

EIGHT APOLOGETICS MYTHS THAT UNDERMINE EVANGELISM

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Apologetics, simply put, is defending the claims of the Christian faith over and against the claims of competing worldviews. Due to the complexity of many non-Christian worldviews, the apologetic task can sometimes seem like a labyrinth of intellectual argumentation. As a result many, if not most Christians have turned away from engaging in apologetics altogether. Though the reasons given for such neglect are many and varied, I believe that they all arise from a basic ignorance of the nature of the apologetic task. The ministry of apologetics is vital to the mission of the Church. The purpose of this paper is to examine eight prevalent “myths” which tend to circulate throughout the Christian community concerning the nature and purpose of apologetics and to offer a response to each that will, hopefully, convince the reader of the importance of the apologetic ministry in the life of the church.

Myth #1 - “You can’t reason someone into the kingdom!”

This is perhaps the most commonly voiced objection that Christians give concerning the nature of apologetics. Throughout the history of the church there have always been those who feel that reason and faith are diametrically opposed. They feel that any attempt to engage the Divine using our own human intellect is against the very nature of the Gospel and will only lead us away from God. While there is a kernel of truth to this statement, it is fundamentally flawed because it represents a

misunderstanding of the purpose of human reasoning. Perhaps an illustration from church history is in order.

John Wesley, as it is commonly known, experienced a spiritual rebirth while listening to the preface of Martin Luther's commentary on the book of Romans being read at the now famous Aldersgate meeting. As a result of this, he held Luther in high esteem and recommended his writings to many. One of the books he admired, based solely on its reputation was Luther's commentary on the book of Galatians. However, after one day reading it for himself and seeing how opposed Luther was to the use of reasoning in dealing with the Gospel, Wesley made the following comment in his journal:

“How does he (almost like Tauler) decry reason, right or wrong, as an irreconcilable enemy to the Gospel of Christ! Whereas, what is reason (the faculty so called) but the power of apprehending, judging, and discoursing? Which power is no more to be condemned in the gross, than seeing, hearing or feeling.” (June 15th, 1741)

Wesley understood that while the Holy Spirit alone can lead an unbeliever to Christ, reason must not be abandoned in the process because it is just like all the other senses that we are given by God. And just like our other senses, our reasoning can deceive us; however, we are not called to ignore our reasoning just as we are not called to ignore our sense of seeing or hearing. I often refer to this quote when dealing with those who hold to this first myth because it illustrates an appropriate understanding of the use of reason in the life of the Christian— as one of the many tools that God has given humanity to use for His glory.

The use of reason in evangelism could take up this entire paper but we must move on. Before we do, two more things must be noted concerning the inability to “reason someone into the kingdom.” First, this mindset often hides a lack of desire to pursue

apologetics due to, for lack of a better term, intellectual laziness. Apologetics requires constant thought and reflection that many Christians find difficult, and therefore, they simply neglect this aspect of their faith.

Secondly, God can and often does use reasoning to aid in drawing people to himself. The truth is that many Christians have opened their hearts to the Lord as a result of seeing the reasonableness of the claims of Christ. Examples of this can be found throughout the history of the church. Augustine, Aquinas, C.S. Lewis and Lee Strobel (as well as the author of this paper) are just a few examples of such individuals. Though reason won't bring people into the kingdom by itself, it is one of the many avenues through which God draws a person to Himself.

Myth #2 – “A good apologetic will bring anyone to faith in Jesus!”

This misconception represents the other side of the coin of myth #1. While the apologetic task is important, it must be kept in its proper context. The Christian must understand that the purpose of apologetics is to tear down intellectual strongholds and push past intellectual smokescreens that are present in the lives of unbelievers and believers alike. The apologetic task is, metaphorically speaking, plowing the field of the mind so that the seed of the Gospel can find fertile ground and not be hindered by “weeds” of falsehood. Lack of intellectual evidence is not what keeps the unbeliever away from the cross—sin is. We must always keep in mind that human beings are, in and of themselves, sinful and selfish and until the unbeliever repents, all the truth in the world won't change his or her heart. Apologetics must always play a secondary role to

conviction of the Holy Spirit. If a Christian fails to realize this, he or she will become frustrated very quickly during an apologetic encounter.

Myth #3 – “Apologetics is okay for some people but it’s just not important for me.”

This statement could not be farther from the truth. Many Christians feel that they are gifted in other areas and therefore, they are not called to engage in the apologetic task. Others feel that apologetics should be left only to those who are specifically called to the apologetic ministry. Granted, not everyone is called or equipped to be a Hugh Ross or a Ravi Zacharias, however not everyone is called to be a Billy Graham or a Luis Palau. Does this mean that every Christian is not called to engage in evangelism? Surely not!

On the Contrary, the New Testament abounds with passages urging believers to defend their faith intellectually. For example, 1 Peter 1:13 reads, “*Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*” (ESV) The Greek idiom translated as ‘preparing your minds for action’ literally means ‘girding up the loins of your mind’. This ‘girding up the loins’ represents someone preparing for intense physical activity. The fact that Peter applies it to ones mind shows that the believer is to ready his or her mind with the same intensity.

Myth #4 – “I don’t need apologetics, I already believe!”

Many Christians feel that since they have already placed their faith in Christ, they are in no need of further evidence of His truth. Two quick responses are in order. First of all (and obviously!), the apologetic task is not *primarily* aimed at the believer, but

rather at the unbeliever who needs evidence or reason before he or she will be open to the Gospel. Therefore, it is the duty of the believer to be able to offer, to the best of his or her ability, such evidence and reasoning, to be able to “give an account for the hope that lies within.”

Secondly, apologetics does play a valuable role in the life of a believer as well. In times of doubt, the believer is often strengthened by his or her knowledge of truth. Apologetics, in its purest form, is the application of wisdom and understanding to the minds of believers and unbelievers alike. Proverbs 3:19 offers profound insight on this subject:

*The LORD by wisdom founded the earth;
by understanding he established the heavens;
by his knowledge the deeps broke open,
and the clouds drop down the dew.
My son, do not lose sight of these—
keep sound wisdom and discretion,
and they will be life for your soul
and adornment for your neck.
Then you will walk on your way securely,
and your foot will not stumble.
If you lie down, you will not be afraid;
when you lie down, your sleep will be sweet.” (ESV)*

If God himself founded the earth by wisdom and established the heavens by understanding, then surely these things should be important in the believer’s walk with Him as well. Wisdom, knowledge and understanding are all gifts from God; to neglect such gifts is not only unbiblical, but also foolish.

Myth #5 – “Apologetics is just regurgitating facts to win arguments!”

This is a common misconception among believers and non-believers alike. However, it’s simply not true. The point of the apologetic task should never be to win an argument, (though that may be a result) rather, the apologist should seek to share the knowledge of the Lord with those who don’t know Him and to help open their minds to the truth by exposing the flaws of competing worldviews by demonstrating the reality of the Gospel message.

Myth #6 – “People who use apologetics are arrogant and mean-spirited”

Sadly enough, this is often the case. However, one must not, if you will, throw out the baby with the bathwater. Those who engage in the apologetic task out of prideful motives and act arrogantly are doing so in direct opposition to the teaching of scripture. The Bible gives very specific guidelines on how to defend the faith and in what manner to do so:

1 Peter 3:15 “ . . .but in your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.” (ESV)

Philippians 4:5 “Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near.” (NRSV)

Proverbs 11:2 “When pride comes, then comes disgrace; but wisdom is with the humble. (NRSV)

The Biblical portrait of an apologist is of one who speaks the truth in humility and gentleness, never seeking to build his or her reputation, but rather, to glorify God.

Myth #7 – “I’m not smart enough to do apologetics!”

Prevalent among many Christians is the belief that the apologetic task requires a genius-level I.Q. Many Christians, feel as if they would not know what to say when confronted with a good argument for a competing worldview and therefore shy away from apologetics altogether. While understandable, this myth is unnecessary because any sincere believer is equipped with the necessary tools to engage in apologetics. First and foremost, the believer has intimate knowledge of what God has done in his or her life. While highly subjective, this knowledge is not without significant apologetic value (In fact, some apologists would say that this is the only sure evidence to which one can look for proof).

It is important to keep in mind that apologetics is more than just stating facts and making arguments; rather, apologetics involves mostly listening and then asking questions. For example, most worldviews that set themselves against the Gospel lack either internal or external coherence. Because of this, the best apologetic strategy often is just to let the non-believer state clearly what he or she believes and then to start asking them questions similar to the ones they pose towards Christianity. The great twentieth century apologist Francis Schaeffer believed that merely pushing the non-believer to the logical conclusions of his or her worldview was often all that was necessary to start the non-believer on the path towards accepting the truth of the Gospel.

Christians sometimes feel as if they are the only ones who have to defend what they believe. This should not be the case; every worldview that claims truth must provide such truth. In his book *Jesus Among Other Gods*, Ravi Zacharais lists four categories of

questions that must be answered by every worldview consistently within themselves and with relationship to one another in order for that worldview to be accepted as true. They are Origin, Meaning, Morality and Destiny. Every worldview must give an account of (1) where we came from, (2) why we are here, (3) how do we account for morality, and (4) what is our eventual fate. If one can remember those four questions and be able to give the Christian response to each, then he or she can effectively engage in the apologetic task.

Furthermore, it is important to keep in mind that apologetics is, like any other form of ministry, primarily a spiritual battle; and we are not to try to fight it in our own strength. The Lord Himself aids the believer as he or she ministers apologetically. Two passages in the Hebrew Scriptures serve to illustrate this point nicely:

Isaiah 54:17 “no weapon that is fashioned against you shall succeed, and you shall confute every tongue that rises against you in judgment. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD and their vindication from me, declares the LORD.” (ESV)

*Proverbs 2:6-11 “For the LORD gives wisdom;
from his mouth come knowledge and understanding;
he stores up sound wisdom for the upright;
he is a shield to those who walk in integrity,
guarding the paths of justice
and watching over the way of his saints.
Then you will understand righteousness and justice
and equity, every good path;
for wisdom will come into your heart,
and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul;
discretion will watch over you,
understanding will guard you. . .” (ESV)*

The believer can take comfort in the fact that Jesus claimed to be “*The Truth*” (*John 14:6*). Therefore, if one is defending Jesus, then he or she is defending truth; and truth

will never fail. Christ's followers must not feel like they always have to be on the defensive, after all, "*the fool is the person who says there is no God.*" (Psalm 14:1 NRSV)

Myth #8 – "I don't need apologetics, I have the Holy Spirit!"

Like myth #1, this myth establishes a false dilemma—namely that the role of the Holy Spirit in a believer's life eliminates the use of reasoning and argumentation in bringing people to Christ. This is not the case at all. As we have previously noted, apologetics is one of the avenues through which the Holy Spirit moves to reach out to people. More importantly, at the end of his earthly ministry, Jesus spoke to his disciples specifically regarding the role of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. (John 14:26 ESV)

When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you. (John 16:13-15 ESV)

One of the ways that the Holy Spirit glorifies Christ is by teaching and guiding us deeper and deeper into God's truth. Since the apologetic task relies solely upon God's truth, the Holy Spirit permeates and is the one that empowers the apologetic task. The two are not, nor ever should be in opposition to one another.

In closing, it is important for Christians to realize the important role that apologetics plays in the life and ministry of the Church. The world is constantly

bombarding people with reasons not to believe in the Son of God who died in order to reconcile them to their Creator. It is imperative that Christians not surrender in the battle for the minds and souls of those who don't believe. Christians (Evangelicals especially) are constantly being portrayed as anti-intellectual and the Christian worldview is seen as a fairy tale that only the weak-minded or naïve believe in. Much of this criticism is due to the fact that for the most part, the Christian community has not taken Jesus' command in Matthew 22:37 seriously: "*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.*" (NRSV) The Christian cannot love God with all his or her heart while at the same time ignoring the call to the apologetic task.