

ASBURY THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY **90TH** ANNIVERSARY SPECIAL EDITION
—1923-2013—

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DOI: 10.7252/Paper.000011

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Cover Design by Kelli Dierdorf



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Harold B. Kuhn

March 6, 1974



The term ‘Apologetics’ and the discipline which it indicates are rooted in the usages of antiquity. The *apology* finds its first formal origin in the legal procedures of the city state of Athens, in which the plaintiff (an individual or the polis itself) brought an accusation, and in turn the accused might make a reply, called an *apologia*—literally a “speaking off” of the charge. Thus the basic meaning of the term came to be *defense*; it was in this sense that Socrates spoke in his own behalf before his accusers.

If a word of explanation is fitting at the outset, it would be this: the word ‘apologetics’ sometimes carries a negative, even unpleasant connotation. This is due, in part, to the fact that it is customary to make an apology for some social miscue, or some word spoken in haste. Not only so, but some tend to regard the *bona fide* apologist as an unduly aggressive and personally defensive individual, who seeks primarily to shout down his opponent. But making allowance for unfortunate usages, the term apologetics has a long and respectable history, and the practice which it suggests has been, as we hope to show, an intrinsic and beneficial part of the Christian proclamation.

As classical philosophy came increasingly to be religious in tone, the element of apology came to increasing prominence in antiquity. Many of Plato’s religio-philosophical discourses are quite clearly designed to persuade. Insofar, especially as these writings were concerned with the refutation of the current polytheism, they were clearly apologetic in tone. Thus the term *apologia*, as well as the procedures which it connotes, were in use in pre-Christian times. Near the beginning of the Christian era, Judaism made a determined effort to relate itself affirmatively to the systems of Hellenism. This was exemplified particularly in the Hebrew community in Alexandria, where Philo Judaeus (c. 20 B.C.- c. 42 A.D.) felt constrained to present an affirmative case for his historic faith before the intellectual spokesmen for the multi-stranded academic culture of the Egyptian metropolis.

Philo, as is well known, saw the Old Testament as the greatest and wisest of books, and Moses as the prince of teachers. By means of allegorical methods of exegesis, he attempted to show that the Old Testament was not only harmonious with the best in Hellenistic thought, but also that it contained a wisdom more lofty and certain than the best in non-Christian systems. By means of the concept of the Logos he sought to connect the major cosmological ideas of the Hebrew Scriptures with those extant in the Greco-Roman world.¹ The result was a powerful synthesis of Mosaic faith and Hellenism. He felt, incidentally, that philosophy was God's special gift to the Greek world, so that its best thinkers were able to discover by reason alone a great deal of that which was given to the Jewish people by special revelation.²

It is proposed to deal with the general subject of Apologetics under four rubrics: first, attention will be given to the apologetic element in the writings of the New Testament; second, brief consideration will be given to the development of apologetics during the early Christian centuries, when the exigencies of the occasion seemed to be the major driving force behind apologetic activity. The third division will examine the early forms of apologetic models, and to note something of the dynamics of model making. The final section will attempt to deal briefly with several forms of structured or modeled apologetics, and if possible, to point the way to the type of apologetic thrust which the conditions of our own century might dictate.

1

There is a surprisingly large degree of attention given to the element of apologetics in the New Testament. The term *apologia* and its verbal form *apologeomai*, appears four times in the New Testament (Acts 19:33, Acts 22:1, Philippians 1:7 and Philippians 1:17). The concepts which these terms bear appear far more widely than the terms themselves. This is true of the Gospels, as well as in the Pauline and Petrine writings. Our Lord

himself is shown to have made a reply to representatives of three major Jewish elements of his time, Pharisees, Sadducees and 'Lawyers' (Matthew 22:15ff; 23ff; and 35ff). Paul's apologetic activity is described in the closing chapters of the Book of Acts, in which he undertook a defense before the mob in Jerusalem (Acts 22:1ff), before the council (Acts 23:1ff), before Felix (Acts 24:1ff) and during his hearing before Festus and Agrippa (Acts 26:1ff). Echoes of this same motif appear in his Epistles, notably in the Corinthian correspondence (1 Corinthians 9; 2 Corinthians 13) and in the Epistle to the Galatians (Galatians 1 & 2). To this we would certainly add his masterly apologetic discourse at the Areopagus in Athens (Acts 17:22-31).

One of the discernible forms of apologetic activity in the New Testament is that which centers in the use of Old Testament materials by New Testament writers. It may be said, as an aside, that this is an aspect of early Church apologetics that is frequently overlooked. It goes without saying that the Evangelist Matthew makes the most conspicuous use of materials from the Hebrew Scriptures in his Gospel. Some thirty times the formula, with slight variations, occurs there: "...that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by..." (Matthew 1:22; 2:15; 2:23; 13:14; etc.). The purpose of this and similar usages was, of course, to support the claim of Christianity against objectors, (in this case perhaps non-believing Jews). The manner in which Scripture was employed to this purpose, and the shift of the mode of employment of it is discussed by Father Barnabas Lindars;³ considerations of time forbid any detailed consideration of this more minute question.

While the use of the Old Testament for apologetic purposes by New Testament writers is most visible in St. Matthew's Gospel, the Epistle to the Hebrews is in some respects even more noteworthy for its reasoned employment of Old Testament motifs with a purpose to persuasion. A. B. Bruce has called this Epistle "the first apology for Christianity."⁴ The writer seems to have been in correspondence with Christians of

Jewish origin who stood in peril of slipping quietly away from their Christian faith and back into Judaism. Against the tempting possibilities that Old Testament faith was being abandoned, that suffering and death were unworthy of a divine Messiah, and that the lack of ritual in the Christian Church represented a loss of vital visibilities in Judaism, the author of Hebrews made a three-fold defense. First, far from losing the essential features of the divinely given Faith channeled to the Patriarchs and Fathers, Christianity was shown not only to fulfill the inner core of Judaic religion, but to surpass all of its usages. Likewise, the sufferings of Christ were, far from being an argument against the dignity of the Messiah, the normal expectation of the *Hebrew* prophetic message. Further, our author points out that while the ritual system of Tabernacle and Temple were no longer observed, they have found a far more satisfying fulfillment in the priestly work of our Lord.

Thus the apologetic thrust of the Epistle to the Hebrews continues that which is both implicit and explicit in the Gospels. It carries that thrust further by showing that Christianity is the perfect Faith, fulfilling and surpassing all that the “Law and Prophets” contained and prefigured. The use of the *a fortiori* form of argumentation was ‘a natural’ to this mode of apologetic.

Much more ought to be said at the point of the employment of the apologetic method by writers of the New Testament. For a careful survey of the methodology of the several New Testament writers, the reader is invited to note especially the section “Apologetics in the New Testament” in Fr. Avery Dulles’ work, *Theological Resources: A History of Apologetics*.⁵ The following is an excerpt from the conclusions which Father Dulles reaches:

While none of the NT writings is directly and professedly apologetical, nearly all of them contain reflections of the Church’s efforts to exhibit the credibility of its message and to answer the obvious objections that would have

risen in the minds of adversaries, prospective converts, and candid believers. Parts of the NT—such as the major Pauline letters, Hebrews, the four Gospels, and Acts—reveal an apologetical preoccupation in the minds of the authors themselves.⁶

It seems clear, in the light of the foregoing, that the apologetic mood, which here and there rises to objective expression, is pervasive of the writings of the New Testament. It should be added, that the resurrection of our Lord occupied a place of unique importance in the overall New Testament apologetic thrust. This event seemed to the New Testament writers, especially Paul, as the crowning manifestation of God's mighty and supernatural activity within human history. As such, it formed not only the basis for the *kerygma* of the primitive Church, but also a major point of reference and appeal as that Church stood at the cutting edge of history, tremulous but confident that it possessed a Faith worthy of universal acceptance.

2

The first two centuries of Church history were marked by a continuation of the apologetic activity begun by our Lord and by the Apostles. Two sets of circumstances called this forth. First, the Church faced, upon repeated occasions, persecution at the hands of the Imperial power—persecutions of varied fierceness, which at times decimated the Church and at most times during the second and third centuries formed a living threat to all who professed to be part of The Way. The second set of circumstances came to the fore as forms of teaching incompatible with the Christian Evangel were advanced within the Christian body (e.g., heresies). Thus was shaped the two-fold character of early Christian apologetics.

Chief among the Greek apologists of the ante-Nicene period were Justin, called The Martyr (died 166) and Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons (140-202). While the causes of the Imperial

persecutions were many, one causative factor was the slander directed against believers by both Jews and pagans. Another factor was, we feel certain, the general uneasiness which pervaded the Empire as a result of the constant incursions of the Germanic barbarians from the north and the east. This led to the psychological phenomenon of scapegoating. It was a concern of both Justin and Irenaeus, not only to refute such charges as those of cannibalism and of sexual license among Christians, but to convince the Imperial power of the reliability of Christian believers as citizens. High officials were assured that the presence of Christians within the prevailing society served only beneficial purposes. Thus, far from being responsible for the troubles of the Empire, Christians through their prayers actually served to hold the Empire together. The objective was, of course, to secure civil toleration for the Christian body. We do not know whether such apologetic writings actually reached the Emperors or not. Probably they had their largest effect at lower levels of the Imperial administration.

As the Christian body came to include many persons who were educated in the science of the time, early Greek apologists sought to relate the Christian Evangel to the prevailing knowledge of the age. Justin sought to show that Christian truth, particularly as it centered about the teaching of the *Logos*, carried forward to completion the major themes of Greek thought. In this, Justin laid the groundwork for much of later apologetics, in pointing out to objectors of all levels the essential affinities between Christianity and the best of prevailing thought. Greek philosophy was thus recognized as the *praeambula fidei*, preparing the way for the Christian Revelation.

Irenaeus developed an apologetic primarily designed to deal with the increasing currency of teachings which threatened the primary teachings of Christianity. His work *Against the Heresies* is not only a defense of Christianity; but it is as well a major source of information concerning heretical movements,

notably Gnosticism. Tertullian (c. 160-245) likewise did an important work in his *Apologetic* and his two books *To the Nations*. The latter was a well-reasoned treatise in defense of the Christian message against the prevailing paganism. To the list we might add his work *On Idolatry* in which he exposed the unwisdom of the worship of idols against the backdrop of Christian theism. His works suggest a dual form of opposition, namely the bitterness of the Jewish communities toward the Christians, and the mocking attitude of the pagan thinkers of the period. Tertullian is brilliant in his application of the principles of Roman law and Roman justice to the defense of Christianity.⁷ Incidentally, the Jews were not ignored in this period; Justin addressed an apologetic to them under the title of *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew*, in which, in the spirit of the Epistle to the Hebrews, he points out that the New Covenant has abrogated the Old, and urges Jews to turn to Christ as the source of the completion of their ancient faith.

Origen (185-254), usually regarded to be the greatest of the Alexandrian apologists, undertook a defense of the Christian faith in terms of a head-on refutation of the prevailing currents of pagan thought. Drawing upon the insights of his great teacher Clement of Alexandria (c. 150-214), Origen sought to elaborate a philosophical base for the several doctrines of Christianity. Unfortunately many of his writings have not survived. We do possess his major work, *On Principles* (in a Latin translation) and of course his *Contra Celsum*. While Origen was basically a Platonist, he did not attempt to erect his apology upon a thorough acceptance of Platonic thought.

It is significant that Origen's greatest apologetic work was elicited by the ablest criticism of Christianity which paganism could mount, that by the Platonist Celsus. If one were to paraphrase a homely phrase, it might read: "It takes a Platonist to catch a Platonist." In any case, it was in his engagement with Celsus that Origen produced "the keenest and most convincing defense of the Christian faith that the ancient

world brought forth, and one fully worthy of the greatness of the controversy.⁸

To trace in any detail Origen's apologetic system would expand this paper beyond tolerable limits. It must be said, in sum, that with Origen, Christian apologetics reached a new level of clarity, and a new stage of approach to the subject. He no longer plead with authorities for mere toleration, but took the counteroffensive against the prevailing currents of thought. He, above all his colleagues, knew well the range of pagan thought and could speak as an authority in his own right, and not merely as a defensive thinker. He was a maker of synthesis, by which he demonstrated to the mind of his day that the Christian message not only includes all that is valid in pagan systems, but also embodies and engenders a wisdom more comprehensive and profound than any rival religion or any philosophy not resting on revelation.⁹ In this sense, Origen was a creator of an apologetic model; as such he summed up in himself the best of ante-Nicene apologetics.

3

With Aurelius Augustine (354-430) there began a new era, not only in biblical interpretation, but as well, in theological discourse and in Christian apologetics. If it may be said that Origen moved far in the direction of an apologetic model, only reaching it at the end of his work, it may be said with equal plausibility that Augustine made from the beginning a systematic use of such a model.

It should be noted at the outset that Augustine imposed no logical order upon his writings. Many of them overlap, and later ones frequently develop or make explicit ideas only implicit in earlier ones. Also, he drew no sharp line of demarcation between philosophy and psychology, or between theology and philosophy. The major writings which concern apologetics are four: *The City of God*, *The Confessions*, *On the Trinity*, and *The True Religion*.

As a germinal thinker, Augustine's writings not only introduce new answers to old questions, but also project new forms of both methodology and content. The range of his researches encouraged this. He not only knew Plato and the Neo-Platonists as did Origen, but he also knew Aristotle, as well as both the original and the later Hellenistic forms of Stoicism and Epicureanism. We would note as an aside that he held Aristotle in high esteem.¹⁰

Against what he felt to be the excessive exaltation of reason by the Stoics, Augustine set himself to relate reason to will *and* to faith. Against the irreligiousness of the Epicureans, he insisted that religion, not irreligion, lay at the very root of correct reasoning. Thus he appears in the role of one who will meet all comers—not in an attitude of braggadocio, but from a posture of deep conviction of the validity and finality of the Christian faith.

His apologetic model concerned itself with three major and interlocking problems: 1. the nature of knowledge; 2. the relation of knowing to theology; and 3. the relation of God to the cosmos. These he treats in their interrelationships. Basic to his epistemology is his belief that all mental activity is from God. As he says in *The True Religion*, God is “the unchangeable substance which is above the rational mind.”¹¹ In other words, knowledge of God is integral to any human knowledge. By cultivating, therefore, a knowledge of God, one will find illumination of the mind which will affect affirmatively all knowing.¹² If it be held that this is a deliverance of faith, not of reason, Augustine would say that the two are correlated, built into man and inseparably linked. Thus faith and reason are held to be reciprocal in activity. For this reason, Augustine would contend, the existence of eternal ideas in the mind leads logically to the affirmation that God exists.

Today's objector would no doubt say that it constitutes an unwarranted inference to move from the existence of truth to the existence of God. Augustine's reply would be, it seems clear, that the identification of truth (with a small letter) with

Truth itself (i.e., God) was self-evident. To Augustine the quest for God was not merely intellectual and analytic, but ultimately a moral quest— i.e., a question of will. The will, in turn, stands not only in a reciprocal relation to reason, but is itself the instrument through which God makes his presence indisputably known. It is evident that Augustine's theory of knowledge was neither systematic nor dialectical, but existential. That is to say, he developed it within a functional theological or religious context. As John A. Mourant writes, speaking of his epistemology:

Its principle features are an activist theory of sensation, the function of imagination and memory, the nature of learning, the celebrated theory of the divine illumination, and the distinction between science and wisdom.¹³

In summary, Augustine's apologetic centered in the assumption (held as a conviction by him) that the nature of human thought presupposes God's existence, and that this guaranteed the validity of the thinking process and implied also God's activity in all parts of the universe, including the area within man. It is not to our purpose to determine the validity of his conclusions, but to note that Augustine formulated a model which was grand in its conception, existential in its methodology, and (to him) coercive in its power. In sum, to Augustine God was not a problem to be solved by logic, but a mystery to be apprehended by faith. As he says in one place, "He is more truly thought than expressed; and He exists more truly than He is thought."¹⁴

From the viewpoint of the actual source of his apologetics, it must be noted that the major work is his *City of God*, Books I to X. He here covered, in the grand manner, the historical bearings of Christian faith against the backdrop of paganism, and dealt with the Hellenistic paganism in such a way that he probably disposed of most of the prestige which it still enjoyed.¹⁵ In Books VIII to X, he defends most of the major doctrines of the Christian faith. It is significant that the *City of*

God is still regarded as a powerful book, and more specifically, a relevant tract for bad times.

One of the most venturesome, if less well known, attempts at an apologetic during the era imprecisely known as the early Middle Ages, was undertaken by an unnamed Old Saxon writer. Writing about 830 during the reign of Louis I, eldest son of Charlemagne and known as ‘The Pious,’ this author produced the Saxon *Heliand*. The title was, of course, the Saxon equivalent for the modern high German word *Heiland* meaning Savior. The *Heliand* was directed primarily toward Germanic pagans marginal to the Christian tradition, as well as to Saxon converts, and manifested many interesting qualities of a modeled or structured apologetic. It demonstrated both affirmative qualities of the apologetic effort, and as well, some of the perils which beset such effort.

The *Heliand* was produced by a poet trained at the monastery of Fulda in Germany. Basing his work, not on the Vulgate but upon the Gospel Harmony of Tatian, the unnamed author wrote in simple but powerful contours; he portrayed the Gospel narrative in terms of old Germanic usages. The Christ of the *Heliand* is a warrior-hero, while his disciples are *theganos* or thanes—noble vassals who render their Lord unquestioning loyalty. The narrative does, of course, reflect the tribal ways of the Saxon people.

The landscape is that of Lower Saxony, with its flat fields, its forests, and its castles. The cities of the Gospels are known as ‘castles’—thus Nazarethburg, Bethleemaburg, Jerusalemaburg, Rumerburg, vivid portrayals of Nazareth, Bethlehem, Jerusalem and Rome, as if they were Rhenish citadels. The evangelists’ narratives are portrayed with typical German realism. Its personages live as Saxon retainers of the fourth and fifth centuries, sworn to lifelong *triuwe* (or reciprocal fidelity) to their Lord.

The *Heliand* is the last great poem in western Germanic speech employing alliterative verse. Its author describes, among other scenes, Herod’s feast, the storm on Gennesaret,

and the fall of Jerusalem. What is significant is, that he made a radical adaptation of the Gospel narratives to the thought-idiom of his own age. It may not please our Puritan ears that he made of the marriage in Cana a Germanic-type drinking bout. It does intrigue us that he sought to meet the mentality of the time on its own ground. At times our author was solemn and stately, as many of his lines will indicate.¹⁶ For example, he made the Sermon on the Mount to be spoken by a Hero whose heroism was adorned with gentleness and mercy. The deviations from the Gospel accounts were so made as to establish contact with the writer's people. The life of our Lord was thus assimilated into the thought of Saxon people, some recently converted to Christianity, others as yet unreached.¹⁷ The strategy was masterly, the language powerful and vivid.

In assessing the apologetic significance of the *Heliand*, one must take into account much more than the actual content of the work itself. It is, that is to say, necessary to note that the author had a governing ideal, a model, namely, of effecting a synthesis of Germanic form with Christian content. The objective was the enlisting of the inner loyalties of a people just emerging from a rugged form of paganism, for the Savior. Two specialists in Germanic life and literature, O. S. Fleissner and E. M. Fleissner, estimate the impact of the work thus:

In the ninth century, under the successor of Charlemagne, Louis the Pious, there originated a great, Christian, low German literary work; the *Heliand*. The author tells therein of the life of Jesus, in old Germanic form. Jesus is a hero and leader, the disciples are his followers. As the life of a German prince, so was Jesus portrayed, bold and dramatic, awakening the love of his warriors. For this reason, certainly the *Heliand* has served greatly to assist the spread of Christianity because he blended together the known and that which was loved by the people, with the new and the unfamiliar.¹⁸

These points of greatness mark the *Heliand* as one of the great apologetic works of the medieval world. If its awkward concessions to prevailing practices and usages point out a peril to apologetics, its effective contact with the life and thought of those to whom it was addressed manifest the aptness of its conception and the validity of its model.

Anselm of Bec (1033-1109), the Benedictine abbot who became Archbishop of Canterbury in 1093, is an important link in the apologetic series. He represents the methodology of the high Middle Ages, and is important to the present study for his clearly defined apologetic model. This model embodied three major elements:

- 1) The relationship between faith and knowledge;
- 2) The possibility of demonstrating God's existence;
and
- 3) His objective view of the atonement.

Anselm's epistemological datum, *credo ut intelligam* (I believe in order that I may know) is fundamental to his entire apologetic system. He chose to begin with faith— with belief— accepting as true what is declared by scripture and tradition. He utilized reason as a means to the achievement of an analytic understanding of what is already believed. Thus he employed a rational methodology for inquiry; and where philosophical understanding was concerned, he began with what he deemed to be self-evident rational principles.¹⁹ What is vital here is, that he found faith to be a light unto understanding, whether it concerned principles of theology, or whether matters essential to philosophy.

With reference to the question of God and his existence, Anselm elaborated in his *Proslogium* an argument which, while of debatable validity, has been the springboard of discussion, over and over again. If the ontological argument has not proved to be coercive, it has had a remarkable survival value. In essence, this argument seeks to argue, from *within the concept of God* to God's objective existence. Its weakness

consists in its “leap” from logical order to ontological reality, from mental existence to extramental reality.

Probably this argument was underlain by a hidden assumption, namely that logical understanding is capable of grasping objective reality. This is, it seems clear, a specialized application of the view that faith leads to understanding— i.e., that faith is linked inseparably to the objectively real. This belief has its origin in the *imago dei* by which man, even in his fallen state, can conceive *and* love God.²⁰ There is also a close linkage between this assumption and the basic assertion of Augustine, to the effect that knowledge of God is part of man’s knowledge in general.

With respect to soteriology, Anselm in his *Cur Deus homo?* (Why a God-man?) sought to establish the necessity of a redemptive Incarnation. Here again, he dealt with a form of analogy which is typically medieval; he sought to show from reason that redemption, with all it involved of incarnation and reconciliation, is as Revelation has indicated it to be. In the briefest, his doctrine of the atonement is strongly objective, and as such rested upon the belief that when man fell, he violated the Divine honor in such a manner as to disturb the entire moral, order.

In Anselm’s view, if man were to be restored to fellowship with God, One must be found with sufficient intrinsic dignity (i.e., both as being Divine and as being sinless) to offer himself a satisfaction to the Divine honor and to remove the affront to it posed by man’s disobedience. What is of permanent value in this view is, not his medieval analogy, but the principle of objectivity of the God-man relationship, and the consequent necessity of an adequate restoration of the fractured relationship.

Anselm’s apologetic model was thus faith-oriented. As its formulator, he became the progenitor of a long line of apologists who sought to ground major biblical motifs in forms of objectively necessary arguments.²¹ His contribution to soteriology cannot be overestimated, particularly when one

understands the relative poverty of theology at this point prior to his time.

The apologetic of Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) appears chiefly in his *Summa contra gentiles*, written near the end of his life. He seems to have produced this work at the request of Raymond of Pennafort, master-general of the Dominican order, as a refutation of the doctrines of infidels, a work “by which both the cloud of darkness might be dispelled and the teaching of the true Sun might be made manifest to those who refuse to believe.”²²

Aquinas’ apologetic is too massive to be surveyed in small compass. His model is, basically, that of the development and treatment of his famous *classes* or levels of truth, and the apologetic consequences which flow from that development. He held that the human mind, while of limited competence, can establish beyond reasonable doubt the existence of one personal God and other important truths related to it (this is truth of *class one*). But with the assistance of Revelation, the mind can, asserts Aquinas, attain to truth beyond the investigative power of rational inquiry (this is truth of *class two*).

To Thomas Aquinas, apologetics assumes different forms, depending upon the type or class of truth which is to be established. For those areas of truth which lie beyond the range of rational inquiry (e.g., the Trinity, the resurrection of the body, the final judgment, etc.) he cites the authority of Revelation, appealing especially to the miraculous.²³ His apologetic rests, it seems clear, not primarily on the understanding of history (as in Augustine) but upon metaphysics. He appears to question Anselm’s view, that Trinity and atonement may be demonstrated by rational investigation, and turns to his favorite view of extrinsicism— the appeal to authority outside man.

Some object that he is inconsistent, in his appeal to intrinsicism as a basis for establishing truths of *class one*, while resorting with such confidence to extrinsicism in dealing with

class two matters. But be that as it may, St. Thomas has presented a massive apologetic, and has adduced some very carefully reasoned and persuasive arguments (we would stop short of saying ‘proofs’) for the validity of the Christian faith. If his *apologia* has weaknesses, they follow from the general limitations upon his *Weltanschauung* and from his mode of argumentation. From the modern point of view, these limitations lie primarily in the areas of that which he takes for granted.

In the period commonly known as the Modern Era, or more precisely, in the centuries following the Protestant Reformation, the apologetic task has been undertaken by a variety of thinkers, representing as many approaches and/or models. In this section, it will be necessary to treat representative writers— and each of these with tantalizing brevity— with a view to locating the major apologetic lines. It is hoped, however, that the selective survey may yield some guidelines for the possible erection of an apologetic edifice for our own time.

Blaise Pascal (1623-1662) had a decisive conversion in 1655, and devoted the remaining years of his life and his unquestioned genius to the cause of making the Christian religion understandable to the France of his day. In 1656, he projected a massive apologetic, which he never completed. There have been those who have tried to discern the precise lines which this work would have taken from a study of his *Pensées*.

His apologetic writings come to us in the form of brief sentences or paragraphs, many in epigrammatic form. Some were dashed off in haste; others appear to have been chiseled out with great care. His *Pensées* do not, of course, present a connected system, but consist largely of materials aimed at giving a sort of “shock treatment” to the religiously indifferent of his day.

Pascal countered the Deists with a view of God which he contended was hidden to sinful man. Nor could this God be

found by the use of reason, at least by reason as understood in the Cartesian sense. His reasoning was dialectical, centering in his famous “wager,” which runs thus: If Christianity be true (he told his objector) you have everything to gain by embracing it; if it is false, you have yet lost nothing.²⁴ As for reason (the shibboleth of the French Enlightenment), Pascal contended that nothing is more reasonable than for reason to submit to authority.²⁵ In a decision to submit, he declared, reason is guided in the best possible way— i.e., by “reasons of the heart”²⁶ which was to him an intuitive form of logic.

The thrust of Pascal’s Wager (which is central to his apologetic) is, that the stakes are high, involving life itself. He makes frank reference to the professional gambler, noting that he takes risks on life which he would never take at the roulette table. Maintaining that the spiritual wager is inevitable, he exhorts his readers to take the line of common prudence. His apologetic aim was, of course, to shatter the complacency of the typically Gallic mentality of his day— we would say, to cause the skeptical person to “blow his cool.” He stings and shocks the indifferent, and faces him with the claims of Jesus Christ, whom he feels to be inescapable. His is an apologetic marked by a deep grasp of the needs of the heart; it is small wonder that it has exerted a profound influence in the West.

Joseph Butler (1692-1752) directed his apology against the Deism of the British enlightenment. His *Analogy of Religion* was written in an age in which Christianity was adjudged to be irrelevant to the educated person. His appeal was, understandably, to the reasonable man or to reasonable men. His analogical method begins with the assumption that the Christian system rests upon a series of principles (or facts) for which there are convincing analogues in the general course of nature. Thus, objections leveled against the former are no more valid than the same when alleged against the latter. Conversely, of course, those presuppositions which are regarded as valid with respect to the general structures of

nature are shown to be equally viable as applied to the principles of Christian faith.

He worked in close relationship to experienced facts, and shows the feasibility of following probability as a guide of life. His appeal is to minds which are serious, for he felt that it is to such, and such alone, that God makes His appeal. Thus he urges the men of the Enlightenment to lay aside frivolity, passion and prejudice. The importance of the *Analogy* for its time may be judged by the fact that it went through no less than 28 editions in Britain and over 20 printings in the United States. Even David Hume termed it the best defense of Christianity which he had ever encountered, while Cardinal Newman termed it the highest expression of Anglican theology.

Friedrich D. E. Schleiermacher (1768-1834) approached apologetics in a totally different spirit. The title of his major apologetic work, *On Religion: Speeches To Its Cultured Despisers*, might well have been used by Tertullian or Origen! Attacking the suavity and coldness of the *Aufklärung* in Germany, Schleiermacher sought to shear away from Christianity what he felt to be the excess baggage of traditional dogma. In this respect, his apologetic was basically negative; he sought to re-interpret Christian theology in such a manner as to remove all stumbling blocks to its acceptance by modern men of his time.

His theological system, outlined in his *On Religion* and sketched more fully in his *Glaubenslehre (The Christian Faith)* is far too sophisticated to be surveyed here. The most that can be done is to expose for further exploration his basic point of departure, and to indicate directions in which he sought to work from this point. To him, religion consisted, not in a set of articulated doctrinal statements, but in what he termed man's "feeling of absolute dependence."

As one committed to the Kantian epistemology, he makes no attempt at any rational argumentation for the existence of God, or for the corollaries of revelation, freedom or immortality. He maintains that man's religious sense finds its

highest achievement in Christianity, defined, of course, in his way. Piety is seen in terms of man's immediate consciousness of absolute dependence, which in turn guides man to what is essential in theology. His is thus an inward and subjective form of apologetic, which makes faith to be something exercised from *the inside*. Under the influence of Christ's redeeming power, the Christian can apprehend God's existence and providence, and redemption through Jesus of Nazareth. Much of this is to be found in his less-known work, *Brief Outline on the Study of Theology*. Here his insistence is upon the Christian community as an association for the achievement of piety, for he felt that there is no religion apart from social religion.²⁷

The full effects of Schleiermacher's radical redefinition have not yet been felt in the Christian world. His *On Religion* was the magna carta of modern liberalism, while his methodology has furnished impetus to similar apologetic attempts, notably by Albrecht Ritschl and Rudolf Otto.

A generation later Maurice Blondel (1861-1949) undertook in France a similar neo-Kantian apologetic, directed especially against the Enlightenment. In his work *L'Action*, he sought to legitimate for the thinking man and woman the claims of the supernatural. He based his presentation upon man's craving for communion with God, and upon the view that knowledge of God must be reciprocal, with God's giving of himself preceding man's dedication to Him. It is not possible here to discuss his "method of immanence"; it needs to be noted that he summarizes his view of the central core of Christian faith in these terms: "Only practical action, the effective action of our lives, will settle for each one of us, in secret, the question of the relations between the soul and God."²⁸

His apologetic was one of reaction against extrinsicism, and was thus in reality a romantic defense of the validity of the appeal to inwardness, both as a source of faith in relation to the supernatural in general and to miracles in particular, and as a means for the inward apprehension of the gifts of grace.

Blondel's influence was confined largely to Catholic circles, where it excited much debate, and at times laid him open to attack both from conservative Catholics and from the Catholic modernists, Alfred Loisy and George Tyrrell.

The work of the Jesuit philosopher and paleontologist, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin is too complex and too sophisticated to be discussed here. Mention should, however, be made of two factors: first, the contemporary revival of interest in his writings in Catholic circles; and second, the fact that, quite apart from the question of the validity of his conclusions, he did pose, ahead of his time, the question of the relation of the Sacred to the Secular.

Thus far, apologists have been chosen from more recent centuries whose works have proved relatively effective, for their times and in subsequent periods. Turning now to our own century, we note that few apologetic writers have, due either to structural inadequacies of their systems or to the shortness of elapsed time, yet proved their permanent value. This is, we believe, true of the dialectical theologians, most of whose theological formulations are slanted toward persuasion— that is, are apologetic in tone and thrust. This is true of the systems of Karl Barth, Emil Brunner, Paul Tillich, and in some measure of Reinhold Niebuhr. It should be pointed out also, that the work of Rudolf Bultmann could quite fairly be termed a *non-apologetic*. In the volume *Kerygma and Myth*, Bultmann in his section "New Testament and Mythology" virtually wipes off the theological slate our Lord's pre-existence, his incarnation, his sacrificial death, his resurrection, the atonement, his exaltation, and his second coming, as well as the major aspects of the doctrine of the Church.²⁹

Bultmann accomplishes this by the dogmatic assertion that "*Man's knowledge and mastery of the world*" [italics his] makes the historic formulation of these doctrines impossible of acceptance by any serious thinker of our time.³⁰ His re-formulation of what remains is accomplished upon an existential base, and by any fair evaluation results in a form of

Christianity which, in the light of both Scripture and historical formulation, is a gnostic distortion.

Bultmann's pupil, Ernst Käsemann, adds to the teaching of his master the dimension of a radically pluralistic understanding of Scripture—the view that the New Testament abounds in contradictions, so that any unitary doctrinal formulation based upon it is unacceptable. This comes through clearly in his *Exegetische Versuche und Besinnungen*, particularly in his exegetical analyses of Matthew 15:1-14 and of Philippians 2:5-11,³¹ and his discussions of the Church and of *Nichtobjektivierbarkeit*³² (roughly translatable as “a quality of being incapable of being objectified”). His insistence upon multiplicity as an ultimate category for the interpretation of Scripture will continue to be a prolific source of mischief for the theological world.

Special mention is due to several who have undertaken, whether formally or informally, the apologetic task in recent years. The most influential lay apologist in recent decades has been, of course, C. S. Lewis, who by a variety of intriguing approaches demonstrated the plausibility of the historic Christian understanding of things, especially the view of God as transcendent, personal and concerned for man. In addition, he utilized the fanciful and the satirical to puncture many current objections to traditional Christianity.

Alan Richardson and the late Edward F. Carnell both undertook formal apologetic formulations. To Richardson, historiography appears the chief bulwark of an apologetic for today's men and women. He sees history as sufficiently broad, provided it be interpreted properly, to make a place for the miraculous, notably the resurrection of our Lord. He believes that the Christian *Weltanschauung* provides a view of history more nearly adequate to the facts of the human enterprise than rival systems. Unhappily his conclusions are vitiated for the Evangelical by his interpretations of some of the New Testament writings.

Edward F. Carnell, whose death seems to us to have been untimely, was searching for an apologetic during his last years. Those who knew his thinking feel that his volume on the subject was really but a tentative beginning. In this connection we might note that John H. Gerstner's volume *Reasons For Faith* suggests that its author has it in his thinking to do further apologetic work. The wide sweep of Carl F. H. Henry's theological researches impresses one also with the possibility that he may one day bring together his materials into an apologetic which might well be the most significant production of our time.

Finally, what does the history of apologetics suggest to us concerning the matter of the defense of the Faith for our day? We are persuaded that it is trying to tell us something concerning approach, method, and content. Certainly we would not wish to see a repetition of some older attempts which serve largely to convince those who already believe of the wrongness of their opponents. Equally certain it is, that no apologetic can be effective which adopts the stance of the antagonist who is "spoiling for a fight." It goes without saying that the use of straw men is futile.

The experiences of some apologists of the past suggest to us the peril of making undue concessions to the spirit of the times. The author of the *Heliand* affords us a genial warning in his over-Saxonizing of the Gospel records. More serious is the warning furnished by Schleiermacher and Bultmann, who insist, not only upon a re-formulation of Christianity, but as well, upon the normative quality (for their times at least) of this re-formulation. Now, would it not be singular indeed if the world had to wait until 1800 or until 1950 to learn what Christianity really is?

An effective apologetic must understand the objector better than the objector understands himself. Its writer needs to be able to think through *positions* to their logical and final consequences, and what is more important to identify himself with the doubts of others.³³ This calls for a measure of

sympathy, of elasticity, and of winsomeness which only the Holy Spirit can engender.

The apologetic attempts of the past also speak to us concerning the content of a viable apologetic enterprise. It seems clear that a significant part of apologetic activity consists in the prudent selection of issues. Two perils arise at this point: the first is, that of selecting a front so broad that nothing really effective is accomplished with respect to any phase of Christian truth; the second peril is that of adopting a too-narrow base for the apologetic. Typical of the latter danger is the "one issue" apologetic, typified by such slogans as: "Revelation is event," or "Revelation is history."

The selection of the breadth of the front is thus crucial. We would suggest that the most effective selection involves the singling out of an issue sufficiently central to carry with it naturally and without any evident or artificial forcing, of related issues which are also of high significance. It may well be that in our time the central issue is that of the *Supernatural*, the question whether our universe manifests, and can be explained in terms of, a single order (i.e., the natural) or whether a valid interpretation of its phenomena demands the recognition of another range of reality. Implied here is, of course, the position that the same God is Lord of both orders, and that He shapes both to his purposes.

The relation of a rather wide range of data to this issue seems evident. Upon its validity hangs the issue of revelation itself, and of course the entire redemptive order, with its inevitable involvement of the structure of Incarnation-Atonement-Resurrection. The validity of this structure is vital in that it involves not only the Christian system, but the eternal hope of our race.

Should we in our time "contend earnestly for the faith?" There is abroad a romantic notion, to the effect that Christianity needs no defense, but only proclamation. History, however, suggests rather clearly that the Christian enterprise involves the harnessing of the talents of the finest and best of men and

women, not only to declaration but as well, to the formulation and projection of reasons for the hope which is in us. This task has enlisted some of the best minds for nearly two millennia; we are persuaded that today and tomorrow the Lord of the Church will make no less demands upon the faithful, and especially the talented faithful.

Notes

¹ Williston Walker, *A History of the Christian Church*, rev. ed., New York, 1959, p. 17

² Avery Dulles, *A History of Apologetics*, New York, 1971, p. 24.

³ Barnabas Lindars, *New Testament Apologetic: The Doctrinal Significance of the Old Testament Quotations*, London & Philadelphia, 1961, pp. 194-199.

⁴ Dulles, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 1-19.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

⁸ Walker, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

⁹ Dulles, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

¹⁰ Augustine Aurelius, *City of God*, VIII, p. 12.

¹¹ John A. Mourant, *Introduction to the Philosophy of Saint Augustine*, University Park, Pennsylvania, 1964, p. 70.

¹² Paul Glenn, *The History of Philosophy*, St. Louis, 1929, p. 161.

¹³ John A. Mourant, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

¹⁴ *De Trinitate*, VII, p. 4, 7

¹⁵ Dulles, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

¹⁶ J. G. Robertson, *A History of German Literature*, 4th ed., New York, 1962, p. 26.

¹⁷ Kurt Reinhardt, *Germany: 2000 Years*, I, revised edition, New York, 1961, p. 57

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- ¹⁸ O. S. and E. M. Fleissner, *Deutsches Literaturlesebuch*, New York, 1968, p. 19 (transl. mine).
- ¹⁹ Glenn, *op. cit.*, p. 194.
- ²⁰ *Proslogion*, Part 1.
- ²¹ Dulles, *op. cit.*, p. 80.
- ²² *Ibid.*, p. 87.
- ²³ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles*, I, p. 6.
- ²⁴ Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, New York (Modern Library), 1941, Section III, 233, pp. 79-84.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, Section IV, 269-272, pp. 93f.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, Section IV, 277, p. 95
- ²⁷ Friedrich D. E. Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, trans. by John Oman, New York, 1958, p. 148.
- ²⁸ Maurice Blondel, *Letter On Apologetics*, trans. by A. Dru and I. Trethowan, New York, 1964. pp. 163f.
- ²⁹ Hans Werner Bartsch, editor, *Kerygma and Myth*, New York, 1961, p. 2.
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 4.
- ³¹ Ernst Käsemann, *Exegetische Versuche und Besinnungen*, Göttingen, 1964, pp. 237-241; 51-95.
- ³² *Ibid.*, pp. 214-136.
- ³³ C. G. Schweitzer, "Praktische Apologetik (Apologie)," *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, Tübingen, 1957, p. 490.

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Franklin Morrison at 50th Anniversary Banquet.

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