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A Case for 'Reformed Evidentialism'

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The task of apologetics has long been of concern to evangelical theologians. The dominant approach to apologetics among evangelicals has been the evidentialist one. Evidentialist apologetics has always been rational regarding the defence and promulgation of the Christian faith; it has sought to anchor the validity of biblical Christianity on the tri-foundation of logic, common sense, and objective evidence. The evidentialist school of thought has strong roots in the Enlightenment and the idea that human reasoning can determine the validity of any intellectual position, religious or otherwise. However, the post-modern period, with its rejection of Enlightenment ideals, has rendered suspect the idea that anything can be 'proven', especially something as nebulous as religious belief. To counter this position, the so-called Reformed epistemologists emerged in the 1980s and attempted to justify Christian belief independent of any type of evidentialist, rationalist proof. This paper will examine the strengths of the Reformed epistemological position concerning apologetics, comparing and contrasting it with traditional evidentialist apologetics, and ultimately arguing that the Reformed epistemological approach cannot succeed as a tool of Christian apologetics without a healthy infusion of evidentialism.

Part 1: Evidentialism

The traditional evidentialist approach to apologetics, sometimes called the classical approach,¹ has a long and illustrious history. In fact, the New Testament writers themselves were evidentialists in the purest sense of the word. For them, the resurrection of Christ was an objective event in time-space history that verified the claims of the new faith the disciples were preaching. In Acts 17:31, Paul, who is debating with the Athenians, explicitly states that there is objective evidence for his religion, since God 'has given proof of this to all men by raising [Jesus] from the dead'. The same apologetic technique is on display in Acts 26 when Paul appears before Festus and Agrippa. Here again, Paul is arguing the Christian case based on the evidence provided by the resurrection. Indeed, so central is the resurrection for Paul that he plainly says the Christian faith stands or falls based on the veracity of this

event (1 Cor. 15:12-19). The writer of 1 John, in his attempt to defend the gospel against Gnostic corruptions, stresses the objective fact of the gospel. The apostles have 'seen', 'touched', and 'felt' the One they now worship as Lord. Thus, it can be said that the New Testament is strongly evidentialist in its approach to the faith. Yes, it teaches that the Christian life is one based on faith, but it is a faith based upon historically verifiable events. This type of evidentialist approach to the defence of Christian theism was surely the most popular approach to Christian apologetics in the twentieth century.²

A representative example is B.B. Warfield of Princeton Seminary. Warfield, who is best characterized as a classical/evidentialist apologist, began the apologetic task on 'neutral' ground with the unbeliever. Warfield started with 'general' revelation (the innate awareness of God that all people have, according to Paul in Romans 1), and progressed to 'special', Christian revelation. For Warfield, the first step in the traditional method is to get the non-believer to consider the fact that there may exist a 'God' who created the universe. This could be done, perhaps, through one or more of the classical proofs for God's existence. Once this was accomplished, the field must be narrowed down, through the use of evidentialist apologetics, to prove that this God who probably exists is the God of the Christian Bible.

One common approach that Christian evidentialists will employ is to appeal to the general reliability of the New Testament documents. The point is often made that the writings of the Christian Bible are the best-attested documents of the ancient world. They were composed within only a few decades after the events they describe. In addition, the large number of extant New Testament manuscripts (literally in the thousands), ensures that the Christian Scriptures we have today are substantially the same in content as the original autographs.³

An even more common approach, though, is to focus on the person of Christ, specifically his death, burial, and resurrection. The historicity of the resurrection has taken somewhat of a beating in the last several decades; many scholars have been so reluctant to declare the resurrection an historical fact that they have sought refuge in the realm of a 'history beyond history'; that is, they maintain that the resurrection indeed happened, but not in the realm of observable, verifiable history. Of course, this is merely theological double-talk; there is no such realm, at least not that we know of. Past events

either happened, or they did not. Indeed, the phrase 'historical event' cannot even be understood apart from the idea that something actually occurred in space-time history. But, even if such a meta-historical realm does indeed exist, why would it be any easier for God to perform miracles there than in our own historical realm? If God cannot work miracles, then he cannot work miracles, regardless of the 'world' in which he operates! Rudolf Bultmann was one of the most famous advocates of this supra-historical view of the resurrection. For Bultmann,

God is beyond space-time history. His acts are transcendent; they are above observable human history....Miracles are not of this world. They are acts in the spiritual world. In brief, Bultmann has defined them out of existence.⁴

But appeal to a make-believe realm of supra-history does nothing to settle the matter one way or another. Indeed, from an apologetic viewpoint, this retreat into the non-historical realm seems to be a tacit admission that the resurrection need not be taken too seriously, since it seems to be like so many other religious stories—purely mythical, regardless of the effect it may have had on the disciples.⁵ Evangelical distaste for such a view is captured in the following words from Gregory Boyd and Paul Eddy.

A good deal of liberal theology is premised on the mistaken notion that people can embrace the symbolic meaning of an event while denying the event ever literally took place....Evangelicals have always regarded this line of thinking implausible, if not incoherent.⁶

Another common approach has been to assume that the resurrection appearances were visions. This approach is interesting because it takes seriously the experiences of those who saw the risen Christ. Proponents of this view seem to sense that it will not do to deny the experiences of the disciples; there is no way to account for the existence of Christianity otherwise. Why would men steeped in Jewish monotheism proclaim a human being was divine? Why would they endure hardship, persecution, and eventually death unless they had had an experience that convinced them Christ was indeed alive after his crucifixion? Even orthodox Jewish scholar Pinchas Lapide is compelled to assert,

No vision or hallucination is sufficient to explain such a revolutionary transformation [in the disciples]. For a sect or school or an order, perhaps a single vision would have been sufficient—but not for a world religion which was able to conquer the Occident thanks to the Easter faith.⁷

There are other problems with the hallucination hypothesis. As I have shown elsewhere, the psychological nature of hallucination, as well as mass-delusion, simply does not lend itself as a plausible explanation of the origins of the Easter faith.⁸

Fortunately, there have been several major works within the past two decades in which the historicity of the resurrection has been ably defended. A host of evangelical scholars have produced rigorous defenses of the historical reliability of Christ's resurrection. Even the esteemed atheist Antony Flew fared quite poorly when he tried to counter the arguments in favour of the resurrection in a debate with evidentialist Gary Habermas.⁹ Flew's intellectual ability was not the problem; he simply had no effective response to the numerous pieces of evidence Habermas advanced in favour of the New Testament account of Christ's rising from the dead.

Reformed Epistemology

Reformed epistemology (hereafter RE) was born in the wake of post-modernism and the concomitant collapse of Enlightenment foundationalism. Foundationalism is a term used to describe the idea that 'though many beliefs are based on other beliefs, some beliefs must be held in a basic or foundational manner in order to avoid an infinite regress of beliefs'. These basic beliefs were viewed as 'self-evident or experientially certain'.¹⁰ Thus defined, foundationalism is almost a synonym for common sense. For instance, if I know it is raining, I will take an umbrella when I leave the house. This is based on the 'foundational' knowledge (acquired through objective observation as well as experience) that without the umbrella, I will get wet. However, foundationalism refers to more than this type of indisputable logic. Under the influence of Descartes and the Enlightenment, Foundationalism became the idea that all of our philosophical and theological thinking could be grounded upon some irrefutable premise.¹¹ It is against this definition of foundationalism that post-modernism has rebelled, so much so that, for Christian thinkers at least, only two options remained—'blind acceptance of classical Christian doctrine by appeal to the Bible (or the church) or the skeptical rationalism that seemed to be the final product of the

enlightened mind'.¹²

With the demise of foundationalism, enter the Reformed epistemologists. Those at the vanguard of this movement were interested in establishing Christian faith as a viable option in the modern world, despite the fact that Christians could no longer appeal to the surety of foundationalism. They therefore embarked upon a theological undertaking that they thought would safeguard Christian belief from the ravages of post-modern, anti-foundationalism. In the pages that follow, I will point out what I consider to be the strengths of the RE position. Then, I will attempt to reveal some of the weaknesses that are inherent in this apologetic system.

Strengths of the Reformed Epistemological Approach to Apologetics

Simply put, the RE position can be summed up as — 'belief in God, like belief in other persons, does not require the support of evidence or argument in order for it to be rational'.¹³ These are the words of Kelly James Clark, one of RE's foremost advocates. He points out that RE can claim the support of no less than John Calvin, who had little use for evidential arguments, rather arguing that all humans have an innate sense of the divine which is not dependent on any type of alleged evidence.¹⁴ Clark makes the salient point that, if there is a God, it seems strange that he would expect us to master the intricacies of arguments and counter-arguments about his existence which fill learned articles and books. 'Why put that sort of barrier between us and God?' he asks.¹⁵ Certainly, the Bible never assumes its readers are required to master complex arguments in order to come to faith. An RE epistemologist is happy to take his stand with St. Paul, who in the first chapter of Romans proclaims that the existence of God is clearly revealed to everyone; only human sin makes anyone deny this fact. In fact, RE thinkers do not believe they have any choice but to take this position. There is no universal standard of human reason, contra the evidentialists, that can establish the validity of any religious truth-claim. But then, how then is religious truth, especially Christian truth, decided?

Concerning the question of whether or not belief in God is warranted without evidence, the premier RE thinker, Alvin Plantinga, has done much to reinforce the traditional Calvinist view that no such evidence is required. For Plantinga, belief in God is 'properly basic' so long as certain conditions are met. Those conditions arise within the Christian community itself. That is, the

Christian community largely determines the faith of its individual members. For those inside the Christian community, Christian faith is properly basic, and therefore as valid a belief as any other belief.¹⁶ For Plantinga, the Christian community shares certain beliefs about God. These beliefs gave shape to that community, and provide the basis of its world-view. These beliefs are shaped by Scripture, but also by the experiences that Christians within the community share, such as 'guilt, gratitude, danger, a sense of God's presence, [and] a sense that he speaks'.¹⁷ The Christian may not be able to convince everyone that his beliefs are true, but this does not render his faith invalid, according to Plantinga. One scholar sums up Plantinga's position as follows;

For example, I might know that I am hungry, even if I can't convince you through an argument. In the same way, the believer might know that God exists in some immediate or non-inferential way, but not be able to convince others of her knowledge.¹⁸

Again, note the reliance here upon Paul's argument in Romans, as well as Calvin's teaching that we possess an innate sense of the divine. Plantinga's point is that, for a Christian, the Christian worldview 'makes sense' and seems to be a valid approach to life, even if one cannot 'prove' that his or her faith is true beyond a doubt. Still, the Christian's belief can be termed properly basic, because it does not rest upon any 'foundational' belief. For Plantinga, belief in God is its own foundation, if you will.¹⁹

There is much to recommend this view of Christian faith, at least from an evangelical viewpoint. First, and most obvious, it takes the internal witness of the Holy Spirit seriously. Jesus assured his disciples that the Spirit would 'guide them into all truth' (John 16:5-16). Evangelicals (especially those of charismatic and Pentecostal persuasion), take seriously the reality of the Holy Spirit in the believer's life. Thus RE, with its emphasis upon the Spirit-inspired, inner-assurance of the believer, surely will find favour with many evangelicals. On this point, RE has two thousand years of Christian orthodoxy on its side.

But there is much more to RE that the evangelical will find appealing. For too long, Christians have been on the defensive, as the largely secular intellectual world expected Christians to prove beyond a doubt that their faith was true, or at least logically sound. The logical positivists of the last century,

adopting a secular, atheistic framework, tried to force Christians into a logical quandary. Their attempt was to render Christianity logically unverifiable. However, the logical positivists were vulnerable to the very same objections they levelled against Christianity—inconsistency;

positivists held that for a proposition to be meaningful it must either be analytic or at least in principle empirically verifiable. The critics of positivism simply asked: Is the positivist criterion itself either analytic or empirically verifiable? Obviously, it is neither, so it should be rejected on its own grounds.²⁰

For Plantinga, the word games of the positivists, as well as the complexities of evidentialist arguments and rebuttals, is not necessary. Why is it Christians who must always defend their view of the world, Plantinga asks? Why do non-theists automatically assume that their position is any more sound than the Christian one? Plantinga writes:

The Christian will of course suppose that belief in God is entirely proper and rational; if he does not accept this belief on the basis of other propositions, he will conclude that it is basic for him and quite properly so. Followers of Bertrand Russell and Madelyn Murray O'Hare may disagree; but how is that relevant? Must my criteria, or those of the Christian community, conform to their examples? Surely not. The Christian community is responsible to its set of examples, not to theirs.²¹

Plantinga's point is well-taken. Why do atheists so often assume that their position is preferable? Can they produce evidence that Christianity is untrue? If, as it is so often maintained, the burden of proof is upon the accuser, let those who deny theism, or Christianity in particular, offer definitive arguments against Christianity, and in favour of atheism. Since the atheist has never done such a thing (at least not to the satisfaction of the millions of believers in the world!), Plantinga's point is a sound one: Christian belief can be just as properly basic as can the tenets of atheism.²² Both seem properly basic to their adherents, and both seem to make sense of the world for their respective followers.

Another realm in which Plantinga's approach will be appreciated is that of biblical studies. Evangelicals have often been suspicious of the historical–

critical method, but not because they think this approach has no merit. Indeed, the spectrum of those calling themselves evangelical is so broad as to include ultra-conservatives who have serious doubts about biblical criticism,²³ to far more moderate evangelicals who embrace much of the findings of modern biblical scholarship. However, one thing that most evangelicals definitely disdain about this approach to Scripture is that it tends to reduce Scripture to a merely man-made document. The historical–critical approach has often been marked by a deep skepticism toward the miraculous elements in Scripture. Many biblical scholars conduct their work as if the miraculous element is assumed, *a priori*, to be fictitious, a pious addition to the otherwise mundane texts they analyze. Edward John Carnell summed up the matter well when he wrote, ‘[i]t does not occur to the higher critic that he has started off with his philosophy of life in a way that makes the consistency of redemptively conceived Christianity impossible’.²⁴

The Jesus Seminar, often castigated by both conservatives and liberals for their extreme views concerning the historical reliability of the gospels, represents an example of the anti-supernatural bias in scholarship taken to the extreme. Because the members of the Seminar are so deeply influenced by a modernist, anti-miraculous worldview, their scholarship cannot but be seen as biased. For them

any record of supernatural events in the Gospels must be rejected as inauthentic. Recorded supernatural events are either mythic fictions created by the early church, or else they can now be accounted for by naturalistic explanations.²⁵

Admittedly, the members of the Jesus Seminar are not part of the mainstream of New Testament scholarship, but the biases that they bring to the table are inherent in many non-evangelical scholars. Indeed, even so illustrious a New Testament scholar as Rudolf Bultmann was guilty of the same sort of *a priori* anti-supernatural bias as is the Jesus Seminar.²⁶ Evangelicals, on the other hand, tend to give Scripture the ‘benefit of the doubt’

If we have sufficient reasons for believing in God (*e. g.*, from scientific or philosophical evidence and argument), then we must bring to our study of [biblical] history a prior rationally justified acceptance of theism. In other words, we cannot exclude the possibility of miracles before we

even investigate historical evidence; rather, the evidence itself must ultimately win the day.²⁷

It is often those who deny the miraculous element in Scripture who portray themselves as 'objective' scholars, while viewing the evangelical position as somehow less than intellectually honest.²⁸ Plantinga, in keeping with his insistence that the Christian worldview (and the miraculous happenings it champions) is intellectually warranted and properly basic, rejects the idea that the premises of critical scholars are the only acceptable ones. (He does not, of course, reject all of the findings of biblical criticism). In fact, he views higher critical methods of Bible study as so biased by an anti-supernatural world view that he sees little reason to take the 'findings' of the critics too seriously. When higher criticism first began to gain prominence, we were often told that it produced 'assured results'. This simply is not the case, Plantinga maintains. For one thing, the critics are often at odds with each other regarding the findings of their own science. Plantinga remarks that

[w]e don't have anything like assured results (or even reasonably well-attested results) that conflict with traditional Christian belief in such a way that belief of that sort can continue to be accepted only at considerable cost; nothing at all like this has happened.²⁹

Plantinga is not denying that modern criticism has been helpful in determining matters like the authorship and dates of the various books. Rather he is claiming that higher criticism has not given evangelical Christians any compelling proof that the central tenets of the faith, like the existence of God, or the resurrection of Jesus, are mythical. A telling example of the overconfidence of biblical critics is that of Rudolf Bultmann. Bultmann, of course, is famous for his attempt to demythologize the Bible. This was necessary, he believed, because modern people simply cannot believe the miraculous worldview that the Bible presents. Of course, he gives no reasons why we who live in the modern era cannot believe in both technological progress and the miraculous as found in the pages of the New Testament. He simply assumes that the two worldviews are incompatible, and then proceeds to build his entire theological outlook on that unproven assumption.³⁰ That Bultmann's position lacked the certitude he thought it did is proven by the fact that most of his students eventually went in the opposite direction and

asserted the New Testament is far more historically reliable than their teacher thought it was.

Part II: Problems with Reformed Epistemology

Although there is much for the evangelical to appreciate in Plantinga's system, there are several serious problems with it in terms of its apologetic usefulness. All of these problems contribute to his system's inability to answer the question: how does one adjudicate between the truth-claims of different religions? Evangelicals are characterized by their insistence on the uniqueness of the Christian faith, and their adherence to the teaching that salvation is possible only through Christ. Therefore, the defence of the Christian faith as the only path to God has always been of great importance to evangelicals. This is not to say that evangelicals see no value in other religions. Many evangelicals are willing to grant that God had revealed at least some truth in all of the great religions.³¹ However, the fullness of God's truth, his saving truth, is to be found in Christianity alone. Therefore, any apologetic system that cannot adequately distinguish the plenary truth of Christianity from the partial truth of other world religions raises great difficulties for the evangelical. The purpose of any Christian apologetic system should be to defend the veracity of the Christian faith, and give reasons why it, and not some other faith, is the truest worldview. It is here that Plantinga's system encounters serious difficulties.

The first problem with Plantinga's system is the manner in which he tries to prove God's existence. He compares the existence of God to things that simply are not at all analogous to God. For example, Plantinga uses the following hypothetical example. He is taken in by the police for suspicion of a crime. However, at the time the alleged crime took place, he was far away, hiking in the hills. But, no one saw him on the hiking trail, so he states—

I hold a belief for which I can't give an argument and which I know is disputed by others. Am I therefore guilty of epistemological egoism? Surely not. Why not? Because I remember where I was, and that puts me within my rights in believing that I was off hiking, even if others disagree with me.³²

Plantinga's point here is that he is justified in maintaining his innocence because he knows, based on his memory, where he was when the crime

happened. He has epistemological certitude about this, just as Christians have about the existence of God. But the analogy does not work because, assuming his memory is functioning properly, he really was hiking in the hills. Had anyone else been there, they would have seen him. Had a camera been rolling at the time, it would have filmed him strolling along. If he goes back to the trail he hiked, his boot-prints will be there. If he was careless, perhaps he lost a few personal items (like a wallet with his identification in it) on the trail. A hermit who lives in the hills may come down to the police station to verify Plantinga's story. The point is, there are many ways Plantinga's story could be confirmed, based on evidence (eyewitnesses, boot-prints, etc.). But what evidence does RE offer for the similar belief that the Christian has in God? There is no evidence, only the believer's inner-confidence that this God exists.

RE thinker Kelly James Clark, following Plantinga, also rejects the idea that all of our beliefs must be based on evidence. As examples, he cites the following: that he believes there is a country called Paraguay, even though he has never been there; that he believes $e=MC^2$, even though he cannot understand or prove it; and that he believes he ate breakfast this morning, although all he can offer as proof is his memory of the event.³³ As with the example cited by Plantinga, none of these examples is analogous to faith in God, because they all can be proven. Clark may never have visited Paraguay, but he can talk to those who have. He can view photographs of the country. And, he can book a flight to Paraguay any time he wishes. As for $e=MC^2$, he may not be able to understand it or prove it himself, but there are plenty of persons in the world who do understand it, can prove it, and can offer evidence as to how the equation functions in the natural world. As for Clark's breakfast, the experience does not rest solely on his memory. Someone could have seen him eating his breakfast. Or, he could root through his trash to find evidence (a banana peel, for instance) verifying what he ate. All of these things can be confirmed by an appeal to objective evidence. These things are objectively true in and of themselves. But how is belief in God anything like these examples? What outside evidence can be marshalled in defence of the belief? Within RE, precisely none, because the RE theologian does not think any is valid, required, or even exists!

This failure to understand the importance of external, objective evidence to the enterprise of Christian apologetic thinking constitutes the great flaw

in RE thinking. RE apologists want to ground belief in the Christian faith on purely subjective grounds, without any appeal to evidence outside the believer's own consciousness. However, once this approach is adopted, how is it possible to adjudicate between the truth claims of Christianity and, say, Islam, or Buddhism? The RE apologist may say that Christian faith does not need evidence, based on what St. Paul says in Romans, but he or she would only be partially correct. Paul does indeed teach in Romans that the creation itself proves God's existence; no further argument is needed. But any Jew or Muslim would agree with what Paul says in the first chapter of Romans. However, Paul never says that the creation proves anything specifically Christian. Neither Paul nor any other New Testament writer ever says that the doctrines of Christianity (like the triune nature of the Christian God, or humanity's innate depravity) are apparent to everyone. That is why, when it comes to the most important Christian doctrine of all, the resurrection of Christ, Paul argues for its validity in an evidential manner, as discussed early in this paper.

Paul's argument may prove that there is a 'God' who created the universe. And the more we learn about the breathtaking complexity of the universe, the more sound his argument seems. But why is this God necessarily the Christian God? Could it not be the God of Islam? And as for Plantinga's claim that the veracity of Christianity is confirmed by the witness of the Christian community, the same can be said for virtually any other religious community, too. Why is Plantinga willing to allow that the Christian community's belief is warranted and properly basic, but not allow the same to be said for the Muslim faith community, the Hindu faith community, etc.? Once the appeal to objective evidence in favour of a religious truth-claim is dismissed, then all religious truth claims are pretty much equal.³⁴ They are all subjective, all based on personal beliefs or inner-experiences, and all subject to rightful skepticism on the part of the unbeliever.

Plantinga has tried to deal with this objection to his system, but I do not believe that he has done so successfully. At one point, he responds to what a detractor of his RE might call the Great Pumpkin objection. That is, if RE requires no external evidence, does this not mean that any religion, no matter how bizarre it seems, can be held with complete conviction? Recall the mighty faith that Linus from the Charlie Brown comic strip had in the Great Pumpkin. The critic asks Plantinga, is not Linus justified in his belief, silly as

it may be? No, says Plantinga. But why? Because it is an irrational belief, and therefore does not qualify as properly basic. After reading Plantinga several times on this point, I think he is saying that belief in Great Pumpkinism is not warranted because it does not have the support of a large, historically entrenched community, as does Christianity. In other words,

the Reformed epistemologist holds...that there are widely realized circumstances in which belief in God is properly basic; but why should that be thought to commit him to the idea that just about any belief is properly basic in any circumstances, or even to the vastly weaker claim that for any belief there are circumstances in which it is properly basic?³⁵

Granted, there does seem to be a much stronger case that the tenets of RE work better when there is a large, well-established religious community, like Christianity, than when there is a quirky religion like Pumpkinism that has only one adherent (Linus!). But, Plantinga still has not proven that Great Pumpkinism is false,³⁶ so I don't think it can be ruled out completely, silly though it may seem. But what if the critique of RE is applied to another unorthodox religion, namely, voodoo? Voodoo has far more adherents than Great Pumpkinism; it has been practiced for hundreds of years; and those who believe in it would certainly tell you that voodoo gives structure and meaning to their lives. The world makes perfect sense to them when filtered through the faith of voodooism. Hence, for voodoo practitioners, this faith is properly basic.³⁷

Plantinga rejects the charge that voodoo should be construed as a properly basic belief, but the reasons why he rejects it are not quite clear, at least not to me. From what I can gather, Plantinga is saying that voodoo practitioners may think their belief system has warrant, but they could be mistaken, perhaps because their religion is based on a misunderstanding of nature, or because they learned voodoo from their parents, and their parents were simply mistaken about the truth of voodoo. Hence, Plantinga can write,

It could certainly happen, therefore, that the views of the Reformed epistemologist are legitimate in the sense of being warranted, and those of the voodoo epistemologist, who arrives at his views in structurally the same way as the Reformed epistemologist, are not. That could be if, for example, the central claims of the Christian faith are true and voodoo

belief is false. It is therefore not the case that if the claim that belief in God and in the great things of the gospel is properly basic with respect to warrant is itself warranted, then by the same token the claim that voodoo belief is properly basic with respect to warrant is itself warranted.³⁸

The above statement is true as far as it goes. Christianity may be ontologically true, hence warranted, while voodoo may be ontologically false, therefore not warranted. But how is one to know? Plantinga's system allows for no evidence, pro or con, regarding either faith. How does one know that the beliefs of the voodoo adherents should be rejected, while the beliefs of Christians should be accepted? Without some type of appeal to evidence, there simply is no way to prove which religion is warranted and which one is not. To the non-Christian, the central tenets of Christianity seems just as bizarre as do the beliefs of the voodoo priest to Plantinga. Thus, when Plantinga talks about the need to reject a community that espouses 'clearly crazy' beliefs,³⁹ he does not seem to realize that his Christian beliefs seem just as crazy to many a non-Christian. Consider the words of Jewish scholar Samuel Sandmel, describing the reaction that many Jews have upon reading the gospel for the first time: for

a Jew, reading as sympathetically as he is able, the Gospels create a bewilderment, not an appreciation. I can report that many a Jew, prior to reading the Gospels, has an estimate of them which the actual reading reduces.⁴⁰

Suffice to say, the beliefs of Christians can look just as odd to Jews as the practice of Voodoo practitioners do to Christians.

Plantinga spends a fair amount of time refuting a probably false faith (Pumpkinism), and a non-mainstream religion (voodoo). Both of these religions are so unlikely to be veridical that the RE apologist (and some evidentialists) will probably tend to give Plantinga's argument against them a bit more weight than it deserves (even though he has not offered one shred of evidence as to why Pumpkinism or voodoo are not true). But, what does the RE theologian do with a major world religion, like Islam, or Hinduism? Here are two faiths that have hundreds of millions of followers. They have both existed for centuries; they have both significantly shaped the cultures in which they have been practiced. And, if you were to ask Muslims why they

believe the way they do, their answer would probably sound pretty much the same as the RE believer's reasons for accepting Christianity. If one lives in, say, Saudi Arabia, believing in Islam, and belonging to a Muslim community, it is as natural and as evidently 'true' to the Muslim as the faith of an RE Christian raised in a devout Christian environment. And, what of Judaism? Here is a faith that not only is older than Christianity, but which actually gave birth to Christianity. If I were a Jew, why would I even consider the truth of Christianity, especially when I have strong reasons, based on historical evidence, to believe that Judaism is 'the truth'?⁴¹ If RE offers no reason for someone to convert to Christianity, it can hardly be called an effective Christian apologetic.

The Evidentialist Corrective

Clearly, RE fails as an apologetic system, since it offers no reasons why a non-Christian should ever consider embracing Christianity. It is precisely at this point that evidentialist apologetics is at its strongest. The world is a welter of competing religious claims, and evidentialism seeks to show that Christianity is demonstrably true. This approach has its critics, of course. Both Kierkegaard and Karl Barth had little use for attempts to 'prove' the Christian faith:

Barth agrees with Kierkegaard that reason cannot defend the Christian faith. Either Jesus was or was not what he claimed to be--the unique Son of God....The man who would prove it implies, implicitly or explicitly, that he has some criterion higher than revelation, he does not need revelation.⁴²

This was basically the same line taken by Cornelius Van Til, who thought it was wrong to submit divine revelation to the 'higher' criterion of human reason. A common thread that runs through the thought of men who oppose the evidentialist approach is the belief that one cannot be reasoned into Christianity; conversion is purely the work of God acting upon the unbeliever. Of course, no evidentialist would argue that God himself is not the primary agent in the conversion process. Yet the fact remains that evidentialist arguments do aid greatly in that process. This is obvious from looking at Scripture, where Thomas believes in Christ as Lord only after he examines the crucifixion wounds. Paul was converted on the road to Damascus by an actual encounter with the risen Jesus; there was nothing fideistic about

Paul's faith.

In a similar vein, if evidence cannot help produce conversion in the human heart, then why bother preaching the gospel at all? Gospel preaching is, after all, a type of apologetic. Why not assume a sort of hyper-Calvinist position and abandon preaching, evangelism, and missions altogether, secure in the knowledge that the Holy Spirit will convict and convert those whom he has chosen? As far as I know, RE does not advocate this position. Why? For one reason, preaching the gospel, like offering evidences for its validity, is commanded by St. Paul himself—'how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?' (Rom. 10:14). Paul makes this statement because preaching is efficacious for conversion—but so is apologetics. For proof, we can point to the example of many of the great twentieth century apologists themselves. C.S. Lewis was brought to faith, albeit 'kicking and screaming', because he found the evidence for Christianity so compelling.⁴³ The same type of event occurred in the life of popular apologist Josh McDowell.⁴⁴ These are only two examples, but then again, they are famous examples. Surely large numbers of everyday men and women have come to faith in Christ in precisely the same way.

I do not have space in this essay to go into all the various ways evidentialists have used to advance the Christian faith. However, one of the most common techniques is to employ a 'defensive' evidentialist approach regarding the death and resurrection of Jesus. Such a defence would basically proceed as follows.

One, the tomb of Christ was empty. Had he not risen, hostile Roman and Jewish authorities could have easily produced the body, thus squelching any talk of a risen Messiah. Such talk would have been blasphemy to the Jewish religious leaders, and potentially seditious as far as the Romans were concerned. The idea that the disciples stole and hid the body, then later claimed that Christ was resurrected, is ludicrous. The disciples suffered greatly for the gospel that they preached. They certainly gained no worldly benefits from preaching their message. Ultimately, tradition tells us, most of them died as martyrs. It is highly unlikely that twelve men would suffer and die for a religion they know to be based on a lie.

Two, the resurrection must have actually occurred, for it is these appearances which obviously turned a rag-tag group of Jewish peasants into the mighty

evangelists who began to preach the resurrection and divinity of Christ. How else to explain the fact that these simple men, who were so dejected when their Master was executed, suddenly became witnesses unto death for that same Master? That these resurrection appearances were only visions, or hallucinations, is entirely untenable, for no twelve men (not to mention the 500 that Paul mentions!) can be expected to have the same hallucinations! Three, the story of the resurrection was preached in the presence of 'hostile witnesses', that is, Jewish authorities who would have gladly discredited the story had they been able to do so.⁴⁵

The evidentialist approach differs from that of RE in that it offers particular reasons not only for accepting Christianity, but also for not accepting the truth claims of other religions. Here the Christian evidentialist employs 'offensive' apologetics. For instance, how should a Christian adjudicate between the truth claims of Christianity, and those of Islam? In RE, both religions can only be seen as equal. That is, both religions have millions of followers, have existed for centuries, and are logically coherent to their respective devotees. Well, the evidentialist would do two things. First, he or she might point out some of the historical problems with Islam.

One of the most damning criticisms of Islam has to do with the Koranic belief that Christ did not really die on the cross. According to Sura 4.156 of the Koran, 'they did not slay him, neither crucified him, only a likeness of that was shown them'.⁴⁶ Now, this belief raises serious problems for the Muslim, for I know of no New Testament scholar, conservative, moderate, or liberal, who denies that Christ did indeed die on the cross (whether or not he subsequently rose from the dead is of course another matter!).⁴⁷

The notoriously skeptical Bultmann considered this to be one of the few incidents in the gospels that could be considered an historical fact. Confirmation of Christ's death comes even from non-theological quarters in the form of papers published in "The Journal of the American Medical Association", as well as other medical journals.⁴⁸ So when Muslims deny that Christ truly died, they are obviously speaking from their own faith perspective, rather than from one of objective, historical investigation.

The Christian evidentialist might also ask, how does the Muslim know that the Koran is God's inspired word? How does he or she know that

Muhammad was indeed inspired by God? As noted above, there is good historical evidence for believing that Christ rose from the dead, thus verifying his claims (and/or those of his followers) regarding his right to serve as God's divine representative on earth. What can Islam offer in the way of this type of evidence for the founder of their faith? John Warwick Montgomery writes that '[n]o such attesting evidence for Muslim revelational claims can be marshaled, for it simply does not exist'.⁴⁹

Or, consider the Mormon religion. An evidentialist might challenge the claims that are made in the Book of Mormon. Joseph Smith, founder of the Mormon faith, claims to have translated the Mormon scriptures from a language he called 'Reformed Egyptian'. Now, the only problem is that scholars know of no such language; it never existed, based on the opinion of 'every leading Egyptologist and philologist ever consulted on the problem'.⁵⁰ But what is recounted in the Book of Mormon is equally troubling. The Book tells the story of two ancient civilizations that left the Middle East centuries before the time of Christ. One group is said to have settled on the west coast of South America, while the other group settled the east coast of what is now Central America. The Book goes on to describe how these two groups of persons established thirty-eight great cities in the New World. Obviously, the problem is that no one outside of Mormonism believes that any ancient immigrants ever left the Middle East and established great cities in Central and South America. Why? Because there is absolutely no proof that this occurred;

Mormons have yet to explain the fact that leading archaeological researchers not only have repudiated the claims of the Book of Mormon as to the existence of these civilizations, but have adduced considerable evidence to show the impossibility of the accounts given in the Mormon Bible.⁵¹

So, an evidentialist apologist need not spend his or her time wondering about whether or not Mormonism meets the claims of 'properly basic' belief. Such speculation is rendered moot by the fact that there seems to be no historical basis for this faith. Evidence (or, in this case, the lack thereof) should give a potential convert serious pause before embracing this faith. Even if the would-be convert was impressed with the properly basic faith he saw among members of the Mormon community,⁵² how important would that be to him, if he knew that that faith seemed to have no grounding in verifiable history?

Finally, the evidentialist approach is realistic. It does not claim that Christianity can be proven beyond all doubt. An apologetic system that delivered irrefutable proof would make a mockery of the claim, found throughout the New Testament, that faith is the key to the Christian life. Yet, as was pointed out above, the New Testament writers do not advocate a fideistic faith, but rather one built upon solid evidences. The evidence for Christ's death and resurrection is strong, but it is not so strong as to make the resurrection an undeniable fact of history (but of course, how could one prove that any event that happened two thousand years ago is irrefutably true?)

John Warwick Montgomery, one of the ablest evangelical defenders of the resurrection in the twentieth century, constantly stressed this point in his writings. Although he believes that the evidence for the resurrection is strong, he knows it is not irrefutable. But what of that? As Montgomery wisely points out, we live our lives based on probabilities.⁵³ For example, I may drive home from work every day on a certain road. This serpentine road is known for its many fatal accidents. Despite the fact that I know there have been several bad car-wrecks on this road, I still continue to drive on it. Why? Because I know the chances are quite slim that I will ever be involved in one of those crashes. Thus, I am willing to risk my life based on the probable (not certain) knowledge that I will not become a fatality on this road. Montgomery has often made the point that all of life is based upon such decisions; we never have absolute certainty regarding important life-decisions, so why should our religious decisions be any different? As I have pointed out elsewhere, it simply is not possible to possess certitude about the decisions one makes in life, be those decisions secular or religious.⁵⁴ Edward John Carnell agrees with this position;

Christian faith...cannot rise above rational probability. Probability is that state of coherence in which more evidences can be corralled for a given hypothesis than can be amassed against it.... Since Christianity is a way of life, and not an unabridged edition of the Pythagorean theorem, it cannot enjoy the demonstrative certainty of the latter.⁵⁵

Toward a Reformed Evidentialist Apologetic

Dr. Plantinga has rendered the Christian community a great service with his RE defence of the Christian faith. However, its deficiencies are such

that the only cure seems to be a healthy injection of evidentialism. Such merging of the two systems would not only buttress the weaknesses in RE, it would also strengthen some of the weak points in the evidentialist system. For instance, evidentialism can sometimes devolve into a series of cold, calculating proofs whereby the apologist defends the faith with great intellectual acumen, but at the expense of genuine Christian warmth or godly example. Presuppositionalist John Frames writes that—

Apologists, therefore, must resist temptations to contentiousness or arrogance. They must avoid the feeling that they are entering into a contest to prove themselves to be righter or smarter than the inquirers with whom they deal.⁵⁶

Frame goes on to point out that often, an apologist can be more persuasive by the life she leads, and the example she sets, than she can with any amount of argumentation.⁵⁷ The RE Christian, secure in her faith and unconcerned with ‘proving’ Christianity, may be more inclined than the evidentialist to demonstrate the truth of her faith by example.

Evidentialists can also sometimes forget that, ultimately, the Holy Spirit, not arguments, however strong they may be, is the cause of conversion in a man or woman’s life.⁵⁸ All good evidentialists believe this, but it is easy to overlook it when carried along by the intellectual tide of argumentation. Alister McGrath wisely remarks that apologetics ‘is an excellent servant of the church; it can, however, too easily be allowed to become its master’. A good evidentialist will realize the limits of apologetics, and allow room for the faith-creating work of God.⁵⁹ The RE Christian, however, with his Calvinistic inclination to see faith as a gift from God, is far less likely to fall into this trap.

Conversely, evidentialism can strengthen RE apologetics are its weakest point, namely, how does one adjudicate between different religions? The RE approach may make perfect sense for someone who is already a Christian, but its effectiveness with non-Christians will necessarily be severely limited, for reasons given above. If the primary purpose of Christian apologetics is to encourage non-Christians to embrace the faith, it is hard to see how the RE approach could possibly do this. Evidentialism also takes seriously the fact that, as RE thinkers themselves admit, there is not much in the world

that we can know with absolute certainty (after all, this was the reason RE thinkers rebelled against foundationalism and founded the RE movement!). If this lack of certainty is true in secular realms of living, there is no reason it should not obtain in the religious realm as well. Evidentialism is realistic in its assessment of the human predicament; it realizes and accepts that, aside from the realm of mathematics, human belief rests on probabilities, not certainties. But it can show that the probability of Christianity being true is quite high, while leaving actual conversion to God.

Conclusion

If the two approaches to apologetics, RE and evidentialism, were blended I believe a powerful apologetic system would emerge. It would be a matrix that could account for the biblical teaching that God's existence is knowable to all, via the world he has created. This system would also take into account the fact that the New Testament clearly teaches that specific Christian truths are not revealed through nature, but through evidences, such as the resurrection of Jesus. It would take seriously the beliefs of Christians who 'know' that their faith is true, even though they might not be able to 'prove' it through complicated theological arguments. It would account for the reality of the Holy Spirit in a believer's life, and the work the Spirit does to confirm that the Bible, and the believer's faith, are genuine. Such a method would also provide a defence against the atheist, who seems to think that his position is somehow more rational than that of the Christian, even though he cannot prove it. The combination of RE and classic evidentialism would offer the Christian solid reasons for the faith that he or she holds. It would also allow the Christian to examine other faiths with a critical eye, and realize that they lack the evidential foundation that distinguishes Christianity from other religions, be they Pumpkinism or Islam. Finally, it would ground the Christian faith in objective truths, like the resurrection, that may not possess mathematical certitude, but which do provide a more than adequate basis for deciding in favour of Christianity.

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ENDNOTES

- 1 The terms 'evidentialist' and 'classical' are often used interchangeably, but according to one thinker there is a major difference. Classical Christian apologists believe that God's

existence must be proved before any specific arguments for Christianity can be considered, while evidentialists believe that the specific arguments themselves not only provide proof for the existence of God, but also suggest that this God is most likely the God of the Christian Scriptures. However, the line is often blurred between these two approaches. See Gary R. Habermas, "Evidential Apologetics," in *Five Views on Apologetics*, Steven B. Cowan, ed., (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000), p. 92.

- 2 Another popular strain of apologetics in the twentieth century was presuppositional apologetics. This system of defending the faith was developed by Cornelius Van Til (late professor of apologetics at Westminster Seminary, Philadelphia). Presuppositionalists reject the very idea of Christian evidences, arguing, as did Karl Barth, that there is no point of contact, or common ground, between Christians and non-Christians. What is needed, Van Til maintained, was to make the non-believer realize that all thinking, religious or otherwise, is predicated upon the existence of the God of the Bible. Thus, the unbeliever must not be permitted to evaluate arguments for Christianity and 'decide' if Christianity is true but humbly submit to the authority of the God of the Bible. For a devastating critique of this from a classical/evidentialist position, see R.C. Sproul, J. Gerstner and A. Lindsley, *Classical Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), pp. 183-338.
- 3 For a good summary of the reliability of the New Testament, see F. F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are they Reliable?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1943), pp. 80-99. Also of interest is J. W. Montgomery, *Where is History Going?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1969), pp. 44-52. The integrity of the NT documents does not in any way guarantee that their contents are 'true', but the fact that our current NT has come down to us more or less in the form in which it was originally written is a powerful argument against those who might be inclined to suspect that the texts have undergone significant editorial redaction. By arguing that the NT has a firm historical basis, it can be distinguished from a work like the Book of Mormon for which there is no supporting historical evidence. For the lack of historicity regarding the Mormon scriptures, see W. Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1965), pp. 178-87.
- 4 Norman L. Geisler, *The Battle for the Resurrection* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1989), p. 90. For a good, succinct summary of Bultmann's views on the historical (or non-historical) character of the NT, see C. Michalson, R. Bultmann in *Ten Makers of Modern Protestant Theology* G.L. Hunt, ed., New York: Association Press, 1958), pp. 102-13.
- 5 Although Bultmann insisted that the resurrection was not a physical, objective event in history, the 'event' of the resurrection nonetheless sparked the rise of the kerygma in the apostles. For his skepticism regarding the historicity of the gospel accounts, see his *The History of the Synoptic Tradition* trans. J. Marsh, 1921, reprint, (NY: Harper & Row, 1963).
- 6 Gregory A. Boyd and Paul R. Eddy, *Across the Spectrum: Understanding Issues in*

- Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), p. 71.
- 7 Pinchas Lapide, *The Resurrection of Jesus* (trans. Wilhelm C. Linss; Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1983), 49. As an Orthodox Jew, Lapide does not view Christ as the Jewish Messiah. However, he does believe that his resurrection proves that he is God's messiah to the Gentile world.
 - 8 John J. Johnson, "Were the Resurrection Appearances Hallucinations? Some Psychiatric and Psychological Considerations," *Churchman* 115, 3 (2001): 227-38.
 - 9 The debate can be found in *Did Jesus Rise from the Dead?* T. L. Miethe, ed., (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987). For a similar debate, see the exchange between William Lane Craig and John Dominic Crossan, in *Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up?* Paul Copan, ed., (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998). Also Stephen T. Davis, *Risen Indeed: Making Sense of the Resurrection* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993).
 - 10 C. Stephen Evans, *Pocket Dictionary of Apologetics and Philosophy of Religion* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002), p. 46.
 - 11 Stanley J. Grenz, *Articulating the Christian Belief-Mosaic: Theological Method After the Demise of Foundationalism*, in *Evangelical Futures* John G. Stackhouse Jr., ed., (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), pp. 110-12.
 - 12 *Ibid.*, pp. 111-12.
 - 13 K.J. Clark, "Reformed Epistemology Apologetics," in *Five Views on Apologetics*, p. 267. The reference here to other minds goes back to Alvin Plantinga's argument that we believe that other minds besides our own exist, even though this is impossible to prove. So it is with faith in God.
 - 14 *Ibid.*, p. 267.
 - 15 *Ibid.*, p. 272.
 - 16 Grenz, *Articulating the Christian Belief-Mosaic*, pp. 131-33.
 - 17 A. Plantinga, "Reason and Belief in God," in *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God* A. Plantinga and N. Wolterstorff, ed., (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), p. 81.
 - 18 Donald Hatcher, "Plantinga and Reformed Epistemology: A Critique," *Philosophy and Theology* 1 (Fall 1986): 88.
 - 19 Here, Plantinga reminds me very much of the presuppositionalist approach to apologetics developed by Cornelius Van Til. For Van Til, too, Christian belief could not be deduced from any sort of argument. It simply is a God-given fact, and it provides the Christian with the correct way of viewing and interpreting the world.
 - 20 Hatcher, "Plantinga and Reformed Epistemology," p. 87.
 - 21 Alvin Plantinga, "Reason and Belief in God," p. 77.
 - 22 The problem of evil is a serious obstacle that all Christians must face. Many atheists consider

this to be their trump card. For them, the reality of evil seems to rule out the possibility of the all-powerful, all-benevolent God of Christian belief. However, the problem of evil, difficult as it is for Christian thinkers, is not insurmountable. One of the best attempts to tackle the issue comes from Gregory A. Boyd, currently working on a trilogy that grapples with the problem of evil from an evangelical, biblical perspective. The first two books in the series are: *God at War: The Bible and Spiritual Conflict* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1997), and *Satan and the Problem of Evil* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2001). Also see John Hick's classic theodicy, *Evil and the God of Love* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966).

- 23 See, for instance, Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *The Old Testament Documents: Are They Reliable and Relevant?* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001).
- 24 Edward John Carnell, *An Introduction to Christian Apologetics: A Philosophic Defence of the Trinitarian-Theistic Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), p. 194.
- 25 M. J. Wilkins and J.P. Morland, eds., *Jesus Under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents the Historical Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), p. 4.
- 26 Gary R. Habermas, "Did Jesus Perform Miracles?" *Jesus Under Fire*, p. 128.
- 27 M. J. Wilkins and J.P. Morland, *Jesus Under Fire*, p. 5.
- 28 Carnell maintains that it is actually conservatives who are the more honest, for they take Scripture as what it claims to be on virtually every page: a miraculous, God-inspired work: let us not soon forget that the Christian, not the higher critic, has actually faced and conquered the facts as they stand. If one assumes that the Bible is a human product, it becomes meaningless; but if one assumes the existence of the God who has revealed Himself in Scripture, he can explain, not deny, the basic facts of the text of the Bible. *An Introduction to Christian Apologetics*, pp. 205-206.
- 29 Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 421. Plantinga's full treatment of this subject spans pp. 374-421.
- 30 See his "New Testament and Mythology," in *Kerygma and Myth: A Theological Debate* Hans Werner Bartsch, ed., tr. R. H. Fuller; London: SPCK, 1953), pp. 1-44.
- 31 See e.g., G.R. McDermott, *Can Evangelicals Learn from World Religions?* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2000). See also C. Pinnock, *A Wideness in God's Mercy: The Finality of Jesus Christ in a World of Religions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992).
- 32 Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, pp. 450-51.
- 33 Kelly James Clark, "Reformed Epistemology Apologetics," pp. 269-70.
- 34 Hatcher makes this point in "Plantinga and Reformed Epistemology", pp. 90-91.
- 35 Plantinga, "Reason and Belief in God", p. 74.
- 36 Hatcher, "Plantinga and Reformed Epistemology," pp. 90-91.
- 37 Michael Martin, *Atheism: A Philosophical Justification* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), p. 272.

- 38 Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, p. 349.
- 39 *Ibid.*, p. 349.
- 40 Samuel Sandmel, *We Jews and Jesus* (NY: OUP, 1965), pp. 126-27.
- 41 Even Christian theologian Karl Barth, often criticized for his ambivalent attitudes toward the Jews, was fond of quoting a conversation between Frederick the Great and his personal physician, Zimmerman: "Zimmerman, can you name me a single proof of the existence of God?" Zimmerman replied, "Your majesty, the Jews!" Quoted from *Dogmatics in Outline* G.T. Thompson ed. and trans. (London: SCM, 1949), p. 75. For a treatment of the veracity of Judaism from the point of view of a Jewish apologist, see E. Berkovits, *Faith After the Holocaust* (NY: KTAV, 1973).
- 42 W. Horndern, *A Layman's Guide to Protestant Theology* (NY: Macmillan, 1955), p. 134.
- 43 C.S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy* (NY: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1955), pp. 223-24
- 44 Josh McDowell, *Evidence that Demands a Verdict: Historical Evidences for the Christian Faith* (San Bernardino, CA: Here's Life Publishers, 1979), pp. 363-67.
- 45 For a fine treatment of this type of approach, see J.W. Montgomery, *Where is History Going?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1969), pp. 53-74.
- 46 Quoted from J. Hick, *The Metaphor of God Incarnate* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), p. 146.
- 47 In fact, even J.D. Crossan, a primary member of the Jesus Seminar, does not deny that Christ actually died on the cross. This is significant, considering his radical reinterpretation of the rest of the gospels; *e.g.*, his version of what happened to Jesus after death is unique. He believes Jesus was buried in a shallow grave, and that his corpse was eventually consumed by wild dogs. For more on this, see William Lane Craig, "Did Jesus Rise from the Dead?" in *Jesus Under Fire*, p. 142.
- 48 See, *e.g.*, W.D. Edwards, W.J. Gabel, and F.E. Hosmer, "On the Physical Death of Jesus Christ," *JAMA* 1986 Mar. 21: 255 (11): 1455-63; D.A. Ball, "The Crucifixion and Death of a Man Called Jesus," *Journal of the Mississippi State Medical Association* 1989 Mar 30; (3): 77-83.
- 49 J.W. Montgomery, *Human Rights and Human Dignity* (Edmonton: Canadian Institute for Law, Theology, and Public Policy, Inc. 1986), p. 119. The beauty of the language of the Koran in its original Arabic is often advanced by Muslims as proof of its divine origin. But literary beauty is not proof of divine inspiration. No one claims that Shakespeare wrote under divine inspiration, even though the beauty and profundity of his work has never been equalled in English. Muslims sometimes point to the internal consistency of the Koran, as opposed to the multiple authorship and apparent thematic contradictions of the Bible. But the Koran could easily be wrong in what it teaches, yet be completely coherent and consistent in its error. For Islamic apologetic techniques, see J.W. Montgomery, "How Muslims do Apologetics," in *Faith*

Founded on Fact (Newburgh, IN: Trinity Press, 1978), pp. 81-99.

- 50 Walter Martin, *Kingdom of the Cults*, 172 (footnote 11).
- 51 *Ibid.*, 183. For a thorough refutation of the alleged historical basis of the Book of Mormon, pp. 178-87.
- 52 I have known several Mormons personally, and have been impressed with their deep faith and the way that faith issues in Godly living. Mormons are therefore justified in claiming the RE understanding of religion for themselves. If their lives are as holy, or more so, than many Christians, how would an RE theologian account for this, given that Mormonism and Christianity are two very different religions? They cannot both be right, even though they both seem to produce the same fruits.
- 53 John Warwick Montgomery, *Human Rights and Human Dignity*, pp. 152-54.
- 54 John J. Johnson, "Is John Hick Concept of the Real an Adequate Criterion for Evaluating Religious Truth-Claims?" *Themelios* 27, 2 (Spring 2002): 52-55.
- 55 Edward John Carnell, *An Introduction to Christian Apologetics*, p. 113.
- 56 J.M. Frame, 'Presuppositional Apologetics', in *Five Views on Apologetics*, p. 220.
- 57 *Ibid.*, p. 220.
- 58 For the role of the Holy Spirit in apologetics, pertaining to both Christians and non-Christians, see Paul D. Feinberg, 'Cumulative Case Apologetics,' in *Five Views on Apologetics* pp. 158-66.
- 59 A. McGrath, *Bridge-Building: Effective Christian Apologetics* (Leicester: IVP, 1992), p. 81; also the section on the limits of apologetics, pp. 82-86. J.W. Montgomery has often been accused of relying too much upon human reason, and too little upon God, for his apologetic method. While it is true that he does stress the importance of human reasoning, he is fully aware that only God can bring about conversion. See his *The Shape of the Past: An Introduction to Philosophical Historiography* (Ann Arbor: Edward Bros., 1962), p. 140.