

Apologetics and Soul Winning

The field of study relating to the positive defense of the Christian faith and the refutation of unbelief is *apologetics*. The word is derived from the Greek word *apologia*. It is rendered “defense” (NKJV) and “answer” (KJV) in a relevant passage in 1 Peter. Peter wrote, “[A]lways be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks a reason for the hope that is in you...” (3:15). Brown says, “[A]pologetics is the working out and presentation of intellectual, scientific and philosophical arguments...” (51). Rogers and Rogers state, “The word was often used of the argument for the defense in a court of law... can also mean an informal explanation or defense of one’s position” (575). Such entails a logical (correctly reasoned) defense. Apologetics is also called *Christian Evidences* because it involves the study of the evidence that provides the foundation for the case for Christianity. Apologetics (Christian evidences) is concerned with the evidence for (1) the existence of God, (2) the inspiration of the Bible and (3) the deity of Jesus of Nazareth, and areas of study that relate to these crucial doctrines.

The word “evangelism” is derived from a family of Greek words (cf. Brown 107). *Euangelizo* is to bring or announce good news, or proclaim and preach the same. *Euangelizomai* is to proclaim or preach glad tidings. *Euangelistes* is the proclaimer of the Gospel (good news), the evangelist. In a definitive volume on evangelism, Michael Green wrote:

THE ENTHUSIASM TO evangelize which marked the early Christians is one of the most remarkable things in the history of religions. Here were men and women... so convinced that they had discovered the riddle of the universe, so sure of the one true God whom they had come to know, that nothing must stand in the way of their passing on this good news to others... In Christianity they had found something utterly new, authentic, and satisfying. They were not prepared to deny Christ even in order to preserve their own lives, and in the manner of their dying they made converts to their faith...

There can be little doubt that the main motive for evangelism was a theological one. These men did not spread their message because it was advisable for them to do so, nor because it was the socially responsible thing to do. They did not do it primarily for humanitarian or agathistic utilitarian reasons... *Christian evangelism has its motivation rooted in what God is and what he has done for man through the coming and the death and the resurrection of Jesus...* (236-237, emp. added).

There is a crucial relationship between “apologetics” (the defense of the Christian faith, and the refutation of unbelief), and “evangelism” (soul winning). First, the ultimate purpose of apologetics is understood in light of the very theme of biblical revelation, which revelation enjoins the need for Christian apologetics and evangelism. The theme of the Bible is the redemption of humanity to the glory of God through the person and work of Jesus Christ (cf. John 5:39; 2 Timothy 3:14-17). Francis Schaeffer, who did much work in the field of apologetics during the 20th century, said:

I wonder if “apologetics” which does not lead people to Christ as Savior, and then on to their living under the Lordship of Christ in the whole of life really is Christian apologetics. There certainly is a place for an academic study of a subject called “apologetics,” as the defense and the credibility of Christianity, but if it does not lead the students to use that material in the way I have spoken about in the previous sentence, one can ask its value... [I]f the total course does not give answers so that the students are left with more than probability in regard to Christianity, it is much less than a course in philosophy can... be. (186-87)

Schaeffer’s point is sound. Since “those who do not know God and... do not obey the Gospel of our Lord Jesus... will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord” (2 Thessalonians 1:8-9 NASV), it surely is the case that true Christian apologetics ultimately seeks to see people delivered (saved) from this awesome fate of eternal lostness. Thomas B. Warren used to tell those of us who were his students that obedience to the Gospel is the ultimate goal of the apologist, but the cause of Christ is still greatly served even when a skeptic, through sound apologetics, becomes convinced of the existence of God and the falsehood of evolution, though not convinced of New Testament Christianity. Surely one can see the possible good for the cause of evangelism that can result when a world-renowned atheist, such as the late professor Antony Flew, renounced atheism and embraced theism even though, unfortunately, he did not obey the Gospel of Christ.

Furthermore, the relationship of apologetics and evangelism is evidenced when one observes the current intellectual and philosophical landscape. British philosopher, David Conway, has stated:

... [T]he theistic doctrine... once formed the lynchpin of western civilization... Theism was... increasingly subject to challenge and was eventually altogether discarded by most philosophers... [Today] skepticism... has culminated... not simply in a form of secularism or militant atheism that, for a long time, has been practically [fashionable] among western intelligentsia, but in a novel and highly sophisticated form of [relativism]... known as *post-modernism*. According to those who share this fashionable intellectual posture, all belief systems are equally without rational basis and hence none is worthy of greater credence than any other... (4-5)

As one aims to reach others with the Gospel of Christ, it seems difficult to think of few things that could be more useful today than an awareness of how to set forth the case for Christianity in a culture so heavily influenced by atheistic, agnostic and post-modern thought in education, government, science and religion.

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