gospel, the evangel. It is a work of communication in which Christians make themselves mouthpieces for God's message of mercy to sinners. Anyone who faithfully delivers that message, under whatever circumstances . . . is evangelizing. Since the divine message finds its climax in a plea from the Creator to a rebel world to turn and put faith in Christ, the delivering of it involves the summoning of one's hearers to conversion. If you are not, in this sense, seeking to bring about conversions, you are not evangelizing; this we have seen already. But the way to tell whether in fact you are evangelizing is not to ask whether conversions are known to have resulted from your witness. It is to ask whether you are faithfully making known the gospel message.⁵

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to explore more deeply the ramifications of these descriptions. Evangelism definitely concerns each ongoing generation of believers (Matt. 28:18–20). For the purposes of this study, evangelism is viewed as the full-orbed proclamation of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

A Comparison of Evangelism and Apologetics

Several distinctions between apologetics and evangelism must be made. First, apologetics as an activity appears as a constantly dynamic and changing study, due simply to the constantly changing flow of ideas in history. As has been observed, many of the world views which opposed Christianity were criticized and answered by apologetics in the past. Present-day apologists can learn from past defenders of the faith, but new problems demand new answers. By contrast, however, the work of evangelism will of necessity demand that no change be made in the actual content of the message. The message of the Gospel must be viewed as a sacred trust (Titus 1:3), to be passed along to each generation without change. Perhaps the well-worn cliché, "changeless truth for changing times," has been overworked. Nonetheless, while the workers in evangelism in each succeeding generation will constantly seek effective communicative skills, they must not change the message. This comparison must be made with the realization that both apologetics and evangelism are based on the entire Christian Trinitarian system.

Second, there seems to be a difference in the actual aim or goal of each activity. Warfield addressed himself to this area in a little-known but major study he did in his separate introduction to the

work of Francis R. Beattie on apologetics. In this carefully constructed effort, Warfield brought cogent response to Abraham Kuyper, and set forth some principles that any student of apologetics needs to evaluate. It is interesting to reflect on the fact that Warfield, in June, 1898, wrote the introductory note to the English translation of Kuyper's *Principles of Sacred Theology*. Warfield's deep appreciation for the contributions made by Kuyper in that statement is clearly obvious. His differences with Kuyper notwithstanding, he exemplified dignity and courtesy. Such a spirit is incumbent on workers in the field of apologetics in this generation, and is often sadly missing.

The goal of apologetics is not primarily the actual conversion of the one receiving the defense to Christianity, as Warfield observed:

It certainly is not in the power of all the demonstrations in the world to make a Christian. Paul may plant and Apollos water; it is God alone who gives the increase. . . . It does not in the least follow that the faith that God gives is an irrational faith, that is, a faith without grounds in right reason. . . . We believe in Christ because it is rational to believe in him, not though it be irrational. . . . We are not absurdly arguing that Apologetics has in itself the power to make a man a Christian or to conquer the world to Christ. Only the Spirit of Life can communicate life to a dead soul, or can convict the world in respect of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment. But we are arguing that faith is, in all its exercises alike, a form of conviction, and is, therefore, necessarily grounded in evidence.⁶

Third, a different body of data pertains to each of these two disciplines. Evangelism has as its focal point the Gospel itself. This fact is made clear in 1 Corinthians 15:1–2a: “Now I make known unto you, brethren, the Gospel which I preached unto you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved.” One who communicates the Gospel functions in a role delineated by Packer in this statement:

To *teach* the gospel is his first responsibility: to reduce it to its simplest essentials, to analyze it point by point, to fix its meaning by positive and negative definition, to show how each part of the message links up with the rest—and to go on explaining it till he is quite sure that his listeners have grasped it. And therefore when Paul preached the gospel, formally or informally, in the synagogue or in the streets, to Jews or to Gentiles, to a crowd or to one man, what he did was to teach—engaging attention, capturing interest, setting out the facts, explaining their significance, solving difficulties, answering objections, and showing how the message bears on life.⁷

Care must be exercised that one does not arbitrarily press this distinction between apologetics and evangelism as to content. Obviously when Paul preached the Gospel, he was involved in close contact with people, and there seems to be every indication that he answered questions and got involved in meaningful discussion. However, it also seems that the purpose of these discussions most often went directly to the argumentation involved in proving that Jesus is the Messiah and that the Old Testament verified this. The content of apologetics, by contrast, includes the broader sphere of the entire Christian position. Perhaps this contrast is one of degree and emphasis.

Fourth, the end result of each activity differs. Evangelism finds within its domain a vital and earnest seeking for conversion from the proclamation of the Gospel. This result is the work of God, to be sure, and not man, as exemplified in Acts 16:14: "And a certain woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul." On the other hand, while apologetics can serve in the realm of preevangelism, it seems logical to limit its intended results to the fulfillment of the task of giving an answer, and of presenting a reason for the hope that is within the believer.

However, who can ultimately fathom or even understand the work of God the Holy Spirit in this entire sphere of operations? Who can actually say that He would not be pleased, as He sovereignly moves, to use the arguments marshaled within the scope of apologetics to act as probing forces in the heart of an unbeliever? The actual proof of the veracity of these arguments, insofar as the inward response or acquiescence to the argumentation is concerned, involves the work of the Holy Spirit. It must be realized, however, that God the Holy Spirit does not authenticate or verify propositionally or historically inaccurate data. Warfield summarizes this issue as follows:

The Holy Spirit does not work a blind, an ungrounded faith in the heart. What is supplied by his creative energy in working faith is not a ready-made faith, rooted in nothing, and clinging without reason to its object; nor yet new grounds of belief in the object presented; but just a new ability of the heart to respond to the grounds of faith, sufficient in themselves, already present to the understanding.⁸

In summary, it has been observed that apologetics and evangelism do have some significant differences. Apologetics

will be changing constantly, in its methodology, whereas evangelism will never change in the core of its message. The primary goal of apologetics is to give an answer, not to win adherents. The working materials available to each field differ considerably. And the results of the activity of each field seemingly are different. God the Holy Spirit works sovereignly as the Gospel is proclaimed in biblical evangelism, and He vindicates the truthfulness of Christianity. A defender of the faith, however, does not expect Him to function in this way in the work of apologetics. It is sufficient to have the answer presented by the Christian worker in apologetics. Obviously the worker must give an answer in the strength of the Holy Spirit. But he then calmly rests the issue with God Himself.

Conclusion

A striking illustration of how apologetics and evangelism overlap on some occasions is found in the life of Viggo Olsen, M.D. The fascinating account of his service in the country of Bangladesh is well known, as recorded in his book *Daktar: Diplomat in Bangladesh*.⁹ Portions of that book have been reprinted in a small booklet entitled *The Agnostic Who Dared to Search*.¹⁰ The story told by Olsen reveals that before he and his wife became Christians, they decided to embark on a detailed study of Christianity with the intention of rejecting it on intellectual grounds. Little by little, as they studied works that deal with data common to apologetics and evidences, all the while as unregenerate individuals, they were led step by step to see the truthfulness of Christianity. Their study was no minor investigation or casual perusal. It was an exhaustive search into many of the deepest issues that are treated in textbooks on Christian apologetics. On strict historical evidence, this is a case study revealing that God is pleased to use deductive and inductive argumentation in the actual thought processes of an unregenerate person to demonstrate truth. One must say that this is the case, or else be driven to the unwarranted conclusion that Olsen was not telling the truth. When the Olsens later both trusted Jesus Christ as their personal Redeemer, they acknowledged that their entrance into the sphere of redemption was all by the grace of God. Throughout the entire process of the study in which the Olsens engaged, their mental facilities were functioning within the realm of the darkened understanding so vividly portrayed in the words of Ephesians

4:18. Yet since they are human beings in the image of God, they still perceived truth.

This same dimension of perception can also be seen in the case of the apostle Paul. He was certainly unregenerate as these words indicate: “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads” (Acts 26:14). These goads or searching, probing instrumentalities were operative and functioning within the thought patterns of an unregenerate man. This is obvious, since Jesus portrayed Saul as actively resisting them, and he certainly could not resist what he could not have the intellectual capacity to understand in the first place. Bruce’s comments about this process are appropriate:

This homely proverb from agricultural life suggests that there was already in the depths of Paul’s mind a half-conscious conviction that the Christian case was true. Stephen’s arguments were perhaps more cogent than Paul allowed himself to admit, and his demeanor at his trial and in his death made a deep impression on Paul. It was probably in large measure to stifle this conviction and impression that Paul threw himself so furiously into the campaign of repression. But the goad kept on pricking his conscience, until at last the truth that Jesus was risen indeed burst forth into full realization and acknowledgment as He appeared to Paul in person and spoke to him by name outside the walls of Damascus.¹¹

Even as God used thoughts in the life of the apostle Paul probing into his mind and conscience as goads, He used a rational process of testing and weighing arguments in the lives of the Olsens as guides along the way to His sovereign work of regeneration.

As is the case with any field of endeavor in the Christian realm, there is much work now to be done. The challenge to get involved in the task of Christian defense is mandatory. This present writer would like to challenge workers in the present day to a new effort in apologetics. Much time and effort has been spent articulating major systems of apologetics, and pondering their relative merits and weaknesses. This is as it should be, for this is an important and even crucial matter. However, many avenues of intellectual activity are yet to be pursued in the defense and confirmation of the Christian faith. Regardless of the type of apologetic system espoused, the task must be accomplished. Reflecting on the urgency of this issue, for example, Killen calls for a renewed dedication to the real task of apologetics as he outlines a total defense of the faith, and proposes a truly biblical apologetic.¹²