

Branches of Christian Apologetics: An Assessment

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Introduction

Christian apologetics is very wide and widens by the day as more issues are raised (Geisler 2008; Craig, 1984; Thornbury & Dockery 2002; Gundry & Cowan 2000). People are forever generating new ideas or ways to arrive at truth. Commendable as these are, some of them at times come in direct conflict with the Bible, many times nibbling away at its very foundations. What is worse is that even some of the children of Zion join forces with the spiritual philistines in pelting the holy writ. Others, naive or sleepy saints, however, may not necessarily jab the Bible but remain sinfully indifferent about deep spiritual matters daily assaulted from every side. Incessant attacks on the Bible and the Christian faith entails more work, research and resources utilised. Approaches and perspectives to Apologetics abound (Gundry & Cowan 2000). While some claim to be the most soundly authentic with absolute fidelity to scripture, others make no such claim but instead use every available means to defend or establish the cause of Christ. Of the many schools, four groups stand out upon which we list and give a few comments:

a. Philosophical /Theological apologetics

This focuses more on the philosophical aspects of religion with arguments built on various premises. Philosophy is good for gaining insight into something but sometimes may lead to unnecessarily prolonged arguments or debates. In some cases, even pundits become victims of their own philosophical approach, as often happens with rationalistic apologists. Craig and Ross are such examples. We equally have had sound stable philosophers like Alvin Plantinga that have mastered the art of philosophical apologetics, all the while retaining fidelity to scriptural truth. That said, prior to the first half of the twentieth century, philosophical arguments were philosophical in nature but after the middle of last century (i.e. the 20th Century), the tide changed to include science and technology (Philip & Cherian 2009). The following are some of the philosophical/theological issues the apologist will have to contend with: Non-theistic, Theistic, Occult and Atheistic philosophies. Each of these has their own slant which they bring against the Christian faith, although some of them may overlap.

b. Historical/Legal Apologetics

These philosophies centre around historical aspects as they impact on the Bible. We have in mind here the area of archaeology and history that digs deep into the past and exhumes a lot of information. As more information is brought to the fore, it is compared with the Biblical texts and claims. Where a variation has been found, the enemies of the faith have celebrated and tried to discredit the Bible. Thankfully, the tide is changing and has changed as more and more information is discovered to prove the critics wrong. The Christian apologist must consider taking up archaeology as an area of apologetics and study, although being fully aware that we do not need external evidence for the Bible to prove true. It is presuppositionally correct and true in all senses. Dr Snelling may prove helpful in that regard.

c. Rational/Scientific apologetics

This focuses more on rational thinking as well as the scientific approach that demands empirical evidence as proof (Geisler 2008; Craig 1984; Khun 1986; Popper 1959). People equate science to 'truth' for various reasons but strictly speaking, these are not the same although are connected at some point. While science has to do with the accumulation of knowledge from the natural sciences, research and observation, truth has to do with facts. Rational/scientific apologetics deals with this type of Bible attack. Rational apologetics aims at handling issues related to matters such as evolution, astronomy, Bible difficulties etc. This involves thinking and providing reasonable answers. Dr Geisler would prove helpful here.

d. Interdisciplinary apologetics

With the advent of many dynamics in our world, knowledge has multiplied and so also the number of attacks on the Christian faith. To effectively function in this global world, one needs to know more than one discipline. Thus, interdisciplinary apologetics comes in, to offer a Christian position. The apologist must competently articulate issues relating to Christian ethics, why suffering exists in the world, existence of God, miracles & Resurrection, Bible text/canon among many others. The apologist must know these and many other areas very well and be able to articulate them at any time. Dr JP Moreland or Dr Henry Morris would help.

As we have seen, Christian apologetics is not an easy undertaking or narrow area of study. Time was when critics were few and far between. They were small isolated pockets and thus could easily be silenced by argumentation but that is not the case anymore. With the increase of knowledge has come many perturbing issues and off shoots. There has thus been a need to raise the standard of apologetics as well. No longer would the tools and answers of yester

year apologetics suffice, there is need to upgrade matters. Knowledge and apologetics methods are incremental as the context changes. Reading, research, thinking and much godliness is what will turn the tide. It won't be easy but is certainly worth it. Christian apologetics has never been an area of the weak minded or faint hearted.

Some influential, budding or established apologists of today

In our day and age, Christian apologist numbers are progressively on the rise, though, admittedly, many more hands are needed to tame the tide. For close to 200 years now, the Evolutionists have orchestrated deadly attack upon attack on the Bible. Sadly, even from among professed evangelicals, compromise is on the rise on every side. We daily hear of cease fires, accommodations or even breaking of ranks as renegades join enemies of the cross. This is hardly surprising though disheartening for sure. In the midst of the seemingly dark, dark picture, Christ assures us that the gates of Hell will never prevail! In this we rest. However, we mention a few mortals that have signed up to defend the cause of Christ, at times at great cost. Their eye is certainly fixed on the Jerusalem from above. Here we go! The first names coming to our minds in that regard, although holding different approaches to apologetics, are Dr Johnson Philip and Dr Cherian (India). Working in extremely difficult conditions, these men have proved themselves over time, valiantly fighting the good fight of the faith! Then we have the venerable late Nabeel Qureshi, sir Logan Nyasulu of Zambia, Ken Gondwe of Malawi, Jay Smith, John Frame, Alvin Plantinga, late Ravi Zacharias, late Cornelius Van Til, Dr Ronald Nash, Ken Ham, Dr Snelling, Dr Joseph Nally and Walter Lang among other luminaries. These and countless others have dedicated themselves to the defence, establishment and propagation of Biblical Christian truth. We need to have many more succeeding generations to carry the baton deep into the future. We must lift high the royal banner of Jesus Christ, as the hymn writer has aptly said. We have no option.

The Christian stand and attitude

The Christian apologist must never be ashamed to stand on the side of truth. As we venture into history, we encounter Martyr after Martyr, Reformer after reformer, apologist after apologist standing to shake our hand, to paraphrase a famous Spurgeon quote of yester-years. This is the faith of our fathers for which they shed their own blood to seal the truth. They were ready to suffer shame and be burnt at the stake. The battle was for the Bible and its truth, and so must we. One Seminary, Trinity Graduate School of Apologetics (India) warms our hearts because it unashamedly stands on this ground as it radiates the five solas which have been the watch words or battle cries of the Reformation. The battle ahead is not easy nor for the faint hearted but it is worth contending and standing for. Conservative biblically sound Christian apologists (not rank

rationalists of course!) may not be famous or popular in this life but certainly the captain of our salvation is pleased with them. For what does it matter, to compromise the faith and let the truth be washed away by the winds of the time, never! May God never allow this to happen to any at any of our last bastions of truth, the Reformed Seminaries!

Conclusion

There are various approaches to doing apologetics with each claiming to be best. This calls for discernment. The work is extremely hard as complex but the Christian has no option but to rise to the occasion. We cannot afford to be at ease in Zion while the walls are crumbling, we must arise, by God's Spirit! The time is short and weapons few but we need to move on to defend the truth as it is in Jesus, may that day come soon and now, Amen!

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