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ALISTER E McGRATH

To Capture the Imagination of Our Culture: Reflections on Christian Apologetics

This article is an edited version of Alister McGrath's inaugural address as Director of the Oxford Centre for Evangelism and Apologetics, delivered in February 2005. In it he argues for the importance of apologetics in contemporary mission to our post-modern world but also raises concerns about the weakness of much modern evangelical apologetics. Through study of the apostles' speeches in Acts he highlights the importance of knowing our audience before showing the importance of theology in apologetics. He concludes with an appeal for a more holistic view of apologetics which is not limited simply to rational arguments but appeals to the imagination and the attractiveness of the gospel.

Recognising the Challenge

We live in an era when apologetics has ceased to be peripheral to the task of the church. The Church of England has, perhaps unsurprisingly to those of us who know her ways, not quite fully woken up to this fact. Apologetics is not at present a core requirement in theological education, so that it is perfectly possible to move into a position of church leadership without any knowledge of the theory or practice of apologetics, or awareness of its strategic importance. In this article, I want to make it clear that this is unacceptable. It is utterly irresponsible for a church which faces hard questions about its beliefs, values, aspirations and traditions to fail to equip its public representatives to deal with these questions, in terms that our culture can understand.

In a survey conducted in late 2003 and 2004, the Ecumenical Research Committee questioned 14,000 people about why they believed churchgoing was in decline. The questions were open-ended; rather than asking people to tick boxes predetermined by the organizers, they were invited to set out their own concerns. The results were significant. 80% believed that the decline of home visiting and reduced pastoral care were a significant factor in diminished church attendance. But for our purposes, the most important finding was this: 73% believed that clergy failed to prepare congregations for challenges to their faith, including explaining faith to non-churchgoers.

The simple fact is that clergy are seen to be failing their congregations, who need reassurance about their faith, and want to be equipped to deal with the questions about Christianity that they are being asked at school, in the shopping malls, at coffee mornings, and in pubs. There is a real need for an apologetic ministry *within* the church for Christians who are unsure about their faith. It is a well-established fact that C.S. Lewis is now read mostly by Christians seeking reassurance about their faith, rather than by non-Christians interested in considering Christianity.

Yes, Christians want to be equipped to deal with their friends' hard questions – but they also need to be reassured about their own anxieties, fears, and misgivings, which are often marginalized or ignored by doubtless well-meaning preachers. But if clergy have not been prepared for this critically important ministry, we can hardly blame them for any failures in this respect. The greatest failing lies in the system, which remains locked into a past vision and model of the church, more attuned to the social realities of an idealized, long-gone England than to its present-day counterpart.

The central challenge that needs to be considered is this: how can we make evangelism and apologetics central to churches who live in the past, and are in denial about the cultural changes around us – including the need to develop an apologetic to reconnect with that culture, and recapture its imagination? Yet there are other pressing issues as well. How can we proclaim the gospel in a postmodern context, when so many Christian apologists operate within a modernist worldview, an intellectual empire on which the sun is about to set?

In this article, I propose to explore some areas of importance to the practice of contemporary apologetics, raising some hard questions. In doing so, I intend no criticism of anyone; I am simply asking that we give careful thought to what needs to be done, the ways in which we have done things in the past, and how we might respond to our new challenges in the future. There are many welcome indications that interest in apologetics, especially among evangelicals, is blossoming.[1] It is a very encouraging trend, which I hope we can sustain. The newly-established Oxford Centre for Evangelism and Apologetics aims to do precisely this, equipping a rising generation of Christian leaders, both in the church and the marketplace, to deal with the questions our culture is raising, and to speak to the unsatisfied longings that make it so open to the gospel proclamation.

The most obvious point with which to begin any paper on apologetics is the New Testament. This provides us with both the theological underpinnings for an authentically Christian apologetic, and, in the Acts of the Apostles, actually provides us with examples of early Christian apologetic addresses and approaches. Many apologists rightly single out 1 Peter 3:15 in this respect:

> Sanctify the Lord Christ in your hearts, being prepared to give an answer (*apologia*) to all those who ask you for a reason (*logos*) for the hope that is within you.

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1 One of the best books is John Stackhouse, *Humble Apologetics: Defending the Faith Today,* Oxford University Press, New York 2002.

From what we know of the situation facing the recipients of this letter, this is an exceptionally important statement. It is presupposed that Christians are being asked about their faith, possibly to find pretexts for prosecution for failing to conform to the imperial cult. The hard, often blatantly hostile, questions asked of the church by its culture become channels for the communication of faith. We tend to see these questions as threats, and run away from them; we ought to see them as opportunities, and welcome them.[2]

The Babylonian captivity of older evangelical apologetics

How can we communicate the gospel effectively to today's culture, when the church seems locked into values and worldviews of the past? It is a question that I am often asked by younger Christians, passionate about their faith, who are deeply discouraged by what they see as the outdated approaches to apologetics being used or encouraged by many older Christian leaders, especially in the United States of America. These strongly rationalist approaches to apologetics fail to connect up with the concerns of many younger people, many of whom simply find rationalist worldviews alien and unattractive, and some of whom are sufficiently academically able to know that they are ultimately intellectually untenable.

Back in 1977, a somewhat lightweight work entitled *The Myth of God Incarnate* made its appearance. The work made some interesting, through ultimately rather unpersuasive, criticisms of traditional Christian understandings of the identity and significance of Jesus Christ. Yet the most distinctive feature of this book was its core belief that the Enlightenment was something that was given and fixed for all time. It was *here*, and it was *right*. And that was that. For example, Professor Leslie Houlden argued that we have no option but to accept the rationalist outlook of the Enlightenment, and restructure our Christian thinking accordingly. 'We must accept our lot, bequeathed to us by the Enlightenment, and make the most of it'.[3]

From modernity to post-modernity

That was back in 1977. Since then, things have changed dramatically. Throughout the western world, the Christian church is faced with the challenges of adapting to cultural change. Public knowledge of the Bible is at its lowest for some considerable time, and many have little or no experience of Christian worship. Yet the assumption of the permanence of the Enlightenment worldview lingers on, particularly within those sections of the Christian community which, on the face of it, ought to be most critical of it. The rise of postmodernity has taken many older Christians by surprise, not least because the street credibility of older approaches to evangelism and apologetics has virtually evaporated. It is a profoundly uncomfortable situation for the church. How can it cope with postmodern culture, when so many of its chief apologists still live in a modern world?

Faced with this situation, Christians have reacted in a number of ways. Some are in denial about the massive cultural change we see around us, and struggle to maintain their churches as tiny outposts of orthodoxy in the midst of what they

2 See especially Graham Tomlin, *The Provocative Church,* SPCK, London 2002.

3 Leslie Houlden, in J. Hick (ed.), *The Myth of God Incarnate,* SCM Press, London 1977, p 125.

see as cultural madness. Others excoriate postmodernity as satanic, deluded, or irrational, and work hard to get society and the churches back into the safe waters of the modern worldview. It is an understandable tactic. After all, Christians have become very experienced at proclaiming and defending the gospel within the Enlightenment worldview. Why not go back there?

Yet historians point out, not unreasonably, that contemporary Christians were appalled by the rise of precisely that modern worldview three centuries or so ago, seeing it as destructive of faith and as eroding critical Christian beliefs and values. The rise of modernity was regarded with alarm by conservative Christians of that era, who regarded it as destructive of faith. Those concerns have long since been forgotten, but they need to be recalled by those who seem to have got it into their heads that people have to be modernists before they can become Christians, and end up defending modernity as much as Christianity.

The simple yet awkward truth is that modernity and postmodernity are neither Christian nor anti-Christian, neither good nor evil. They are fundamentally cultural moods, each raising certain challenges and – very importantly! – creating certain openings for Christian faith. Many Christians have got so used to working in a modernist culture that they have assumed that this was a permanent state of affairs or, even worse, that it was somehow sanctioned by the gospel itself, despite the protests of their predecessors in the eighteenth century. As a result, they have been left bewildered by recent cultural changes, and have only two strategies at their disposal – trying to turn the clock back, or ignoring what is happening, and hoping that it will go away.

Using the language of the people

As a Reformation scholar, I have always been impressed by the early Protestant insistence that the gospel must be proclaimed and taught in a language 'understanded of the people' (Thomas Cranmer). If the gospel is proclaimed in a language that our culture cannot understand, through a medium it cannot access, then the church has failed in its mission. It is just about as realistic as sending English evangelistic tracts to a people who, in the first place, speak French and in the second, cannot read.

My first plea is simply this: can we break free from this modernity-is-good, postmodernity-is-bad mindset? It is clearly incorrect; more importantly, it is destructive to any attempt to proclaim the gospel faithfully and effectively in a postmodern context. Ultimately, it demands that we first convert people to a rationalist worldview, so that they will then come to see the merits of our rationalist arguments for faith, and as a result, come to faith. Apologetics is about proclaiming and celebrating the truth and beauty of the gospel, not trying to turn back the cultural clock so that older forms of apologetics can have a new lease of life.

There is a real danger that we end up isolating the Christian faith from postmodern culture, not because of the faith itself, but on account of the manner in which we present it. The manner of presentation of the gospel can be a barrier to Christianity if it is needlessly framed in terms of an outmoded worldview. In our apologetics, we need neither commend nor excoriate either modernity or

postmodernity. Rather we seek to reach people who inhabit these worldviews in language they can understand.

This raises a fundamental question for apologetics – the importance of the audience.

The audience in apologetics

It is tempting to develop a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to apologetics, not least because it alleviates the immense tedium of having to prepare a different talk for every audience. Yet there are some serious problems with this. Three issues may be identified as being of major importance.

1. The language we use
2. The authorities we cite
3. The style of argument we use.

Before we move on to consider this further, let us consider some of the apologetic sermons or speeches in the Acts of the Apostles. These have much to teach us on the importance of the audience.

Acts tends to deal with three specific audiences: Jews, Greeks and Romans. In each case, we find early Christian apologists adapting their message to these audiences, ensuring they use language and imagery that will be understood, citing authorities that will carry weight, and using forms of argument that conform to accepted patterns.

Peter to Jews (Acts 2)

An excellent example of an apologetic address aimed at a Jewish audience is provided by Peter's Pentecost sermon (Acts 2:14-36).[4] The audience is Jewish; Peter therefore cites an authority which carries weight with this audience – the Old Testament. Peter's apologetic is directly related to themes which were important and comprehensible to a Jewish audience. The expectation of the coming of the Messiah (a notoriously complex and multifaceted notion, as recent scholarship has indicated) was (and remains!) significant for Judaism. Peter demonstrates that Jesus meets the specific expectations of Israel. He does so through appealing to authorities (here, prophetic passages in the Old Testament) which carried weight with his audience, while using language and terminology which would readily have been accepted and understood by his audience. Note in particular his specific reference to Jesus as 'Lord and Christ'. No explanation is offered, or necessary. These were terms well familiar to his audience. What was new about Peter's message was his emphatic insistence that Jesus was to be identified with both these figures on the basis of his exaltation through God having raised him from the dead.

Paul to Greeks (Acts 17)

Now contrast Peter on the Day of Pentecost with Paul's apologetic address at Athens – the famous 'Areopagus speech'. The audience here is Greek. They have

4 For detailed studies of this major text, see the classic study of Robert F. Zehnle, *Peter's Pentecost Discourse: Tradition and Lucan Reinterpretation in Peter's Speeches of Acts 2 and 3,* Abingdon, Nashville, TN 1971. Although dated in some respects, the work remains an important analysis of the text itself and its underlying strategy.

no knowledge of the Old Testament, nor would they see it as carrying any weight. In fact, it is an audience similar, in many ways, to our own postmodern situation. Paul opens his address to the Athenians with a gradual introduction of the theme of the living God, allowing the religious and philosophical curiosity of the Athenians to shape the contours of his theological exposition.[5] The 'sense of divinity' present in each individual is here used as an apologetic device. By this means Paul is able to base himself upon acceptable Greek theistic assumptions while at the same time demonstrating that the Christian gospel goes beyond them. Paul shows a clear appreciation of the apologetic potential of Stoic philosophy, portraying the gospel as resonating with central Stoic concerns, while extending the limits of what might be known. What the Greeks held to be unknown, possibly unknowable, Paul proclaims to have been made known through the resurrection of Christ. The entire episode illustrates the manner in which Paul is able to exploit the situation of his audience, without compromising the integrity of faith. Note also his appeal to the cultural authorities of his day – the 'poets' – who are used to back up some important apologetic points.

Paul to Romans (Acts 24)

Finally, we may note an apologetic address to a Roman audience. The most important speeches in Acts to deal with Christianity in the eyes of the Roman authorities are found in Acts 24–26. Recent studies have stressed the way in which these speeches conform to patterns which were well known in the legal proceedings of the period.[6] More than 250 papyri of official court proceedings in the early Roman empire are extant. These offer important insights into the way in which forensic proceedings were conducted and the manner in which they were recorded. In general terms, forensic speeches – whether offered by the prosecution or defence – tended to consist of four or five standard components. In the case of a speech for the defence, this would include a refutation of the specific charges brought against the accused.

The importance of this point can be seen by examining Paul's speech at Acts 24:10–21, in which he responds to the charges brought against him by the professional orator Tertullus (Acts 24:1–8). It is important to note the way in which Paul, as he subjects Tertullus' accusations to a point by point refutation, follows – in the view of many scholars, with great skill – the 'rules of engagement' laid down by Roman legal custom. In particular, he stresses the continuity between his own beliefs and those of the Jews who had accused him, particularly in regard to the Scriptures and the resurrection. But most significant is his appeal to Roman rules of evidence: his accusers (some Asian Jews) were not present to witness against him.

My concern in this discussion is not so much to understand what is happening in this important confrontation, but to work out what its relevance might be to

5 See Bertil Gartner, *The Areopagus Speech and Natural Revelation,* Gleerup, Uppsala 1955. Once more, this work offers many important insights, even if scholarship has moved on somewhat since then. For some reflections on the issues, see Alister E. McGrath, *The Order of Things: Explorations in Scientific Theology,* Blackwell, Oxford 2006, pp 54-96.

6 See Bruce W. Winter 'Official Proceedings and the Forensic Speeches in Acts 24–26', in B. W. Winter and A D. Clarke (eds), *Ancient Literary Setting,* Eerdmans, Grand Rapids 1994, pp 305–36.

our apologetic situation today. I see the following points emerging clearly from Paul's defence of himself at this point, and others.

First, it is clear that both Paul and the Christian gospel were being misrepresented by his accusers and their legal representatives. Paul's general strategy is to set out clearly what he believes. A rejection of Christianity – whether this takes the form of a deliberate decision to have nothing to do with it, or an unconscious sense of hostility towards it – rests upon an understanding of what Christianity actually is. There is every possibility that it is actually a caricature or distortion that has been rejected, whereas the real thing has escaped unnoticed.

Secondly, we need to note the way in which Paul makes highly effective use of the 'rules of engagement' of the Roman legal system. He knows the status of certain arguments in the eyes of those who are going to make the critical decisions concerning his future. Knowing what matters, he is able to deliver the most effective defence of himself as a believer, and of the Christian gospel.

Apologetics today

This point about the 'rules of engagement' seems to be of great importance to us today. We have to defend the gospel against its many critics. Yet we cannot simply treat all those who dislike or reject Christianity as being one homogeneous group. The reasons for rejecting Christianity vary, as do the reasons for accepting it. What may seem to be a highly persuasive argument for Christianity to one group of people may actually be an equally effective argument against it for another.

The three addresses we have chosen to explore have very different audiences in mind. For example, Peter addressed Jews deeply versed in the Old Testament, and aware of the hopes of Judaism; at Athens, Paul addressed the interests of secular Greek paganism. In each case, the approach adopted is tailored to the particularities of that audience. We need to show that same ability to take the trouble to relate the unchanging gospel to the very differing needs of the groups to whom we will minister and preach. The pastor who has one standard apologetic or evangelistic address, which is used time and time again – irrespective of the audience! – is failing to do justice to the gospel.

Theology and apologetics

Apologetics is often presented as a technique – a way of winning arguments. As Avery Dulles once put it, 'the apologist is regarded as an aggressive, opportunistic person who tries, by fair means or foul, to argue people into joining the church'.[7] I have read, I regret to say, many apologetic manuals which seem to believe that the essence of apologetics is verbal manipulation, intellectual bullying, and moral evasion. They don't describe their approach like that, of course, but that is what it amounts to.

But what about theology? What role does theology play in apologetics? I want to suggest that theology plays a major role in responsible apologetics, at two levels. First, by insisting that we set apologetics in its proper context; secondly, by allowing us to appreciate the richness of the gospel, and identifying what the best 'point of

7 Avery Dulles, *A History of Apologetics,* Corpus, New York 1971, xv.

contact' might be for the gospel in relation to a given audience. We will explore both these points in what follows.

Theology of God's grace and apologetics

First, theology reminds us that the whole enterprise of apologetics and evangelism has both divine and human elements. God's grace and human responsibility are set side by side; neither is to be denied or ignored. A theological system which ignores or eliminates one or the other has manifestly lost sight of its moorings in Scripture. It has succumbed to the perennial temptation of systematic theology – to make intrasystemic consistency the arbiter of truth, rather than its grounding in the totality of the biblical witness.

With this point in mind, let us consider a second concern about apologetics noted by Dulles: 'Numerous charges are laid at the door of apologetics: its neglect of grace, of prayer, and of the life-giving power of the Word of God'.[8] It is a powerful point, which cannot be ignored. Rational persuasion cannot convert. We are dependent on the grace of God. If people are blinded by the 'spirit of the age', divine grace is needed to heal them. This is something that we all know to be true; yet somehow, it often seems to get overlooked. We must recall the famous words of John Newton, in his hymn *Amazing Grace*:

> 'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
> And grace my fears relieved;
> How precious did that grace appear
> The hour I first believed.

The point is obvious: it is God's grace that illuminates and ultimately converts. We, as apologists, have a role within this process; it is an important role, but one that must never become a barrier to the operation of God's grace.

Theology and knowing where to start in apologetics

Yet in the second place, theology informs apologetics, enabling the apologist to have a full and firm grasp of the richness of the gospel, and hence an understanding of which of its many facets might be the most appropriate starting point or focus for a given audience. We cannot hope to present the totality of the gospel in a single address. We have to start somewhere. Theological analysis very often enables us to identify the most helpful starting point. This is not about reducing the gospel to a single point; it is simply a tactical judgement about where to begin. The rest can and should follow. Yet the decision about where to start is often the most crucial judgement an apologist must make, and it is essential that it is informed by a thorough knowledge of both the gospel itself and the audience that is to be addressed.

Let me share an image with you that I developed fifteen years ago, and have often found helpful in thinking about the role of theology in informing apologetics.[9] One of the most famous experiments in English scientific history was carried out by Isaac Newton in his rooms at Cambridge. He found that passing a beam of white light through

8 Dulles, *History*, xv.

9 It can be found in Alister E. McGrath, *Bridge-Building: Effective Christian Apologetics,* Inter-Varsity Press, Leicester 1992 (US edition: *Intellectuals don't need God and other Modern Myths,* Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI 1993).

a prism 'decomposed' the white light into the colours of the rainbow. All those colours were already present in the beam of white light; the prism merely separated them out, and allowed them to be seen and appreciated individually. Theology is like that, enabling us to identify and appreciate the individual elements of the gospel.

The apologetic importance of this is immense. It means that we can conduct a theological analysis of the gospel, and identify which of its many aspects may relate particularly well to a specific audience. Different people have different needs and concerns. One aspect of the gospel may interlock with one group of needs, while another may match up with others. To appreciate this point, let us return to look briefly once more at a central theme of the Christian faith – the meaning of the cross.

It is impossible to summarize the immensely rich and complex message of the cross in a few words.[10] Indeed, one of the great delights of theology is that it offers us the opportunity of reflecting deeply (and at leisure!) on the full meaning of the great themes of the Christian message, such as the cross of Christ. Yet it is important to note that a number of aspects can be identified within that message – each of which has particular relevance to certain groups of people. If we pass the 'word of the cross' through a theological prism, we find, in the first place, that it has many components, and, in the second, that each relates particularly well to a specific audience. We will explore this point briefly.

One great theme of the gospel is that the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ free us from the fear of death. Christ has been raised from the dead, and those who have faith will one day share in that resurrection, and be with him for ever. Death is no longer something that need be feared. We celebrate this supremely at Easter. This great message of hope in the face of suffering and death is crucial for us all. Yet it has a special relevance to those many people who wake up in the middle of the night, frightened by the thought of death.

Another great theme of the cross is that of forgiveness. Through the death of Christ, real forgiveness of our sins is possible. This helps us to understand that our redemption is both precious and costly. Yet it also helps us appreciate the relevance of the gospel to a particular group of people – those who are burdened by guilt. Many feel that they can hardly continue living on account of that guilt. Theology identifies one of the many facets of the gospel which has especial relevance to those people. Those sins can be forgiven, and their guilt washed away.

The same type of thinking can be applied again and again. The important thing is to bring the gospel into contact with people's lives. Theology helps us identify the most appropriate point of contact with individuals, so that they can discover the joy of faith. Again, let me stress that this doesn't mean that we are reducing the gospel to just one point. It simply means that we are looking for the aspect of the gospel which is of greatest relevance to the person we are talking to. The rest of the gospel will follow in due course. We have to start somewhere – and theology helps identify the best starting point in each case.

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10 For some excellent attempts, see John Stott, *The Cross of Christ,* Inter-Varsity Press, Leicester 1985; Charles E. Hill and Frank A. James (eds), *The Glory of the Atonement : Biblical, Historical and Practical Perspectives,* Inter-Varsity Press, Downers Grove, IL 2004.

Learning the limits of argument

It is important to appreciate the limits of reason in apologetics. As Pascal once put it: 'Reason's final step is to realize that there are an infinite number of things which lie beyond it. It is simply feeble if it does not get as far as realizing that'. Rationalist approaches to apologetics focus on arguments. Yet apologetics is meant to engage the mind, the heart and the imagination.

We impoverish the gospel if we believe it only impacts upon the human mind, and neglect the impact of the gospel on all of our God-given faculties. One of the most significant critics of a purely rationalist approach to apologetics is the great eighteenth-century American Puritan theologian Jonathan Edwards. For Edwards, rational argument has a valuable and important place in Christian apologetics. But it is not the sole, and perhaps not even the chief, resource of the apologist. The real resource is an apprehension of divine glory.

> Though great use may be made of external arguments, they are not to be neglected, but highly prized and valued; for they may be greatly serviceable to awaken unbelievers, and bring them to serious consideration, and to confirm the faith of true saints; yea, they may be in some respect subservient to the begetting of a saving faith in men. Though what was said before remains true, that there is no spiritual conviction of the judgment, but what arises from an apprehension of the spiritual beauty and glory of divine things.[11]

Edwards' argument is significant, and merits close consideration. For the heart of his analysis is that arguments do not convert. They may remove obstacles to conversion, but in themselves and of themselves they do not possess the capacity to transform humanity. Instead, we must aim to convey or bring about 'an apprehension of the spiritual beauty and glory of divine things'. As I argue elsewhere, divine revelation is about capturing our imaginations with glimpses of glory, not simply persuading our minds with impressions of rationality.[12]

Once the apologist appreciates this point, a whole series of misconceptions can be removed. We are not called upon to argue people into the kingdom of God by rationalist logic, or aggressive rhetoric. The task of the apologist is to bring people to a point at which they can catch a glimpse of the glory of God; or, to use Edwards' phrase, gain 'an apprehension of the spiritual beauty and glory of divine things'. This insight is liberating. It reminds us once more that apologetics is not about manipulative human techniques, but about the grace and glory of God. And it also affirms that the apologist does not need to be verbally skilled, possessing a dexterity with words and language that captivates an audience. The most faltering words may still point to the glorious reality of God, perhaps by confessing the impact that Christ has had upon the speaker's life, or the new hope that the gospel brings within her existence.

Just as importantly, we need to appreciate the importance of an appeal to the imagination, not just reason, in the apologetic task. This point has been emphasised

11 Jonathan Edwards, *Treatise on the Religious Affections,* Yale University Press, New Haven, CT, p 307. Readers who enjoy Edwards but who are not familiar with his appeal to divine beauty will greatly appreciate exploring this aspect of his thought, which has immense implications for apologetics, evangelism and worship. A good starting point is Roland Delattre, *Beauty and Sensibility in the Thought of Jonathan Edwards,* Yale University Press, New Haven, CT 1968.

12 McGrath, *The Order of Things*, p 95.

by Christian writers from George MacDonald to C. S. Lewis: the imagination is capable of grasping the gospel as something that is profoundly attractive, so that people are brought to the point where they wish that it were true and that it were accessible. The apologist is then able to assure people that it is both. The attractiveness of the gospel rests upon its truth – yet it is the former which may well be the gateway to the latter in our cultural situation.

Western apologetics has been impoverished through its Babylonian captivity to rationalism throughout the period of the Enlightenment. It is time to break free from this self-imposed imprisonment and rediscover the power of the imagination in apologetics. How that can be done demands another article, or even a book[13] – but it is something to which we all need to give careful thought. It is my hope and prayer that many will feel themselves called to take up the mantle of the apologists of yesterday, not woodenly repeating their solutions to the challenges of their day, but facing the challenges of our own day in ways that build on their faithfulness and share their wonder in the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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13 Readers may not be entirely surprised to learn that I am working on precisely such a book, provisionally entitled *The Sovereignty of the Imagination: Christian Apologetics in a New Key*. The phrase 'the sovereignty of the imagination' comes from George MacDonald.

George Marchant

The Venerable George Marchant who died on February 3rd, aged 90, was one of the founding trustees of Anvil in 1984 and chair of the Anvil Editorial Board until 1991. Through these years he made a significant contribution to the journal, in many ways epitomising why the journal had been started. He remained a faithful book reviewer for Anvil until shortly before his death. He was a convinced evangelical with a scholarly mind, committed to the exploration of ideas and questions. He was 'open' in his theology before such terms were used, widely read and profoundly thoughtful. He was a chairman of the old school, focused on holding contemporary scholarship and the Anglican Evangelical understanding of mission and theology together. I remember him as someone who did not have too much time for fads, and as a godly man who wanted to keep evangelicals thinking.

Anne Dyer, Assistant Editor.