

Part Five

Fideist Apologetics:

By Faith Alone

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Apologists Who Emphasize Faith

In a long-running feature on the PBS television series *Sesame Street*, four pictures are placed on the screen, three of which are identical or of the same kind of object and one of which is different. Accompanying the pictures, a song (which most will undoubtedly remember!) ran, “One of these things is not like the other; one of these things just doesn’t belong. . . .”

One could make a strong case that counting fideism as one of four major approaches to apologetics is a case of “one of these things just doesn’t belong.” After all, fideism, as the term is usually used in this context, utterly rejects the whole idea of apologetics. So why treat it as a kind of apologetics?¹

Greg Bahnsen, arguing strenuously that Cornelius Van Til was not a fideist, cites a number of definitions of the term *fideism* to support his conclusion.² For example, Alan Richardson defined it as “a pejorative term for subjectivist theories which are based upon religious experience and which undervalue reason in theology.”³ To Van Harvey it is the doctrine that “Christian assertions are matters of blind belief and cannot be known or demonstrated to be true.”⁴ With definitions like these, no wonder hardly any Christian writer will admit to being a fideist. Yet the term is applied to a wide range of Christian thinkers. We would be speaking only somewhat facetiously if we defined it as “the position of someone whose critique of the use of reason in apologetics seems more extreme than ours.”

C. Stephen Evans advances the discussion considerably in a recent book entitled *Faith Beyond Reason*. He argues that we should distinguish irrational fideism from what he calls responsible fideism. *Irrational fideism* denies that we can or should think rationally or logically about matters of faith. Any attempt to give a reasoned account of the Christian faith is dismissed as illegitimate or impossible or both. *Responsible fideism* offers (paradoxical as it may sound) a *reasoned* case for viewing faith as justified even though what it believes is above, beyond, or in some sense against reason. Evans even describes this position as *rational fideism*, a term that neatly contrasts this approach with irrational forms of fideism.⁵

We recognize that Evans's definitions are unusual and that most people who use *fideism* will probably continue to use it as a term of reproach. Nevertheless, we suggest that there exists a distinct approach to apologetics that we may helpfully designate fideism. From this point forward, unless we specify otherwise we will use the term to refer to this "responsible" or "rational" fideism as the fourth major type or approach to apologetics.

As here defined, **fideism** (pronounced *FID-ee-ism* or sometimes *fi-DAY-ism*) is an approach to apologetics that argues that the truths of faith cannot and should not be justified rationally. Or, to look at it another way, fideists contend that the truths of Christianity are properly apprehended by faith alone. The word *fideism* derives from the Latin *fide* (pronounced *FI-day*), meaning "faith," and so in a general sense means a position that assigns some kind of priority to faith. Although fideists often speak of Christian truth as "above" or "beyond" or even "against" reason, they do not maintain that the truths of Christianity are actually irrational. Rather, by "reason" they mean *human* reason or rationality, the use of reason by the human mind. Essential to the case for fideism is the belief that some truths of Christianity are beyond our capacity to understand or express in a logically definitive fashion.

Although fideists deny that human reason can prove or justify Christian beliefs, they do *not* conclude that we should offer no answer to the apologetic questions and challenges posed by non-Christians. The irrationalist may rebuff such challenges with non-replies like “Just believe,” but this is not what we mean by fideism. Rather, fideists answer those apologetic challenges by explaining *why* reason is incompetent to provide a satisfactory answer and then showing that faith does provide a way to deal with the problem.

Since critics of Reformed apologetics so often equate it with fideism, we should briefly explain where the two approaches diverge. Apologists of both traditions agree that Christian truth claims cannot be justified or verified on the basis of assumptions or methods of reasoning *acceptable to non-Christians*. Reformed apologists, though, contend that these truth claims are internally consistent and that they can show them to be rational from within a Christian system of thought, based on certain key Christian assumptions. All the Reformed apologists we discussed in Part Four make this claim, including Cornelius Van Til and Alvin Plantinga, whom Evans classifies as fideists.⁶ But we argue that it is just this claim to be able to produce a rational Christian system that thinkers best described as fideists reject. It is their contention that the truths of Christianity at their core present us with a “paradox” that no amount of rational analysis can eliminate *even for Christians*.

Apologists of all other schools of thought regard fideism as diametrically opposed to the very idea of apologetics—and most fideists themselves would agree. From this perspective, fideism can have nothing to offer apologetics. However, in our opinion there are three reasons why apologists need to consider seriously the claims that fideists make. First, fideism is an increasingly influential perspective in Christianity, including among evangelicals. For good or ill, Christian apologists need to be familiar with fideism. Second, fideists do offer reasoned

arguments for Christian faith, though of a very different kind from the sorts of arguments we have considered so far. This leads us to the third reason: we suggest that apologists of all approaches can learn quite a bit from fideism even while criticizing it.

In this chapter, we will examine the roots of fideist apologetics and consider briefly the thought of five influential fideist apologists. We will pay special attention to the apologetic system of the nineteenth-century fideist Søren Kierkegaard.

Historical Roots of Fideism

Like evidentialism and Reformed apologetics, fideism is a modern development. However, its roots extend back into the early church. The church father most commonly cited as a precursor to fideism was **Tertullian** (ca. 160-220),⁷ whose *Apologeticum* was for Latin Christians what Origen's *Contra Celsum* was for the Greek believers. Tertullian presented in many respects a fairly traditional apologetic, citing fulfilled biblical prophecies and historical evidences for the resurrection of Jesus in support of the Christian faith. But he is most famous for his repudiation of Greek philosophy. "What indeed has Athens to do with Jerusalem?" he asked, with the implied answer, nothing. "Away with all attempts to produce a mottled Christianity of Stoic, Platonic, and dialectic composition!"⁸

Tertullian's position has often been summarized in the formula *credo quia absurdum* (I believe because it is absurd), but he never made this statement.⁹ What he said (that has been misrepresented using that formula) was that the seeming foolishness of the Christian position proves that human beings did not invent it: "The Son of God is born; it does not shame, because it is shameful. And the Son of God is dead; it is altogether believable, because it is foolish [*ineptum*]. And having been buried, he rose again; it is certain, because it is impossible."¹⁰

This argument appears repeatedly in the writings of modern fideists: the moral and spiritual impossibility of human beings inventing the teaching that we need to be saved from sin through the atoning death and resurrection of God incarnate proves that the teaching originated from God. Note that this is, in its own way, a kind of apologetic argument. It may be paradoxical but it is not irrational.¹¹

Tertullian's rejection of philosophy was not, then, a rejection of logic, critical reasoning, or of the consideration of philosophical issues, but of the pagan philosophies that took their point of departure in human speculations. Indeed, Tertullian in his *Apology* could appeal to Stoic philosophers and poets (much as did the apostle Paul in Acts 17:28) to show that even pagans occasionally recognized truths about God. What Tertullian rejected was the project of *syncretism*—the attempt to combine or mix together Christianity with pagan philosophies to make Christianity more palatable.

Martin Luther

The fideist approach to apologetics, though by no means limited to one theological or denominational camp, is most deeply rooted in the Lutheran tradition. Not surprisingly, key aspects of fideism can be traced back to Martin Luther himself.¹² We are not classifying Luther as a fideist, but rather saying that key elements of fideism have their seed in the views of the German Reformer.

Einar Billings's dictum that the test of a correct understanding of Luther is whether it can be reduced "to a simple corollary of the forgiveness of sins"¹³ is relevant to a discussion of Luther's view of apologetics. For Luther forgiveness of sins is a gift of God through faith alone, a gift needed by all human beings because of their bondage to sin. This spiritual bondage is so

radical that the human mind is simply incapable of knowing anything significant about God and his will or about understanding the liberating truth of the gospel apart from the work of the Holy Spirit.

In this context, Luther takes a very dim view of human reason. In the temporal affairs of human beings in the kingdom of earth, “the rational man is self-sufficient.” But in the eternal issues of life in the kingdom of heaven, “nature is absolutely stone-blind” and human reason is completely incompetent.¹⁴ Worse, reason is an enemy of God, “the devil’s whore,” whom Luther nicknames “Frau Hulda.” Reason was responsible for the distortion of the gospel by the Scholastics, who had tried to reconcile the gospel with Aristotle. For Luther, Aristotle was “the stinking philosopher” (*rancidi philosophi*, one of Luther’s more *polite* descriptions of Aristotle),¹⁵ “that noble light of nature, that heathen master, that archmaster of all masters of nature, who rules in all of our universities and teaches in the place of Christ.”¹⁶

Some of what Luther says about apologetic issues overlaps the views of both classical and Reformed apologetics. Non-Christians can, Luther admits, by their reason know that there is a God. Natural reason “is aware that this Godhead is something superior to all things” and recognizes “that God is a being able to help”; indeed, such knowledge “is innate in the hearts of all men.” This innate knowledge Luther calls a “general” knowledge of God, one for which the universality of religion and worship (in all its corrupt forms) provides “abundant evidence.” By this general knowledge, all people know “that God is, that He has created heaven and earth, that He is just, that He punishes the wicked, etc.” The light of natural reason even “regards God as kind, gracious, merciful, and benevolent.” But “that is as far as the natural light of reason sheds its rays.” This knowledge does them no good, since reason “does not know who or which is the true God” and cannot know “what God thinks of us, what He wants to give and to do to deliver

us from sin and to save us.” Luther calls such knowledge the special, proper, or particular knowledge of God.¹⁷

Worse still, what God has done for human beings—becoming incarnate, dying and rising from the dead—seems quite unreasonable to them. “All works and words of God are contrary to reason.”¹⁸ The use of syllogistic reasoning in theology will inevitably lead to falsehood, even when the premises are true and the form of reasoning logically valid. “This is indeed not because of the defect of the syllogistic form but because of the lofty character and majesty of the matter which cannot be enclosed in the narrow confines of reason or syllogisms. So it [the matter] is not indeed something contrary to, but is outside, within, above, before, and beyond all logical truth.”

Luther concludes, “God is not subject to reason and syllogisms but to the word of God and faith.”¹⁹ This view of reason has important implications for the usefulness of apologetical appeals to the natural realm. Since logic is inapplicable to God and the central claims of Christianity, no arguments can be given for the gospel of grace from the natural realm or from reason. The gospel must be heard from the Word, and its sole argument is that God has spoken. Attempts to defend it utilizing reason (in its arrogant mode) will only succeed in subverting it. “Let us not be anxious: the Gospel needs not our help; it is sufficiently strong of itself. God alone commends it.”²⁰

Blaise Pascal

Blaise Pascal was a Catholic mathematician and writer whose thought has attracted much interest in recent years. Although he was not a fideist, his position anticipates the fideist model of apologetics in significant respects.²¹ Although his *Pensées* (“Thoughts”) consists of scattered fragments of the apologetic treatise he never wrote, it is one of the most remarkable apologetic

works ever penned. In it Pascal chose to avoid metaphysical theistic proofs and provided a trenchant analysis of the paradoxes of the human condition and the interplay between faith and reason.²²

Pascal's *Pensées* begins with a discussion of the dynamics of human thought. He notes that some people's minds are more intuitive, while others are more mathematical; both ways of thinking are important (1). Some people's thinking emphasizes precision, while others' emphasizes comprehension (2). Pascal therefore urges a sensitivity and respect for the differences in the way people think. Instead of telling them they are wrong, he recommends acknowledging where they are right and then showing them another side of the issue, so as to avoid unnecessary offense (9). The goal is to help them discover the truth for themselves, rather than forcing it on them: "People are generally better persuaded by the reasons which they have themselves discovered than by those which have come into the minds of others" (10). We can do this only if we "put ourselves in the place of those who hear us" (16). What line of reasoning we will then use depends on what is perceived to be the difficulty. "For we always find the thing obscure which we wish to prove, and that clear which we use for the proof" (40).

In number 60 Pascal summarizes what were evidently to be two major points developed in his work. The first part he entitles "Misery of man without God" or "That nature is corrupt. Proved by nature itself," and the second part "Happiness of man with God" or "That there is a Redeemer. Proved by Scripture." Later he will note that "the Christian faith goes mainly to establish these two facts, the corruption of nature, and redemption by Jesus Christ" (194).

He begins his discussion of man's misery without God by urging his readers to "contemplate the whole of nature in her full and grand majesty," and in doing so they will find that nature "is the greatest sensible mark of the almighty power of God" (72). Those seeking to

understand everything, to comprehend the totality of the world, have acted “with a presumption as infinite as their object” (72). Pascal further warns that every aspect of human nature contributes to human error. “The senses mislead the reason with false appearances, and receive from reason in their turn the same trickery which they apply to her; reason has her revenge. The passions of the soul trouble the senses, and make false impressions upon them” (82). Reason, therefore, as valuable as it is, cannot be fully trusted, since it is “blown with a breath in every direction” (82).

Although the will does not create belief, it “is one of the chief factors in belief” because it can influence the mind to look at things according to the likes and dislikes of the person (99). Motivated by self-love, we hate the truth and wish to hide the truth about ourselves from others (100). But we betray our unhappiness in the pursuit of diversions: “If our condition were truly happy, we would not need diversion from thinking of it in order to make ourselves happy” (165).

If people hate the truth about themselves, it follows that they hate religion even while fearing that it is true. The apologetic task is to overcome this hatred of truth: “To remedy this, we must begin by showing that religion is not contrary to reason; that it is venerable, to inspire respect for it; then we must make it lovable, to make good men hope it is true; finally, we must prove it is true” (187). In this remarkable statement Pascal refers to three of the functions of apologetics (see chapter 1): as defense (“showing that religion is not contrary to reason”), as offense or proof (“we must prove it is true”), and as persuasion (“we must make it lovable”).

So far Pascal has argued in a manner fairly close to the classical approach to apologetics, but his argument is about to take a new turn. In number 194 he argues for the importance of seeking the truth, of considering questions of ultimate purpose. God has given “visible signs” to make it possible for people to find him, but has “disguised” them so that only those really

seeking him will succeed (cf. 430). Many people claim to have tried to learn the truth but are really indifferent and have made at best a casual effort. They then abandon the quest, comforting themselves with the notion that the truth in these matters is unknowable and unimportant. Such carelessness in the most important issues of life, Pascal says, moves him “more to anger than pity.” People who deny the existence of a God to whom they are accountable and pretend to be self-sufficient and happy, are not being honest with themselves or others. “Let them at least be honest men, if they cannot be Christians.”

To show atheists and other skeptics that they need to consider the Christian position seriously, Pascal offers the following argument: “If there is a God, he is infinitely incomprehensible.” From this premise it follows that nothing in this world can prove God, for God is beyond anything in this world. “Who then will blame Christians for not being able to give a reason for their belief, since they profess a religion for which they cannot give a reason?” It is of the essence of the Christian religion that God is beyond our reason, and thus that Christianity “is a foolishness, *stultitiam*”; atheists who ask for proof are then asking for something that would *disprove* Christianity. One is therefore faced with a choice, to believe or not to believe. “A game is being played at the extremity of this infinite distance where heads or tails will turn up. What will you wager?” (233).

Pascal then offers his famous “wager argument”: “Let us weigh the gain and the loss in wagering that God is. Let us estimate these two chances. If you gain, you gain all; if you lose, you lose nothing. Wager then without hesitation that He is.” The person who wagers that God exists can find God in the experience of a changed life. “Endeavor then to convince yourself, not by increase of proofs of God, but by the abatement of your passions. . . . Learn of those who have been bound by you, and who now stake all their possessions” (233). Contemporary

philosophers have given the wager argument considerable attention, and there has been much debate about its significance and validity.²³ In the context of his *Pensées*, Pascal's wager appears to be a recommendation to unbelievers to *try* the Christian faith—to enter into the experience of the faithful as a way to faith. If we refuse to believe and act unless we have certainty, Pascal reminds us, we will “do nothing at all, for nothing is certain” (234).

Pascal regards attempts “to prove Divinity from the works of nature” in arguments with unbelievers to be counterproductive. Although believers rightly see God's handiwork in nature, arguments that appeal to nature to prove God to unbelievers “give them ground for believing that the proofs of our religion are very weak” (242). Scripture never reasons in the manner that “There is no void, therefore there is a God” (243). “There are three sources of belief: reason, custom, inspiration. The Christian religion, which alone has reason, does not acknowledge as her true children those who believe without inspiration. It is not that she excludes reason and custom. On the contrary, the mind must be open to proofs, must be confirmed by custom, and offer itself in humbleness to inspirations, which alone can produce a true and saving effect” (245).

Faith, then, comes only from God. “Faith is different from proof; the one is human, the other is a gift from God” (248).

Pascal attempted to chart a course between “two extremes: to exclude reason, to admit reason only” (253). To make faith contrary to the senses would be to exclude reason; to limit it to the senses would be in effect to admit reason only (265). Likewise, to limit ourselves to reason would mean the elimination of mystery, while to ignore reason would result in absurdity: “If we submit everything to reason, our religion will have no mysterious and supernatural element. If we offend the principles of reason, our religion will be absurd and ridiculous” (273). “The heart

has its reasons, which reason does not know” (277). These “reasons” of the heart are irreducible first principles, analogous to the axioms of mathematics. Such principles are intuited, not deductively derived. “And it is as useless and absurd for reason to demand from the heart proofs of her first principles, before admitting them, as it would be for the heart to demand from reason an intuition of all demonstrated propositions before accepting them” (282). Rather than seek to prove such first principles, “reason must trust these intuitions of the heart, and must base them on every argument” (282).

In the central and most distinctive arguments of the *Pensées*, then, Pascal appears as a precursor to what C. Stephen Evans calls a responsible fideism.²⁴ It would be a mistake, though, to view him as a thoroughgoing fideist; as we have seen, his apologetics contains aspects of the classical approach. Although he denies that faith rests on proofs, he affirms that proofs *are* available and offers a brief list of a dozen such proofs. These include the establishment of the Christian religion despite its being contrary to human nature; the changed life of a Christian; the biblical miracles in general; the miracles and testimonies of Jesus Christ, the apostles, Moses, and the prophets; the Jewish people; the biblical prophecies; and other evidences (289). The rest of the *Pensées* elaborates on these evidences or proofs. These proofs provide confirmation of the claims of Jesus Christ in Scripture: “Apart from Jesus Christ, we do not know what is our life, nor our death, nor God, nor ourselves. Thus without the Scripture, which has Jesus Christ alone for its object, we know nothing” (547). The voice of God is clearly heard in Scripture, and for Pascal, the Christ of Scripture is the real proof of Christianity.

Søren Kierkegaard

Søren Aabye Kierkegaard (1813-1855) lived a relatively short life, during which he was not widely known outside his native Denmark. Yet in the twentieth century he became one of the dominant influences in Western philosophy and theology. Kierkegaard (pronounced *KEER-kuh-gore*) is generally regarded as the father of both religious and atheistic existentialism. His thought profoundly influenced such theologians as Karl Barth, Emil Brunner, and Reinhold Niebuhr. Brunner, in fact, hailed him as “the greatest Christian thinker of modern times”²⁵ as well as “incomparably the greatest Apologist or ‘eristic’ thinker of the Christian faith within the sphere of Protestantism.”²⁶ Brunner’s description of Kierkegaard as an “Apologist” will surprise those who are used to thinking of fideism and apologetics as mutually exclusive.²⁷

Like many profound thinkers, Kierkegaard is often cited but rarely understood. Perhaps it would be best to say that the project of understanding Kierkegaard is still under way. He is the subject of an unending stream of books and articles analyzing his life and thought in minute detail.²⁸ Scholars interpret his thought in radically different ways; such diversity exists among interpreters sympathetic to Kierkegaard as well as among those critical of him. Evangelicals generally view Kierkegaard negatively in light of his role in the rise of modern existentialism and neoorthodox theology.²⁹ While not denying the problematic aspects of his thought, our focus will be on explaining what many Christian thinkers have found of positive value in Kierkegaard in order to understand the appeal of fideism.

Kierkegaard’s writings need to be interpreted in the context of his life experiences.³⁰ More so than most theologians or philosophers, he wrote out of the intensity of his own spiritual journey.

Two individuals dominated Kierkegaard’s life, and his relationships with them are profoundly mirrored in his writings. The first was his father, Michael Pedersen Kierkegaard, an

extremely strict and pious man overwhelmed with guilt. As a child Michael had cursed God, and for this and other reasons he feared his family was under a divine curse. In midlife he began reading seriously in theology and philosophy, an interest he passed on to Søren, the youngest of his seven children. Two of Søren's brothers died while he was a young child, and his mother died when he was a young adult, seemingly proving the elder Kierkegaard's fear valid. (In the end, only one member of the family, Peter, outlived Søren.) A year after his mother died, Søren rebelled against his father and sought his escape in a life of wanton pleasures. His conduct was so colorful that he became the inspiration for a character in a novel written by Hans Christian Andersen, Søren's childhood classmate and Denmark's other famous nineteenth-century son. The prodigal son eventually realized the emptiness of that path and returned home to his father, who died soon thereafter (in 1838). Søren followed his father's passion for theology and philosophy, completing his graduate studies with a dissertation entitled "The Concept of Irony, with Continual Reference to Socrates" (1841).

The second person of life-changing importance for Kierkegaard was Regina Olsen, a young woman of fourteen he had met during his prodigal days. In 1840 Søren became engaged to her, and he immediately regretted it. The following year he broke off the engagement, feeling that God had called him to a life of solitude and internal suffering. Kierkegaard never married, and he carried his love for Regina to his grave.

During the next seven years Kierkegaard wrote most of the books for which he is now well known, including *Either/Or* (1843), *Fear and Trembling* (1843), *Philosophical Fragments* (1844), *Stages on Life's Way* (1845), and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to "Philosophical Fragments"* (1846). He wrote these books under pseudonyms such as Johannes de Silentio ("Johnny Silent") and Johannes Climacus ("Johnny Climax"). To this day there is considerable

debate as to whether or to what extent these pseudonymous “authors” actually spoke for Kierkegaard. What is clear is that his use of the pen names was part of his method of, as he called it, “indirect communication.” This seeks to communicate ideas not by directly asserting or arguing for them, but by speaking in such a way as to provoke people to think about those ideas and come to embrace the truth “on their own,” as we sometimes say. It is interesting that Hans Christian Andersen is famous for his own method of indirect communication, namely, his popular children’s stories.

Two primary sources will guide our interpretation of Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous writings. First, he wrote voluminously in journals and other unpublished papers, and often indicates there his agreement or disagreement with something attributed in his books to one or another fictional writer or speaker. We will be referring to these materials frequently in discussing his position on various apologetic issues.³¹

Second, he capped off seven years of literary output, during which he produced his major writings, with a book that was not written under a pseudonym: *The Point of View for My Work as an Author. A Direct Communication: A Report to History* (1848). As the title indicates, this book was “a direct communication,” setting forth plainly how his earlier writings should be interpreted. Those writings seemed to be largely “aesthetic” at first, becoming more “religious” toward the end. However, Kierkegaard insists that “the religious is present from the beginning,” and he denies being “an aesthetic author who with the lapse of time has changed and become a religious author.”³² Between the strongly aesthetic writings and the later overtly religious writings was his *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, which centered on “the problem of the whole authorship: how to become a Christian.”³³ Kierkegaard goes on to explain that in his day virtually everyone was considered a Christian, and yet Christendom fell woefully short of the

true Christianity of the New Testament. In such a situation, he realized, he could never get people to see the problem by attacking their status as Christians directly. “If it is an illusion that all are Christians—and if there is anything to be done about it, it must be done indirectly, not by one who vociferously proclaims himself an extraordinary Christian, but by one who, better instructed, is ready to declare that he is not a Christian at all. . . . A direct attack only strengthens a person in his illusion, and at the same time embitters him.”³⁴

Kierkegaard took just this approach in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, in which his pseudonymous author, Johannes Climacus, explicitly disavowed being a Christian.³⁵ We see here a kind of “apologetic” at work, but an unusual one in that its purpose is not to convert people of other religions to Christianity but to convert people of the Christian religion to authentic Christian faith. Kierkegaard viewed himself ideally called to this work because he himself struggled to become a Christian.

The ancient Greek philosopher Socrates had troubled Athens with his message that the Athenians did not really know what they thought they knew; he had claimed to be wiser than the rest of them only in that he knew that he didn’t know. Socrates sought to communicate this message indirectly by acknowledging his ignorance and asking his fellow Athenians to share their wisdom with him. Likewise, Kierkegaard (who had written his thesis on Socrates) troubled Copenhagen with his message that the people of Christendom thought they were Christians but were not. He communicated this message by acknowledging that he himself was not a Christian in the true sense of the word and by raising questions designed to bring those who were confident of their own Christianity face-to-face with the problem.

After 1848 Kierkegaard wrote fewer books, as he apparently saw his primary mission as already fulfilled. Two of his most notable publications during this last period of his life, *The*

Sickness unto Death (1849) and *Training in Christianity* (1850), were written under the pseudonym Anti-Climacus (“Anticlimax”), suggesting that in these works he was correcting or balancing some of the things he had published under the pseudonym of Johannes Climacus. The central point of *Training in Christianity* epitomizes his message: to be a believer in Christ, a true Christian, is not to know that Christ lived in the past but is instead to live as a contemporary of Christ in the present. In 1854 and 1855, he published a flurry of articles and pamphlets protesting the self-assurance of the establishment church. These writings, later published as a book entitled *The Attack upon “Christendom,”* took Kierkegaard’s nominally Christian culture to task not so much for failing to live up to the ideal of Christianity as for failing to have the humility to admit that it fell short. Kierkegaard evidently burned himself out in the effort, falling ill and dying in 1855.

Kierkegaard is commonly, and we believe rightly, described as a fideist. However, the context in which he advocated a fideistic approach to the truth of Christianity is all-important. He was sharply opposed to the traditional defenses of Christian orthodoxy because he believed they led only to a conceited sense of intellectual triumph among philosophers and theologians and distorted the essence of the Christian faith. “If one were to describe the whole orthodox apologetical effort in one single sentence, but also with categorical precision, one might say that it has the intent to make *Christianity plausible*. To this one might add that, if this were to succeed, then would this effort have the ironical fate that precisely on the day of its triumph it would have lost everything and entirely quashed Christianity.”³⁶

A “plausible,” nonparadoxical, inoffensive Christianity is not, Kierkegaard insisted, the Christianity of the New Testament. When Christianity is reduced to a set of propositions that can be demonstrated by rationalistic and historical argumentation, the dimension of personal

encounter, inner suffering, and decisive response to truth is lost. Kierkegaard's intention was to bring people to the realization that becoming a Christian requires more than membership in the church or assent to a doctrinal formula. "My intention is to make it difficult to become a Christian, yet not more difficult than it is, and not difficult for the obtuse and easy for the brainy, but qualitatively and essentially difficult for every human being, because, viewed essentially, it is equally difficult for every human being to relinquish his understanding and his thinking and to concentrate his soul on the absurd."³⁷

If becoming a Christian is not more difficult for the obtuse than for the brainy, then it cannot depend in any way on following the rational arguments traditionally used to prove that Christianity is true. In fact, Kierkegaard concludes that such arguments actually become obstacles to genuine faith, because they obscure the radically scandalous and personally challenging nature of the Christian message.

Although Kierkegaard opposed traditional apologetics, he offered a kind of "indirect" apologetic for Christianity in keeping with his method of indirect communication. C. Stephen Evans has identified four basic apologetic arguments in Kierkegaard's *Philosophical Fragments*.³⁸

The "no human author" argument. In setting forth the Christian position as a "thought experiment," Johannes Climacus (Kierkegaard's pseudonymous author) presents it as hypothetical or imagined, to which his interlocutor objects that the position is already well known. Climacus admits this, but suggests that while he cannot take credit for it, no other human being can either; it is not something anyone would make up (65-66).³⁹ "Everyone who knows it also knows that he has not invented it." From this "oddity" Climacus concludes that the lack of any human author demonstrates its truth: "It tests the correctness of the hypothesis and

demonstrates it” (66).⁴⁰ There is some uncertainty as to what this claim that no one would invent is. Evans suggests that in context Climacus’s point is that the idea that human beings are spiritually dead and incapable of overcoming this problem “is not one that could ‘naturally’ occur to any human being, but can only be known after God has revealed it” (67).

The argument from the uniqueness of the Incarnation. The second apologetic argument is very much like the first. Climacus’s “poem” about God becoming a man in order to be our Teacher and Savior is again shown not to be his invention or the creation of any other human being; it must have come from God himself (67).⁴¹

The argument from offense. Those who hear the story of the Incarnation and disbelieve it are always offended at it, a fact that Climacus takes as confirmation of its truth. The absurdity of the Incarnation is viewed as an objection and an offense by the unbeliever (68), but Climacus views the reaction of being offended as “an indirect testing of the correctness of the paradox” (68-69).⁴² Evans explains that since we would expect people to find the Incarnation absurd and offensive, the fact that they do is indirect confirmation of its truth. “A person who wanted to make up a story would make up something much more plausible” (69).

The argument of the book as a whole. Evans contends that the argument of the book as a whole is that the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation is a plausible idea. This interpretation of Kierkegaard is certainly ironic, given his emphatic condemnation of attempts to make Christianity plausible. “Chapter 1 argues that any genuine alternative to Socrates will have God as our teacher.” That is, either we follow a great human teacher or we follow God as teacher. Chapter 2 argues that God can be our teacher ultimately only if he gives himself in love by becoming one of us. Chapter 3 argues that natural theology (rational proofs of God’s existence) is a failure, and therefore that if we are to know God, he must reveal himself. “Chapters 4 and 5 .

.. imply that historical apologetics is pointless” because faith is produced by an encounter with God and cannot be grounded on argument or evidence. Unbelievers are offended by the Incarnation, not because it supposedly lacks evidence but because they find it absurd (70-72).

Evans’s reading of *Philosophical Fragments* shows that we must be careful not to read too much into Kierkegaard’s rejection of apologetics. On the one hand, Kierkegaard rejected attempts to make Christianity “plausible” in the sense of making it into an intellectual system to which one might comfortably give assent. True Christianity always requires leaving our “comfort zone.” On the other hand, Kierkegaard offered constructive suggestions for ways to show indirectly that Christianity is true while retaining its radical, life-changing character. Ironically, he turns the fact that Christianity is not “plausible” (in the intellectually comfortable sense) into an indirect argument for the truth of Christianity. Kierkegaard was thus far from advocating a thoughtless, uncritical, or irrational faith. What he advocated was a careful thinking about faith that recognized that faith was not itself merely a matter of thought. There is, to be sure, a naive and irrational fideism that waives all questions and squelches all doubts with a demand to “just believe,” but this is not the kind exemplified by Kierkegaard. Indeed, from his perspective it is the nominal Christian who assumes he is a Christian because of his baptism, doctrinal belief, church membership, morality, or even piety that has failed to think seriously and clearly about the Christian faith.⁴³

Karl Barth

Karl Barth (1886-1968) is widely regarded as the most important and influential theologian of the twentieth century. Admittedly other theologians of the century were more radical, or more conservative; “Barthianism,” so called, never did amount to much in the way of

a coherent movement (which is just as Barth would have liked it); and outside scholarly settings Barth's name (pronounced *BART*) is not particularly well known. But Barth forged a new approach to theology that continues to challenge and inspire theologians of all perspectives. His importance can best be seen by a review of his life and work.⁴⁴

BARTH'S EARLY THEOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT

Barth was the son of Fritz Barth, a conservative Swiss theologian, and was educated in leading German universities during the first decade of the twentieth century under such renowned liberal theologians as Adolf von Harnack and especially Johann Wilhelm Herrmann.⁴⁵ As the pastor in Safenwil, a small Swiss town, Barth found the liberal theology he had learned in Germany difficult to preach. The bankruptcy of liberalism became overwhelmingly clear to him in the light of his German professors' support (along with that of numerous other German intellectuals) for the policy of Kaiser Wilhelm II in World War I (1914-1918). Liberalism, he realized, accommodated Christianity to the culture rather than confronting or challenging the culture.⁴⁶ In 1919 Barth published his commentary on Romans (*Der Römerbrief*), sounding the message that God is known only in his self-revelation as the God who transcends history and culture. "God is God," Barth protested against his former professors. In the often-quoted words of Karl Adam, a Roman Catholic theologian writing in 1926, Barth's commentary on Romans fell like "a bomb on the playground of the theologians."

Der Römerbrief is a kind of "transitional fossil" in the evolution of Barth's theology. It signaled a break with the old liberalism and sounded some of the characteristic themes of Barth's theology, but it did not articulate a stable alternative to liberalism. His theology was now in transition, retaining fundamental assumptions and elements of liberalism even while he was

seeking to pull away from it. He began almost at once to rewrite the entire commentary even while reviewers were hailing the first edition as the charter of a new theological model. This theology was sometimes called the “theology of crisis” because of its emphasis on the judgment (Greek, *krisis*) of God’s revelation against culture, or “dialectical theology” because of its emphasis on the antithesis or polar opposition between God and humanity. The two best-known theologians who associated themselves with this theology, Rudolf Bultmann and Emil Brunner, found over the years that they could not follow Barth’s continued movement in a more conservative theological direction. The common practice of classifying these three theologians as “dialectical” or “neo-orthodox” tends to obscure the radical differences between Barth and others identified by those labels. In later years Barth actually disavowed the term “dialectical theology.” He summed up his theological position during the early 1920s in an often quoted statement from his preface to the second edition (1922) of *Der Römerbrief*:

I know that I have laid myself open to the charge of imposing a meaning upon the text rather than extracting its meaning from it, and that my method implies this. My reply is that, if I have a system, it is limited to a recognition of what Kierkegaard called the “infinite qualitative distinction” between time and eternity, and to my regarding this as having negative as well as positive significance: “God is in heaven, and thou art on earth.” The relation between such a God and such a man, and the relation between such a man and such a God, is for me the theme of the Bible and the essence of philosophy. Philosophers name this KRISIS of human perception—the Prime Cause: the Bible beholds at the same cross-roads—the figure of Jesus Christ.⁴⁷

About the same time that Barth was finishing the second edition of *Der Römerbrief*, he began his academic teaching career. He held teaching positions at three German universities—

Göttingen (1921-1925), Münster (1925-1930), and Bonn (1930-1935). While he was at Bonn, Adolf Hitler came to power in Germany, and once again Barth found it necessary to protest the accommodation of the church and its theology to German nationalistic ideology. He was the principal drafter of the Barmen Declaration (1934), which affirmed the lordship of Jesus Christ over all individuals and nations. The following year Barth, forced to give up his chair at Bonn and expelled from Germany, accepted a position at the University of Basel in his native Switzerland, where he remained until his retirement in 1962.

During his years teaching in Germany, Barth wrestled to come to terms with both the teachings of the Bible and the theological heritage of the church's history. His mentors from 1910 to 1920 had been Harnack, Herrmann, and the father of theological liberalism, Friedrich Schleiermacher; during the 1920s they were Luther, Calvin, and Anselm. While his theology increasingly inclined toward the views of Luther and Calvin,⁴⁸ his theological method was shaped through his distinctive reading of Anselm. In *Anselm: Fides Quarens Intellectum* (1931), Barth challenged the conventional interpretation of Anselm's theology as an attempt to establish the rationality of Christianity apart from revelation. Rather, Barth argued, Anselm himself stated that his method was one of "faith seeking understanding" (*fides quarens intellectum*), that is, of a person who has already accepted God's revelation in faith then seeking to articulate a rational understanding of the meaning of that revelation. This does not mean that Anselm was not concerned to reach the unbeliever. But Barth's take on Anselm's method of communicating the Christian faith to unbelievers is a surprising one:

Perhaps Anselm did not know any other way of speaking of the Christian *Credo* except by addressing the sinner as one who had not sinned, the non-Christian as a Christian, the unbeliever as a believer, on the basis of the great "as if" which is really not an "as if" at

all, but which at all times has been the final and decisive means whereby the believer could speak to the unbeliever. Perhaps desiring to prove, he did not really remain standing on this side of the gulf between the believer and non-believer but crossed it, though on this occasion not in search of a truce as has been said of him and has often happened, but . . . as a conqueror whose weapon was the fact that he met the unbelievers as one of them and accepted them as his equal.⁴⁹

Here we see the heart of Barth's fideistic understanding of apologetics. He did not advocate irrationalism—no one could, using Anselm as a model! On the other hand, he insisted that Anselm did not seek a rationally based accommodation to or compromise with unbelief. Instead, Barth interpreted Anselm as taking the paradoxical approach of humbly identifying himself with unbelievers in their astonishment at the Christian message in order to conquer them with its truth. The apologist is not to seek a “neutral” common ground between Christian and non-Christian on which both can reach a “truce.” Nor is he to remain triumphantly on Christian ground, demonstrating the truth of Christianity to his own satisfaction while ignoring the perspective of the non-Christian. He is rather to present Christian truth as the answer to questions that he asks right along with the non-Christian.

BARTH'S *CHURCH DOGMATICS*

In the preface to the second edition of the book, Barth commented that his interpretation of Anselm was “a vital key, if not the key,” to understanding the method that was increasingly informing his theology.⁵⁰ Barth's discovery of this Anselmic method led him to do with his already-begun systematic theology what he had done earlier with his commentary on Romans:

start over from the beginning. In 1927 he had published what was supposed to be the first volume of a series entitled *Christian Dogmatics in Outline*. Through his continued immersion in the church's theological heritage, and especially his study of Anselm, he became convinced that he needed to redo the dogmatics. The new series was entitled *Church Dogmatics*, and it was to dominate Barth's work for the rest of his life. At the beginning of the first volume, published in 1932, he made explicit his change of method:

This means above all that I now think I have a better understanding of many things, including my own intentions, to the degree that in this second draft I have excluded to the very best of my ability anything that might appear to find for theology a foundation, support, or justification in philosophical existentialism. . . . In the former undertaking I can only see a resumption of the line which leads from Schleiermacher by way of Ritschl to Herrmann. And in any conceivable continuation along this line I can see only the plain destruction of Protestant theology and the Protestant Church.⁵¹

Barth published the *Church Dogmatics* in installments in German from 1932 until 1959, with a volume "fragment" published in 1967, the year before Barth's death. Ironically, Barth never finished his magnum opus, a reminder of his own teaching that a perfect or complete human theological system is unattainable in this life.

An understanding of the *Church Dogmatics* as a whole is essential to understanding Barth's statements relating to apologetics in their context. This poses a considerable challenge because of the work's length, depth, and creative approach.⁵² Its plan called for five volumes organized around the affirmation that the church's dogma, or authoritative teaching, is a witness to the revelation of the triune God. Barth was to explicate this teaching by considering, in turn, the Word of God as revelation (volume I), the one God who reveals himself (II), and his

revelation in the Father as Creator (III), in the Son as Reconciler (IV), and in the Holy Spirit as Redeemer (V). The volumes ran so long that Barth published them in parts and even half-parts, so that the first four volumes consisted of thirteen weighty books (and Barth did not quite finish volume IV and was unable to start volume V).

In volume I, *The Doctrine of the Word of God* (1932, 1938), Barth argues that theology is properly understood as the church's critical examination of its speech about God in the light of God's own revelation in the Word of God. This Word is God himself, revealing himself as the triune God, preeminently in the Incarnation of the Word in Jesus Christ, the Son, and in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (I/1, chapters 1–2). (We will consider Barth's teaching in these opening pages of the *Church Dogmatics* in somewhat more detail in chapter 17.) This personal self-revelation is communicated to us in Scripture, which as the witness to God's revelation becomes the written Word of God. In turn, the church communicates its understanding of God's revelation witnessed in Scripture to the world, and as it does so the church is preaching the Word of God (I/2, chapters 3–4). (We will have more to say about Barth's view of Scripture in chapter 18.)

Volume II, *The Doctrine of God* (1940, 1942), is a volume of obvious relevance to apologetics. Barth begins by arguing that the true God is the one who is known to us exclusively at his initiative, by his revealing of himself to us in the Word of God. This means that natural theology is an utterly futile and irrelevant path to the knowledge of God. The God known to us by revelation is the absolutely perfect, personal God who freely loves us (II/1, chapters 5–6). Furthermore, this God has chosen to make himself known graciously and redemptively to mankind in Jesus Christ, who is ultimately God's chosen one. God's command to us is a call to

union with and conformity to the character of Jesus Christ, so that Christian ethics must be grounded in the Christian gospel and doctrine of God (II/2, chapters 7–8).

Volume III, *The Doctrine of Creation* (1945-1951), expounds the Christian conception of the world and of mankind as created by God, a work appropriately credited especially to the Father. A Christian knows God as Creator not as an abstract truth but as defining our relationship to God as creatures who have fallen in sin and are in need of the grace we receive in Jesus Christ. This knowledge comes only by faith in God's revelation of himself as Creator in Scripture. The biblical account of creation is neither unhistorical myth nor humanly constructed history, but is instead a theological account focusing on the meaning of creation for our knowledge of God. That meaning is that the purpose of creation was to create the setting for the covenant of grace between God and mankind (III/1, chapter 9). God's purpose for creating man is seen concretely in Jesus Christ. In his incarnation Jesus perfectly embodied man's intended relationship to God and to his fellow man. He also perfectly exhibited man's wholeness as creatures consisting of an integrated unity of body and soul. Finally, Jesus Christ perfectly realized God's purpose for man as creatures living in time. By his birth into our world of time, and by his death and resurrection, Jesus shows himself to be the Lord of time (III/2, chapter 10). Throughout time God as Lord providentially rules over creation to ensure the fulfillment of his covenant of grace with mankind. Again, this providence can be known only by faith in God's revelation. God's providence includes his acting through the agency of angels, since he is Lord of heaven as well as of earth (III/3, chapter 11). God's providential rule over creation does not negate human responsibility, which was perfectly revealed in Jesus Christ. That responsibility is to love God and others, with respect for one's own life and with focused commitment to one's calling (III/4, chapter 12).

In volume IV, *The Doctrine of Reconciliation* (1953-1959), Barth focuses on what God has done in Jesus Christ to fulfill the covenant of grace for mankind in its estrangement from God. Christ's reconciling work is considered in terms of the three classic offices of priest, king, and prophet (IV/1, chapter 13). We learn what sin truly is from God's judgment against it in Jesus Christ, who took our judgment so that we might be freed from it. This justification is received by faith alone because it is accomplished in and by Christ alone as our Priest. In his resurrection Jesus Christ is exalted as King on our behalf, and his deity is made known to us through the testimony of the Spirit. The exaltation of the risen Jesus Christ as Lord at once pronounces judgment against sinful man and the assurance of exaltation to God's purpose for man (IV/2, chapters 14–15). To the truth of this reconciliation Jesus Christ is himself the true Witness, the Prophet in whom God's Word is personally embodied as well as definitively spoken. In turn, Christians are called to bear witness to the truth of Jesus Christ individually and as the church (IV/3, chapter 16). In baptism Christians make their initial witness to God's reconciling grace in Jesus Christ (IV/4, "Fragment").

From our regrettably abbreviated summary of the *Church Dogmatics*, we would highlight two crucial themes or motifs in Barth's theology that are characteristic of fideism in Christian apologetics. First, we can know God and the truth about us in relation to God only by faith in his revelation. By faith alone we know that God is real, that he is absolutely personal and a perfect being, and that he created and providentially cares for us. Likewise, by faith alone we know that God purposes for us to live in relationship with him for eternity, that we are sinners deserving of his judgment, and that Christ died and rose again to make God known to us in grace. We see here Luther's principle of justification by faith alone theologically applied to all our knowledge of and about God, an application that calls into question traditional apologetic methods.

Second, our knowledge of and about God is gained directly from Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit and only indirectly from Scripture. Rather than basing Christian knowledge on the Bible as the foundation of a rational worldview, as in various forms of Reformed apologetics, Barth bases Christian knowledge on Jesus Christ as the embodiment of God and of God's purpose for mankind. Thus it is in Christ that we come to know God's reality and perfection, his purpose and will for mankind; it is in Christ that we come to know that we are sinners deserving judgment, and that instead we are called to be saints preserved from judgment by grace. Scripture mediates this knowledge of God by its witness to Jesus Christ, not by providing a rational philosophical or theological system.

ASSESSING BARTH

Barth's theology has been highly controversial among evangelicals, particularly in the English-speaking world. Widely disparate assessments of the meaning and soundness of his theology have been defended.⁵³ Some evangelicals have been mildly critical of Barth,⁵⁴ others enthusiastic in their appreciation of Barth,⁵⁵ and still others sharply critical of what they perceive as Barth's thoroughly unorthodox theology.⁵⁶ Given the diversity of opinion and the complexity of many of the criticisms of Barth, we cannot enter into this debate here, but can only offer some general observations.

First of all, Barth clearly intended his theology to be evangelical Protestant in character. He himself expressly stated that to be his intention, and differentiated his theology from both Roman Catholicism and liberal Protestantism (*CD I/1*, xiii-xv), both of which he described as heresy (*I/1*, 34).

Second, although Barth espoused an evangelical Protestant position, the soundness of his theology has been widely questioned by conservative evangelicals. On the one hand, Barth affirmed the doctrine of the Trinity, the centrality and uniqueness of Christ as God incarnate, the redemptive death and resurrection of Christ, and the grace of God as all-determining in our reconciliation to God. On the other hand, evangelicals have vigorously questioned his orthodoxy on each of these issues.⁵⁷

Third, Barth's theological legacy is clearly problematic for evangelicals in some important respects. Although assessments of his view of Scripture vary significantly, everyone agrees that he denied the inerrancy of Scripture as well as its character as "propositional" revelation (I/2). Barth's teaching on this subject seems to have helped create the "neo-evangelical" view of Scripture as theologically authoritative but factually errant.⁵⁸ His explanation of evil in terms of "nothingness" and of God's "non-willing" (III/3) is speculative and unbiblical, and it undermines the reality of sin. Along the same lines, although Barth affirmed the reality of a final judgment (II/2; IV/3), his affirmation is weak and leaves the door open to universalism, the heresy that all individuals will ultimately be saved.⁵⁹

Finally, Barth himself recognized a significant divide between his theology and that of conservative Protestants. Although he considered himself Reformed, he distanced himself from traditional Calvinism. "I betray no secret in alluding to the fundamental (and, if I may say so, mutual) aversion which exists between the 'historical' Calvinism that follows in the footsteps of A. Kuyper and the Reformed theology represented here."⁶⁰

Although Barth was not soundly evangelical, he represents an important and influential voice in Christian theology. As such, his view of apologetics is deserving of careful attention,

especially because some contemporary evangelicals are emulating his approach. One such evangelical is Donald G. Bloesch.

Donald G. Bloesch

Donald G. Bloesch is an unfamiliar name to most evangelicals, but he is becoming ever more widely known and respected as one of America's leading evangelical theologians.⁶¹ He is an excellent example of a contemporary evangelical who advocates a fideist approach to apologetics.

Bloesch was born in Indiana in 1928. His father was a pastor in the Evangelical Synod of North America, a denomination with German and Swiss theological roots, and a close friend of Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971), who went on to become one of America's most influential 'neo-orthodox' theologians.⁶² Bloesch remained in his father's denomination, which eventually merged with others to form the United Church of Christ in 1957. After attending the denomination's Elmhurst College, he attended Chicago Theological Seminary and then the University of Chicago Divinity School. He read works by Kierkegaard, Barth, and other modern theologians, and was especially impressed by Barth. At the same time, his involvement with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship convinced him of the need for an evangelical faith. Bloesch received his doctorate after writing a dissertation entitled "Reinhold Niebuhr's Re-evaluation of the Apologetic Task" (1956). In his estimation Niebuhr's approach, while it made some good criticisms of traditional apologetics, was itself too rationalistic.

The year following the completion of his doctorate, Bloesch began teaching at the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary in Iowa. Ironically, he was hired in the expectation that, as a University of Chicago graduate, he would be more liberal than Arthur C. Cochrane, a

professor at Dubuque who followed Barth. Bloesch taught at Dubuque until his retirement in 1992.

Bloesch's writings during the 1960s focused on renewal in the church. The one notable exception was *The Christian Witness in a Secular Age* (1968), in which he examined the apologetic thought of nine twentieth-century theologians, beginning with Barth and including Niebuhr and other more liberal theologians.⁶³ The concluding chapter is entitled "Beyond Apologetics: A Restatement of the Christian Witness" (120-135). As the title suggests, the approach Bloesch favors here is heavily indebted to Barth. He defines apologetics as "the attempt to make the faith plausible to the world of unbelief on the basis of a criterion held in common with unbelief" (121). He bases his rejection of such apologetics on Luther's teaching that man is in bondage to sin (121). He quotes Barth, Calvin, and Pascal to support the conclusion that the gospel cannot be correlated with man's searching in culture and religion (122). Again he quotes Kierkegaard and Luther in support of the assertion "that God's truth is beyond the reach of man's conception and perception," even for Christians, for whom "God remains hidden even in the act of revelation" (122-23). "With Barth we contend that revelation must be proclaimed, not defended or even recommended in the sense of trying to heighten its value" (126). According to Bloesch, apologetics is "the attempt to compel a man by rational means to assent to the truth of faith" (130). In place of such "religious imperialism" he advocates "gospel evangelism," a presentation of the message that people need to believe in Christ for salvation (130-31).

While Bloesch rejects apologetics as traditionally conceived "as a preparation for and validation of the Gospel," he acknowledges that "there is an element of truth in the traditional apologetic enterprise which must not be lost" (132). Apologetics is needed to clarify our own

understanding of the gospel so that we can be sure that what we are preaching is indeed the gospel and not a message accommodated to the culture (132-33). “This is apologetics in the context of faith seeking understanding. . . . Apologetics, as I now try to define it, is oriented not about a defense of the faith but rather about the heralding and explication of the message of the Bible” (133). Like many Christians today, Bloesch considers the rational, explanatory function of apologetics to be of value to Christians seeking to understand what they believe, rather than of use for convincing non-Christians that the Bible’s message is reasonable.

Bloesch followed up *Christian Witness* with *The Ground of Certainty* (1971).⁶⁴ In this book, dedicated to his colleague and mentor Arthur C. Cochrane, Bloesch explored issues in the relation of theology to philosophy, concluding with a chapter entitled “Faith and Reason” (176-203). According to Bloesch, Martin Luther “illustrates the position of evangelical fideism.” Luther “saw faith as standing in contradiction to reason” (178). By contrast Pascal, who “might be considered a representative of fideism in the Catholic Church . . . did not see faith as contrary to reason: rather faith goes beyond reason” (179). (Our own assessment, explained earlier in this chapter, is that Luther and Pascal were not fideists but anticipated certain elements and emphases of fideism.) Kierkegaard is another thinker whom Bloesch cites as a fideist. For Kierkegaard, Bloesch points out, human reason finds that “the revelation of God in Christ is an absolute paradox, and even faith cannot fully penetrate this mystery” (181). These thinkers stand in sharp contrast to Charles Hodge and Gordon Clark, whom Bloesch cites as examples of rationalistic Calvinists (182-185). Finally, Bloesch commends Karl Barth’s “noteworthy and fresh contribution to the subject.” Following Anselm and the Reformers, Barth understands that “faith is prior to human reasoning, but in itself it is rational, not suprarational” (185). However, Bloesch does fault Barth for minimizing the “mystical dimension of faith” and overemphasizing

its cognitive dimension (187). Bloesch places himself in this fideist tradition, with some qualification:

My position is much closer to fideism than to rationalism in that I see faith as determining reason and not vice versa. I stand in that tradition which includes Forsyth, Kierkegaard, Pascal, Edwards, Luther, Calvin, Irenaeus and also Paul the Apostle. Some Christian mystics (Bernard of Clairvaux and John of the Cross), as well as luminaries of neo-orthodoxy like Emil Brunner and Karl Barth, evangelical Calvinists such as Martyn Lloyd-Jones, and neo-Lutherans like Helmut Thielicke and Gustav Wingren, also belong to some degree to this general tradition. (187)

Bloesch continued to publish major works of theology that have deeply influenced a generation of evangelical theologians. His writings in the 1970s included a work on Barth's doctrine of salvation⁶⁵ and a two-volume textbook on systematic theology, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, a pioneering work in the new progressive form of evangelicalism sometimes called neoevangelicalism.⁶⁶ Over the years he has continued to nuance his position as one closer to fideism than to rationalism, yet in some ways not simply identified with either. Thus in his 1983 book *The Future of Evangelical Christianity*, he affirmed "a pressing need to transcend the cleavage between fideism and rationalism." Faith is "a rational commitment," but reason cannot provide the basis for or even prepare the way for faith.⁶⁷ A pure fideism would involve "beginning with a leap of faith," whereas the proper method is to begin neither with faith nor with reason but with revelation.⁶⁸ Consistent with the Lutheran roots of fideism, Bloesch warns that evangelical rationalists such as Norman Geisler, by allowing that unbelievers could respond properly to the light of nature before receiving the light of the gospel, are in effect allowing intellectual works to contribute to salvation.⁶⁹

In 1992 Bloesch retired from his teaching post at Dubuque and published the first volume of *Christian Foundations*, a seven-volume series of systematic theology textbooks.⁷⁰ In the first volume he labels his position “fideistic revelationalism, in which the decision of faith is as important as the fact of revelation in giving us certainty of the truth of faith. . . . This is not fideism in the narrow or reductionist sense because our faith has a sure anchor and basis in an objective revelation in history” (21). Later in the book Bloesch returns to this distinction: “What I espouse is not fideism but a faith that is deeper than fideism, for it is anchored in the supreme rationality that constitutes the content and object of faith” (203). He again calls for the affirmation of a theological method that goes beyond the polarity of fideism and rationalism. Here fideism is typified, not by Luther, Pascal, Kierkegaard, and Barth, whose writings are said to evince only “a fideistic thrust,” but by Jacques Ellul. This is because Ellul views faith as “an illogical venture” devoid of intellectual or cognitive content (57).⁷¹

While rationalism holds to *credo quia intelligo* (I believe because I understand) and fideism to *credo quia absurdum est* (I believe because it is absurd), evangelical theology in the classical tradition subscribes to *credo ut intelligam* (I believe in order to understand). In this last view faith is neither a blind leap into the unknown (Kierkegaard) nor an assent of the will to what reason has already shown to be true (Carl Henry), but a venture of trust based on *evidence that faith itself provides*. (58, emphasis added)

Note that fideism is here implicitly defined as the position of believing despite not having any understanding of what it is one believes. Again, this would seem to fit Stephen Evans’s category of irrational fideism, as distinguished from rational or responsible fideism, which does recognize a cognitive and even rational dimension to faith. Bloesch carries his understanding of fideism through consistently when, in terms reminiscent of his conclusion in *Christian Witness*,

he writes: “My position is probably closer to fideism than to rationalism; yet it is not really fideism, for it is based not on a venture into the unknown, necessarily fraught with uncertainty, but on the divine-human encounter, which expels all doubt. We know really and truly because we are known by God” (61).

Bloesch’s reticence to embrace the term *fideism* is understandable, given its widespread negative and pejorative use. But we would suggest that any apologetic method that denies that reason can demonstrate the truth of Christianity, even on Christian principles, and that grounds faith “on evidence that faith itself provides,” as Bloesch puts it, is rightly called fideism.

Conclusion

Very often *fideism* is used as a pejorative label to censure views of faith and reason that are “to the left” of the person applying the label. Not surprisingly, hardly anyone will confess to being a fideist. Using the term in this way would appear to render it a subjective judgment rather than a useful description of a particular position. Alternatively, many people define fideism as the view that faith is irrational. Admittedly some people do think this is the case, but such a view is hard to find among serious theologians or apologists, for the obvious reason that serious-minded persons do not wish to be irrational. Making matters worse, Christian thinkers are often far too quick to deem another Christian’s position irrational. Several of the thinkers profiled in this chapter, notably Kierkegaard and Barth, as well as Reformed apologists such as Cornelius Van Til, are frequently and unjustly labeled irrationalists.

We suggest, then, that it is time to rehabilitate the term *fideism* and use it to refer to an approach to apologetics that not only exists as more than a caricature or an extreme, but is also in fact highly influential. As we have seen, there is a significant tradition in Christian theology

taking a distinctive approach to faith and reason that runs from Martin Luther to Kierkegaard, Barth, and Bloesch (among others). A comparable approach was also taken by the Catholic thinker Pascal, who is, if it is possible, more popular among Protestants today than among Catholics. This theological tradition has developed in modern times into a distinct approach to apologetics that we call fideism. While neither Luther nor Pascal were fideists, their views—especially those of Luther—helped to prepare the way for the development of fideism.

Like Reformed apologists, these fideists argue that the traditional apologetic method of trying to defend Christianity as reasonable on the basis of principles acceptable to non-Christians is unbiblical and unworkable. Unlike Reformed apologists, though, fideists hold that Christianity cannot be shown (at least directly) to be reasonable even as a Christian system based on Christian principles. Rather than try to show non-Christians that Christianity is *reasonable*, these opponents of traditional apologetics urge us to try to show them that Christianity is *faithful*—that is, faithful to God and to his revelation in Jesus Christ. How this approach transforms the apologetic task will be spelled out in more detail in the following two chapters.

For Further Study

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Kierkegaard, Nietzsche. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1962; New York: Humanities Press, 1964.

Pelikan, Jaroslav. *From Luther to Kierkegaard: A Study in the History of Theology*. St. Louis: Concordia, 1967. One of Donald Bloesch's professors offers an insightful study demonstrating Kierkegaard's theological connection to Luther.

¹Some critics of the first edition of *Faith Has Its Reasons* expressed just this complaint—without, however, addressing the reasons we gave for including fideism in the book.

²Greg L. Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic: Readings and Analysis* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1998), 73.

³Alan Richardson, "Fideism," in *A Dictionary of Christian Theology*, ed. Alan Richardson (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969), 129.

⁴Van A. Harvey, *A Handbook of Theological Terms* (New York: Macmillan, 1964), 99.

⁵C. Stephen Evans, *Faith Beyond Reason: A Kierkegaardian Account*, Reason & Religion (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), especially 52, 55.

⁶Evans classifies Van Til as an *irrational* fideist, although he prefaces his comments with the admission that his classification of certain individuals might be challenged; C. Stephen Evans, *Faith Beyond Reason*, 17-19. As we have seen, Van Til argued that Christianity was supremely rational and the only rational system of thought, and developed an argument with which to prove this to non-Christians. Thus, Van Til does not fit Evans's definition of fideism, responsible or otherwise. Evans does a better job backing up his suggestion to classify Plantinga as a responsible fideist (41-47), which is defensible on Evans's definition of the term. We classify Plantinga as a Reformed apologist, but note that some elements of his thought are closer to

classical apologetics and other elements have affinities with fideism (as was the case with Abraham Kuyper, whose thought led in different ways to Van Til and Plantinga).

⁷On Tertullian, see B. B. Warfield, *Studies in Tertullian and Augustine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1930); Cornelius Van Til, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1969), 83-109; Robert H. Ayers, *Language, Logic, and Reason in the Church Fathers: A Study of Tertullian, Augustine, and Aquinas*, *Altertumswissenschaftliche Texte und Studien* 6 (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1979); Robert D. Sider, “*Credo Quia Absurdum?*” *Classical World* 73 (1980): 417-19; Timothy D. Barnes, *Tertullian: A Historical and Literary Study*, rev. ed. (Oxford: Clarendon; New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); Anthony J. Guerra, “Polemical Christianity: Tertullian’s Search for Certainty,” *Second Century* 8 (1991): 109-123; Eric Osborn, *Tertullian: First Theologian of the West* (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Ian Balfour, “Tertullian on and off the Internet,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 8 (2000): 579-85. Online resources include The Tertullian Project (<http://www.tertullian.org/>).

⁸Tertullian, *Against Heresies* 7, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 10 vols. (1885; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), 3:246.

⁹As pointed out by many scholars and apologists; e.g., Norman L. Geisler and Winfried Corduan, *Philosophy of Religion*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 87.

¹⁰Tertullian, *On the Flesh of Christ* 5 (our translation); cf. *Opera*, ed. E. F. Leopold (Leipzig, 1839-1841), 4:66.

¹¹See especially David F. Siemens, Jr., “Misquoting Tertullian to Anathematize Christianity,” *Philosophia Christi* 5 (2003): 563-65.

¹² An accessible collection of key writings by Luther is John Dillenberger, ed., *Martin Luther: Selections from His Writings* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1961). Useful introductions to Luther include David C. Steinmetz, *Luther in Context*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002); Stephen J. Nichols, *Martin Luther: A Guided Tour of His Life and Thought* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2002); Donald K. McKim, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Martin Luther*, Cambridge Companions to Religion (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). Works dealing with Luther's thought of special relevance to apologetics include Philip S. Watson, *Let God Be God! An Interpretation of the Theology of Martin Luther* (London: Epworth Press, 1947; reprint, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970); B. A. Gerrish, *Grace and Reason: A Study in the Theology of Luther* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1962); several essays in *Reformation Studies: Essays in Honor of Roland H. Bainton*, ed. Franklin Hamlin Littell (Richmond: John Knox, 1962); Robert H. Fischer, "Place of Reason in Luther's Theology," *Lutheran Quarterly* 16 (1964): 41-48; H. Wayne House, "The Value of Reason in Luther's View of Apologetics," *Concordia Journal* 7 (1981): 65-67; Siegbert W. Becker, *The Foolishness of God: The Place of Reason in the Theology of Martin Luther* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1982); Demarest, *General Revelation*, 43-50; Brown, *Christianity and Western Thought*, 148-151.

¹³Cited in Gerrish, *Grace and Reason*, 8 n. 2.

¹⁴Luther, "Postil [Epistle] for Epiphany," on Isaiah 40:1-6, in WA 10, pt. 1/1, 531; cited in Gerrish, 12. WA refers to the 1910 Weimar edition (*Weimarer Ausgabe*) of *D. Martin Luthers Werke*, the standard reference. The epistle cited here is not published in the American edition.

¹⁵WA 9:43.

¹⁶“The Gospel for the Festival of the Epiphany, Matthew 2[:1-12],” in *LW* 52:165. *LW* refers to the fifty-six-volume American Edition in English of *Luther’s Works*, co-published by Concordia Publishing House and Fortress Press.

¹⁷Luther, *Lectures on Jonah: The German Text* (1526), in *LW* 19:53-55 (cf. *WA* 19:206-208), on Jonah 1:5; *Lectures on Galatians 1535, Chapters 1—4*, in *LW* 26:399 (cf. *WA* 40:606-608), on Galatians 4:8-9.

¹⁸Luther, “The Gospel for New Year’s Day, Luke 2[:21],” in *LW* 52:150.

¹⁹Luther, *The Disputation Concerning the Passage: “The Word Was Made Flesh”* (1539), in *LW* 38:239-244.

²⁰Luther, *Sermon on Faith and Good Works*, cited in J. K. S. Reid, *Christian Apologetics* (London: Hodder & Stoughton; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), 131.

²¹A good, short introduction to Pascal for beginners is Douglas Groothuis, *On Pascal* (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth, 2002). Works on Pascal’s thought include Hugh M. Davidson, *The Origins of Certainty: Means and Meanings in Pascal’s “Pensées”* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979); A. J. Krailsheimer, *Pascal, Past Masters* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1980); Mayers, *Both/And: A Balanced Apologetic*, 118-125; Francis X. J. Coleman, *Neither Angel nor Beast: The Life and Work of Blaise Pascal* (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986); Thomas V. Morris, *Making Sense of It All: Pascal and the Meaning of Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992); Peter Kreeft, *Christianity for Modern Pagans: Pascal’s Pensées Edited, Outlined, and Explained* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993); Douglas R. Groothuis, “To Prove or Not to Prove: Pascal on Natural Theology” (Ph.D. diss., University of Oregon, 1993); Terrence D. Cuneo, “Combatting the Noetic Effects of Sin: Pascal’s Strategy for Natural Theology,” *Faith*

and Philosophy 11 (1994): 645-662; Marvin R. O'Connell, *Blaise Pascal: Reasons of the Heart*, Library of Religious Biography (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997); Rick Wade, "Blaise Pascal: An Apologist for Our Times" (Richardson, Tex.: Probe Ministries, 1998), online at < <http://www.leaderu.com/orgs/probe/docs/pascal.html> > (checked 10/27/2004); Nicholas Hammond, *The Cambridge Companion to Pascal*, Cambridge Companions to Religion (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Kenneth Richard Samples, "Why Should I Gamble on Faith?" in *Without a Doubt: Answering the 20 Toughest Faith Questions* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 77-87.

²²According to the traditional arrangement, Pascal's "thoughts" are in blocks of sentences and paragraphs and are numbered. Thus citations from the *Pensées* are given here according to numbers, not pages, and are quoted from the translation by W. F. Trotter. It has been published as *Thoughts*, trans. W. F. Trotter, Harvard Classics 48 (New York: P. F. Collier & Son, 1910), 9-317; *Pensées*, Great Books of the Western World 33 (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1952), 169-352; and *Pensées* (New York: Dutton, 1958). See also Blaise Pascal, *The Mind on Fire: A Faith for the Skeptical and Indifferent*, intro. Os Guinness, abridged and ed. James Houston (Regent College Publishing, 2003).

²³In addition to the literature already cited, see Charles M. Natoli, "The Role of the Wager in Pascal's Apologetics," *New Scholasticism* 57 (1983): 98-106; Nicholas Rescher, *Pascal's Wager: A Study of Practical Reasoning in Philosophical Theology* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985); R. Douglas Geivett and Brendan Sweetman, eds., *Contemporary Perspectives on Religious Epistemology* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 257-92, and the literature cited there; and see the following exchange: Alan Carter, "On Pascal's

Wager; or Why All Bets Are Off,” and Douglas Groothuis, “Are All Bets Off? A Defense of Pascal’s Wager,” *Philosophia Christi* 3 (2001); Alan Carter, “Is the Wager Back On? A Response to Douglas Groothuis,” and Douglas Groothuis, “An Unwarranted Farewell to Pascal’s Wager: A Reply to Alan Carter,” *Philosophia Christi* 4 (2002).

²⁴See C. Stephen Evans, *Faith Beyond Reason*, 49-52.

²⁵Emil Brunner, *Truth as Encounter* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964), 112.

²⁶Emil Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, trans. Olive Wyon (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1950), 100.

²⁷Brunner’s notion of ‘eristics’ was in some ways a compromise between classical apologetics and Kierkegaard’s fideistic stance. Brunner’s one-time mentor and later theological rival, Karl Barth, was thoroughly fideistic, and he strenuously opposed Brunner’s eristics.

²⁸A fact attested by the many bibliographies on Kierkegaard that have been published; see especially Calvin D. Evans, comp., *Søren Kierkegaard: Remnants, 1944-1980, and Multi-Media, 1925-1991*, Fontanus Monograph Series (Montreal: McGill University Libraries, 1993); Francois Lapointe, comp., *Søren Kierkegaard and His Critics: An International Bibliography of Criticism* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1980). Two excellent Kierkegaard readers are *A Kierkegaard Anthology*, ed. Robert Bretall (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1946), and *The Essential Kierkegaard*, ed. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000). A helpful introductory work is Shelley O’Hara, *Kierkegaard within Your Grasp: The First Step to Understanding Kierkegaard* (Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley, 2004). Among the best reference works are Alastair Hannay and Gordon D. Morino, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*, Cambridge Companions to Philosophy (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge

University Press, 1998), and Julia Watkin, *Historical Dictionary of Kierkegaard's Philosophy* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 2000).

²⁹For an especially negative assessment, see E. D. Klemke, *Studies in the Philosophy of Kierkegaard* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976). A number of apologists whose views we profile in this book have written critical assessments of Kierkegaard. See, for example, Gordon H. Clark, *Thales to Dewey: A History of Philosophy* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980 reprint of 1957 ed.), 485-91; Cornelius Van Til, *Christianity and Barthianism* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1962), 287-307; Edward John Carnell, *The Burden of Søren Kierkegaard* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965); Norman L. Geisler, "Kierkegaard, Søren," in *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 405-11. In our opinion, Geisler's assessment of Kierkegaard is especially judicious.

³⁰Works on Kierkegaard's life are numerous; see especially Walter Lowrie, *Kierkegaard*, 2 vols. (New York: Harper, 1962); Peter P. Rohde, *Søren Kierkegaard: An Introduction to His Life and Philosophy*, trans. Alan M. Williams (London: Allen & Unwin, 1963); Josiah Thompson, *Kierkegaard* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1974); Brita K. Stendahl, *Søren Kierkegaard* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1976); Bruce Kirmmse, *Kierkegaard in Golden Age Denmark* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990); Joakim Garff, *Søren Kierkegaard: A Biography*, trans. Bruce H. Kirmmse (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000). For a recent survey by an evangelical writer, see L. Joseph Rosas III, *Scripture in the Thought of Søren Kierkegaard* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994).

³¹The collection we will rely on is *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers*, ed. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, 7 vols. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967-1978), hereafter

referred to as *JP* in parenthetical references in the text. The first locator is the entry number, after which are given the volume and page numbers. Entries and excerpts from Kierkegaard's unpublished writings are arranged alphabetically by topics.

³²Søren Kierkegaard, *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*, in *A Kierkegaard Anthology*, ed. Robert Bretall (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1946), 325.

³³Kierkegaard, *Point of View*, 326.

³⁴*Ibid.*, 332.

³⁵Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to "Philosophical Fragments,"* vol. 1, *Text*, ed. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992), 617.

³⁶Søren Kierkegaard, *On Authority and Revelation*, trans. Walter Lowrie (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1955), 59.

³⁷Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 557.

³⁸C. Stephen Evans, "Apologetic Arguments in *Philosophical Fragments*," in "*Philosophical Fragments*" and "*Johannes Climacus*," ed. Robert L. Perkins, *International Kierkegaard Commentary*, vol. 7 (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1994), 63-83. Parenthetical page references in the rest of this section are to this article.

³⁹Cf. Søren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments; Johannes Climacus*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985), 21.

⁴⁰Citing *ibid.*, 22.

⁴¹Cf. *ibid.*, 35-36.

⁴²Citing *ibid.*, 51.

⁴³On the apologetic insights to be found in Kierkegaard, see also Robert C. Koons, “Faith, Probability and Infinite Passion: Ramseyian Decision Theory and Kierkegaard's Account of Christian Faith,” *Faith and Philosophy* 10 (1993): 145-160, accessed online at < <http://www.utexas.edu/cola/depts/philosophy/faculty/koons/kierk.pdf> >; Mark C. Miller, “The Hipness unto Death: Søren Kierkegaard and David Letterman—Ironic Apologists to Generation X,” *Mars Hill Review* 7 (Winter/Spring 1997): 38-52, accessed online at < <http://www.leaderu.com/marshall/mhr07/kierk1.html> >; John Depoe, “Rejuvenating Christian Apologetics in the Twenty-first Century: Taking Hints from Søren Kierkegaard,” Baylor University, 2002, accessed online at < http://www.johndepoe.com/Kierkegaard_Apologetics.pdf >.

⁴⁴Barth offers an illuminating account of his life's work in *How I Changed My Mind* (Richmond: John Knox, 1966; Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1969). His son, the New Testament theologian Markus Barth, wrote an endearing short biography, “My Father: Karl Barth,” published in *How Karl Barth Changed My Mind*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 1-5. See also Geoffrey W. Bromiley, “Karl Barth,” in *Creative Minds in Contemporary Theology*, ed. Philip E. Hughes, 2d rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), 27-62, especially 27-31; Eberhard Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts*, trans. John Bowden, 2d rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976); Hendrikus Berkhof, *Two Hundred Years of Theology: Report of a Personal Journey*, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 179-207. Studies of the development of Barth's theology include Thomas F. Torrance, *Karl Barth: An Introduction to His Early Theology, 1910-1931* (London: SCM, 1962); Bruce L. McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and*

Development, 1909-1936 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995); Gary Dorrien, *The Barthian Revolt in Modern Theology: Theology without Weapons* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000); Sung Wook Chung, *Admiration & Challenge: Karl Barth's Theological Relationship with John Calvin* (New York: Peter Lang, 2002), 15-122. Some interpreters of Barth (following Barth's own self-reflections) emphasize the differences between his early thought and his later, more conservative theology (e.g., Torrance), while others emphasize the continuities and maintain that Barth's later theology retained significant elements of liberalism (e.g., McCormack, Dorrien).

⁴⁵Johann Wilhelm Herrmann (1846-1922) was one of Barth's professors at Marburg; on his theology and his relation to Barth, see Karl Barth, "The Principles of Dogmatics According to Wilhelm Herrmann," in *Theology and Church*, ed. Louise Pettibone Smith (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 238-71; Berkhof, *Two Hundred Years of Theology*, 143-62, 179-85; McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 49-77; Dorrien, *Barthian Revolt in Modern Theology*, 15-21, 27-32.

⁴⁶Cf. George Rupp, *Culture-Protestantism: German Liberal Theology at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars, 1977).

⁴⁷Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, trans. Sir Edwyn Hoskyns (London: Oxford University Press, 1933 [2d ed.], 1980 [6th ed.]), 10 (in both editions).

⁴⁸On Barth's theological relationship to Calvin, see especially Chung, *Admiration & Challenge: Karl Barth's Theological Relationship with John Calvin*; Cornelis van der Kooi, *As in a Mirror: John Calvin and Karl Barth on Knowing God: A Diptych*, trans. Donald Mader; *Studies in the History of Christian Traditions* 120 (Leiden: Brill, 2005).

⁴⁹Karl Barth, *Anselm: Fides Quaerens Intellectum*, trans. Ian W. Robertson, 2d ed. (London: SCM; Richmond: John Knox, 1960), 71.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 11.

⁵¹Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. Geoffrey T. Bromiley and Thomas F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1936-1977), I/1, xiii. The abbreviation *CD* is used throughout for the English translation of this work. Citations refer to volume and part, each of which was actually a separate book (I/1, I/2, II/1, etc.), followed by the page reference.

⁵²Geoffrey W. Bromiley was not only the co-editor overseeing the translation of the *Church Dogmatics* into English, but he was also the master at digesting Barth's work for students needing an overview. His *Introduction to the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979) offers a careful and insightful condensation of the *Church Dogmatics* in about 250 pages. For an even briefer overview, see Bromiley, "Karl Barth," 31-50.

⁵³Surveys of evangelical views of Barth include Gregory Bolich, *Karl Barth and Evangelicalism* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1980); Richard A. Mohler, Jr., "Evangelical Theology and Karl Barth: Representative Models of Response" (Ph.D. diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1989); and especially helpful, Phillip R. Thorne, *Evangelicalism and Karl Barth: His Reception and Influence in North American Evangelical Theology*, Princeton Theological Monograph Series, vol. 40 (Allison Park, Pa.: Pickwick, 1995).

⁵⁴For example, G. C. Berkouwer, *The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth*, trans. H. R. Boer (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; London: Paternoster Press, 1956); Colin Brown, *Karl Barth and the Christian Message* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1967).

⁵⁵Perhaps most notably Bernard Ramm, *After Fundamentalism: The Future of Evangelical Theology* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983).

⁵⁶Especially Cornelius Van Til and others of his theological perspective; see Van Til, *The New Modernism: An Appraisal of the Theology of Barth and Brunner* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed; London: James Clarke, 1946); Van Til, *Christianity and Barthianism* (Nutley, N.J.: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1962); Fred H. Klooster, *The Significance of Barth's Theology: An Appraisal with Special Reference to Election and Reconciliation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1961). Taking a somewhat different approach but reaching similar conclusions is Gordon H. Clark, *Karl Barth's Theological Method* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1963).

⁵⁷Ramm's *After Fundamentalism* (see n. 54 above) defends Barth's soundness on these basic doctrines, while Van Til, Klooster, and Gordon Clark (see n. 55 above) were among Barth's sharpest critics on these doctrinal issues. *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, ed. John Webster (Cambridge, U.K., and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), contains recent essays on Barth's views on the Trinity, Christology, grace, and salvation by scholars noted for their work on Barth. On Barth's view of the resurrection (usefully contrasted with Bultmann's), see Dorrien, *Barthian Revolt in Modern Theology*, 182-92.

⁵⁸On Barth's view of Scripture, see Klass Runia, *Karl Barth's Doctrine of Holy Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962); Francis Watson, "The Bible," in *Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, ed. Webster, 57-71; Neil B. MacDonald, *Karl Barth and the Strange New World within the Bible: Barth, Wittgenstein, and the Metadilemmas of the Enlightenment*, Paternoster Biblical and Theological Monographs (Milton Keynes, U.K.: Paternoster, 2002); Bruce L. McCormack, "The Being of Holy Scripture Is in Becoming: Karl Barth in Conversation with American

Evangelical Criticism,” in *Evangelicals & Scripture: Tradition, Authority and Hermeneutics*, ed. Vincent Bacote, Laura C. Miguélez, and Dennis L. Ockholm (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2004), 55-75.

⁵⁹See Bromiley, “Karl Barth,” 51-55, for an overview of these and subsidiary problems in Barth’s theology.

⁶⁰Barth, CD I/2, 833, quoted in Chung, *Admiration and Challenge*, 14 n. 31.

⁶¹See *Evangelical Theology in Transition: Theologians in Dialogue with Donald Bloesch*, ed. Elmer M. Colyer (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1999), featuring contributions by Avery Dulles, Millard Erickson, Clark Pinnock, Thomas F. Torrance, and others.

⁶²In fact, he left the pastorate to begin his academic career in 1928, the same year that Donald Bloesch was born. Reinhold Niebuhr’s principal writings include *Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Practice* (New York: Scribner, 1932); *The Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation*, Gifford Lectures, 2 vols. (New York: Scribner, 1941, 1943); *Faith and History: A Comparison of Christian and Modern Views of History* (New York: Scribner, 1949). On Niebuhr, see Theodore Minnema, “Reinhold Niebuhr,” in *Creative Minds in Contemporary Theology*, 377-406; Charles W. Kegley and Robert W. Bretall, eds., *Reinhold Niebuhr: His Religious, Social, and Political Thought* (New York: Macmillan, 1956; reprint, New York: Pilgrim Press, 1984); Paul Foreman, “The Theology of Reinhold Niebuhr,” LeadershipU < <http://www.leaderu.com/isot/docs/niehbr3.html> >. Reinhold is to be distinguished from his brother, H. Richard Niebuhr, another distinguished liberal theologian.

⁶³Donald G. Bloesch, *The Christian Witness in a Secular Age: An Evaluation of Nine Contemporary Theologians* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1968; reprint, Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2002). Parenthetical page references in the text are to this work.

⁶⁴Donald G. Bloesch, *The Ground of Certainty: Toward an Evangelical Theology of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971; reprint, Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2002). Parenthetical page references in the text are to this work.

⁶⁵Donald G. Bloesch, *Jesus Is Victor! Karl Barth's Doctrine of Salvation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1976).

⁶⁶Donald G. Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, 2 vols. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978, 1979; 2 vols. in 1, Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2006).

⁶⁷Donald G. Bloesch, *The Future of Evangelical Christianity: A Call for Unity amid Diversity* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1983), 121.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*, 122.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, 123-24, citing Norman L. Geisler, *Options in Contemporary Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 32.

⁷⁰(1) *A Theology of Word and Spirit: Authority and Method in Theology* (1992), (2) *Holy Scripture: Revelation, Inspiration, and Interpretation* (1994); (3) *God the Almighty: Power, Wisdom, Holiness, Love* (1995); (4) *Jesus Christ: Savior and Lord* (1997); (5) *The Holy Spirit: Works and Gifts* (2000); (6) *The Church: Sacraments, Worship, Ministry, Mission* (2002); and (7) *The Last Things: Resurrection, Judgment, Glory* (2004). Each volume is published in Downers Grove, Illinois, by InterVarsity Press. Page references in the text are to the first volume in this series.

⁷¹Citing Jacques Ellul, *Living Faith*, trans. Peter Heinegg (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983), 123, 125; *What I Believe*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 306.

Oddly, in an endnote Bloesch states that “Ellul is not an irrationalist” since he allows some role to reason, though not in faith (*Word and Spirit*, 285 n. 80). But if Ellul affirms that faith is *illogical*, that would seem to be sufficient to justify classifying him as an irrational fideist.