

21

Contending for the Faith: Apologetics and Human Knowledge

The apologists profiled in the preceding chapter differ significantly on various matters of apologetic method. But unlike most (not all) of the apologists considered in the earlier parts of this book, Carnell, Schaeffer, David Clark, Evans, Frame, and the like are not particularly troubled by those differences. While they have worked, or are working, to develop the best apologetic they can, they see much value in the fact that there are different apologetic methods.

In the closing chapters of this book, we will discuss ways of integrating the four major approaches to apologetics. Let us be clear at the outset what we are and are not advocating.

First, we are not advocating a kind of ‘fifth approach’ that would supposedly incorporate elements of the four basic approaches to create a new, superior approach to apologetics. We do not suggest that apologists abandon their approach to apologetics for a new, improved model. On the other hand, we do claim that apologists can improve their apologetic by learning from other approaches (and indeed that many apologists already do so).

Second, we are not arguing that all four approaches as they have historically been practiced are equally sound approaches to apologetics. In particular, we do not think that fideism, as represented by such modern thinkers as Kierkegaard, Barth, and Bloesch, is an adequate metapologetic. As we explained toward the end of Part Five, the weaknesses of fideism

are significant and deeply rooted. Still, we think fideists bring often-neglected considerations to the apologetics table and that we can all learn from them and by doing so enrich our own apologetics. (Again, many apologists have already been doing so.) We also maintain that fideism can be developed into a sounder and more robust apologetic, though doing so requires more of an ‘overhaul’ than in the other three approaches. We also recognize that many apologists will regard one or more of the other two approaches as deficient in some way (e.g., evidentialists may view Reformed apologetics as inadequate, and vice versa). They may continue to regard each other’s approaches as inadequate while still enriching their own apologetic through interacting with other approaches.

We do not claim, then, to be offering definitive proposals for integrating the different approaches to apologetics. If we succeed in helping to advance the discussion over integration and to stimulate others to do a better job than we do here, we will be gratified.

Perspectival Approaches to Defending Truth

In the preceding chapter we noted that John Frame utilizes the schema of three perspectives in two somewhat disparate ways. When analyzing non-Christian epistemologies, he identifies rationalism, empiricism, and subjectivism as imbalanced theories of knowledge due to their lopsided elevation of logic, fact, and the person. As we pointed out, these three epistemologies correspond to classical, evidential, and fideist apologetics. On the other hand, when setting forth his own Christian epistemology, he moves logic to the same perspective occupied by facts or evidence and places revelation or Scripture under the “normative” perspective. Scripture as normative in knowledge is, of course, the crucial and distinctive claim of presuppositionalism.

Transcendent and Immanent Perspectives in Knowledge

<i>Reformed Apologetics</i>				
God's Logos (Scripture)				
God's Acts (Miracle)		God's Spirit (Illumination)		
Revelation: Transcendent Aspect				
<i>Evidential Apologetics</i>	Situational Perspective	Normative Perspective	Existential Perspective	<i>Fideist Apologetics</i>
Reception: Immanent Aspect				
Facts (Sense)		Faith (Will)		
Logic (Reason)				
<i>Classical Apologetics</i>				

We suggest, then, that Frame's perspectivalism can be adapted to encompass and correlate the four approaches to apologetics (see above table). One way to do this is to interpret the three perspectives as describing the **immanent aspect** of knowledge, and then to identify revelation as the **transcendent aspect** of knowledge. Logic, facts (evidence), and faith are the basis of three related perspectives on the way we receive God's truth; God's Logos (the Word), God's acts, and God's Spirit are the basis of three related perspectives on the way God reveals truth to us. We use our capacities for reason (the mind), sense, and choice (the will) to receive God's revelation; in turn, God, by his Spirit, creates faith within us in response to his revelation.

Some comments on this schema are in order if its significance is to be properly understood. First of all, a perspective is, as in Frame's system, a way of viewing the whole. For

example, the work of God's Spirit in illumination causes us to think differently (logic), to see the facts differently (evidence), and to respond to God differently (faith). Our reason, perception of reality, and faith stance (whether believing or unbelieving) are always inseparably related in our knowledge. We use our reason to reflect on and interpret the teachings of Scripture, the redemptive acts of God reported in Scripture, and the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit enabling us to appreciate and accept the truth of Scripture.

Second, while all these perspectives are involved in knowledge, certain of them are inevitably primary in specific experiences of knowing. The nominal Christian who intellectually assents to the truth of Scripture and espouses a Christian worldview experiences the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit primarily as engendering the willingness to trust in the God revealed in that Scripture and articulated in that worldview. The Christian biblical scholar studying the date of the Exodus views the matter primarily through the situational perspective of the factual evidence (though other perspectives, such as his acceptance of Scripture as normative, play a role). The non-Christian who has been taught that the problem of evil poses a logical contradiction within the Christian worldview experiences challenges to this conclusion primarily through the normative perspective of reason (though other perspectives, such as his willfully unbelieving stance, again play a role). *Apologists need to identify which perspective is primary in any specific discussion with an individual and address the question at hand from that perspective.*

For example, in talking with a non-Christian about the problem of evil, the Christian may find that the non-Christian's difficulty centers on the loss of a loved one and the subsequent difficulty in believing that God loves him. In that situation the apologist should address the issue primarily as a matter of gaining confidence in God as a person who loves him, not as a logical

difficulty to be solved. Here apologists of any approach may find that the fideist way of handling the question may be the most effective. On the other hand, some non-Christians are very troubled by the logical conundrum but not by a specific experience of their own. In that case the apologist should be sure to address the issue primarily, at least at first, as a matter of showing the non-Christian that the reality of evil does not disprove God's existence. Here Plantinga's free-will defense, Geisler's greater-good defense, or some similar philosophical argument may be most effective.

Third, the transcendent and immanent aspects of knowledge are united in the situational and existential perspectives in a way that it is not true in the normative perspective. God's acts in the world are both miraculous (the transcendent aspect) and factual (the immanent aspect). The work of God's Spirit within a person may be described both as illumination (transcendent) and the creation of faith (immanent). By contrast, Scripture and human reason are not two aspects of the same reality. The result is that an integrative view of the three transcendent perspectives and the three immanent perspectives results in four basic approaches to knowledge, not six. These four approaches appear as the four "corners" of the table and correspond to the four approaches to apologetics analyzed in this book.

Fourth, an apologetic argument could in theory start from any one of the four "corners" and be persuasive; at the same time, no one approach is guaranteed to be a successful or most effective starting point in all apologetic contexts. This generalization follows from the points just made: some perspectives are primary in one situation and not in others. On the other hand, because each perspective relates to the whole, a sound, comprehensive, and effective apologetic method can begin from any of the four approaches as long as it takes a broad enough view of the other approaches.

BROADENING THE CLASSICAL APPROACH

Let us illustrate our claim here by examining how each approach might appropriate the crucial insights of the other approaches in light of the above schema. We begin with classical apologetics. In the standard model one first constructs a rational argument or arguments for theism as the best worldview. Having established theism, one then presents the evidence for the distinctive claims of Christianity, which will be viewed without worldview prejudice.

This classical model can incorporate the evidentialist approach by agreeing that the two steps mutually support each other. That is, the arguments for theism make more plausible the arguments for such Christian claims as the resurrection of Jesus or fulfilled prophecy, while good evidence for the Resurrection or fulfilled prophecy can also be considered evidence for theism.

The classical model can also be broadened to include the Reformed approach. As we have pointed out, the transcendental argument for the existence of God functions much like the traditional theistic proofs, and could be used as the foundational theistic proof in which all the more traditional proofs are grounded. That is, the theistic arguments that appeal to causation, order and design, morality, human rationality, and so on can be grounded in the transcendental argument that they would have no meaning if an absolute, transcendent God did not exist. Classical apologists can also use the “new Reformed epistemology,” assuring non-Christians who already confess the existence of God that they are rational to do so even if they are unprepared to prove his existence. The apologist may then present the evidence that God has revealed himself in Christ and in the Bible, noting that the validity of any appeal to evidence to establish facts assumes a rationality and order in the universe that is not self-explanatory.

Finally, the classical model can even encompass the approach taken in fideism. Before presenting rational proofs for God's existence, the classical apologist can get to know a non-Christian's beliefs about God. If the non-Christian recognizes that there must be some kind of God, the apologist might do better to bypass arguments for theism and ask if the non-Christian would like to know God personally. He can always circle back to the theistic proofs if, in further discussion, it becomes clear that the non-Christian firmly espouses an alternative worldview. Then, after explaining why God can be known only in Jesus Christ, the apologist can present evidences supporting Christ's supernatural existence as needed.

As we saw in the previous chapter, David K. Clark is a classical apologist who integrates the other three approaches in much the way sketched here. One could make a plausible case for classifying Clark as either a classical apologist or evidentialist due to the way he splits the difference between them. Clark also encourages apologists to draw upon the strengths of existential approaches (i.e., fideism) and presuppositionalism, especially the "milder" form advocated by Francis Schaeffer.

BROADENING THE EVIDENTIALIST APPROACH

Given the nature of the evidentialist approach to apologetics, it may have the easiest task integrating the other three approaches into its own. Since evidentialists tend to favor a multi-pronged or cumulative-case argument for Christianity, incorporating arguments from the other three approaches is for the evidentialist largely a matter of adding to its repertoire. C. Stephen Evans is an example of an evidentialist who has given substantial attention to integrating insights from both Reformed epistemology and fideism into his apologetic (see above, chapter 20).

Most evidentialists already use some of the theistic arguments favored by classical apologists for defending theism. The difference is that the evidentialist prefers to use such arguments as part of a broader case for Christianity, rather than divide apologetic arguments into those that support mere theism and those that support Christianity given a theistic worldview. Evidentialists should have no trouble acknowledging that for some people, at least, certain evidence-based arguments work better once a case for theism has been made.

Evangelical evidentialists do not, as we explained in our treatment of their approach to apologetics, affirm the Enlightenment form of ‘evidentialism,’ the epistemological claim that no belief can be rational unless the one holding the belief can back it up with sufficient evidence. From this perspective, the evidentialist and the Reformed apologist can make common cause. There is nothing to prevent evidentialists from agreeing with Plantinga that evidence is not needed for belief in God because it is properly basic—and then turning around and presenting such evidence for those who have not yet recognized that fact. (Again, some evidentialists, like Evans, already do just that.) Evidentialists can also agree with presuppositionalists in Van Til’s line that God is the necessary presupposition of all evidence, fact, inference, and probability—and then turn around and offer evidential arguments in support of Christian belief. Some evidentialists have already added Van Til’s transcendental argument to their ‘collection’ of evidences.

Evidentialists need not *always* present a direct historical argument for the reasonableness of belief in the Resurrection to those who doubt it. They can instead offer an indirect argument based on the apparent absurdity in first-century Judaism of claiming that a crucified man (the presumed object of God’s curse) was the Messiah and the lack of any expectation of the Messiah dying and rising again (he was rather expected to bring death to the pagans and resurrection to

departed Israelites). The very apparent absurdity of this belief proves that human beings did not concoct the story. This is an argument that classical and Reformed apologists should also be able to use.

BROADENING THE REFORMED APOLOGETICS APPROACH

John Frame is an example of an apologist in the tradition of Van Til (the presuppositional wing of Reformed apologetics) who has broadened his approach to include what are from his perspective valid aspects of the other approaches (for what follows, see chapter 20). The central (and in a sense *only*) apologetic argument for Van Til is the transcendental argument that reason, fact, and value (and so forth) can have no coherent meaning except on the presupposition of the existence of the God revealed in Scripture. Van Til sharply distinguished this ‘indirect’ argument for God’s existence from the ‘direct’ theistic arguments of classical apologetics, which he rejected. Frame, on the other hand, acknowledges that Van Til’s indirect, transcendental argument can be ‘converted’ into a direct argument of the classical type.

Frame also has room for the inductive, historical arguments typical of evidentialism. Whereas Van Til objected to arguments that concluded that Christian beliefs (such as the Resurrection) were probably true, Frame objects only if apologists conclude that those Christian beliefs are merely or only or at best probable. Thus, a Frame-type presuppositionalist should be able to use arguments for the reality of the God of the Bible from fulfilled prophecies, the historical evidence for Jesus’ resurrection, and the like.

Reformed apologetics and fideism are in some ways not that far apart, and in Frame’s thought certain key emphases of fideism are given a significant role. Frame’s recognition of an “existential perspective” in knowledge leads him to affirm that the truth is something we do, not

just something we believe. One of our strongest arguments for Christianity is love, without which our apologetics is hypocritical and ineffective.

BROADENING THE FIDEIST APPROACH

If evidentialism is the apologetic approach most conducive to integrating elements of the other three approaches, fideism is undoubtedly the approach least conducive to such integration. After all, fideism historically has been a reactionary way of thinking that has repudiated apologetics as traditionally understood. Of the apologists who favor integration discussed in the previous chapter, none can fairly be classified as a fideist.

In our opinion, what fideism needs above all is to abandon its false dichotomies. Fideists typically argue that revelation and the knowledge of God are personal rather than propositional. In fact, they are both. God has revealed himself both propositionally in Scripture, the written Word of God, and personally in Jesus Christ, the living Word of God. Propositional or factual knowledge *about* God can lead to personal knowledge *of* God. Of course, reading the Bible and learning doctrinal propositions about God will be useless if we fail to put our trust in the Lord Jesus and encounter the living God about which the Bible speaks. On the other hand, trusting in Christ would have little if any meaning or practical effect in our lives if we did not know anything *about* Christ.

Fideists argue that the gospel is an affront to human reason and therefore cannot be defended using human reason. Their argument amounts to another false dichotomy, between the gospel as contrary to human reason and the gospel as consistent with human reason. The dichotomy is a false one because it depends both on the humans doing the reasoning and on what we mean by reasoning. Human beings by their own wisdom are incapable of discovering God in

order to know him (1 Cor. 1:21), but this does not mean that those endowed with human wisdom cannot recognize in retrospect ways in which God makes himself known. The gospel is “foolishness” to Greeks (vv. 22-23), but it is also divine wisdom, not foolishness, to those Greeks who are called by God (v. 24). It is reasonable to expect that God will be beyond our reasoning capacity to comprehend; thus we do not need to choose between Christianity being reasonable and beyond reason, since both are true.

If fideists abandon these false dichotomies, they will find that they can make good use of the apologetic arguments of the other three approaches. The classical apologists’ arguments for theism can be used by such fideists as “signs” or pointers to the God who is beyond our comprehension (as indeed a God who transcends time and space and yet is immanently present and at work in creation surely is). There is nothing stopping a fideist from presenting such arguments to those who ask for reasons to believe that God exists—and then hastening to say that what the nonbeliever really needs, once he recognizes that God exists, is to get to know God personally. A fideist should also have no trouble affirming that belief in God is properly basic (as Reformed epistemologists argue) while insisting that belief or disbelief in God is primarily (not exclusively) a matter of the will. As we have already pointed out, fideists argue ‘indirectly’ for the truth of the resurrection of Jesus by arguing that the idea is so contrary to conventional wisdom that it could not have been invented. It is a short step from that argument to a more traditional historical argument for the Resurrection as employed in both evidentialist and classical apologetics.

As we stated at the beginning of this chapter, fideism as it has historically been understood requires the most significant reconstruction if it is to be amenable to integration with the other three apologetic approaches. Fideists and non-fideists alike may conclude that giving

up its usual dichotomies (personal v. propositional, living Word v. written Word, against reason v. agreeing with reason) would leave something unrecognizable as fideism. They may be right. What we think is a safe assertion is that an apologetic approach that is oriented from the ‘existential perspective’ of the work of God’s Spirit in bringing an individual to the point of choosing to believe can be broadened to include significant elements of more conventional apologetics. The Holy Spirit can and does use rational arguments, presentation of factual evidence, and appeals to the authority of God’s self-revelation as means to engender faith, just as he uses the proclamation of the gospel and the faithful lives of Christians. Just as we sometimes need to use arguments to persuade a rebellious child to go home to the parents who love him, it is sometimes necessary to use arguments to persuade nonbelievers that they are estranged from God and need to be reconciled to him.

TEST CASE: POSTMODERNISM

The utility of an integrative approach may be illustrated by considering how Christian apologists should respond to the challenge of postmodernism. It turns out that all four approaches make a valuable point on this. The classical apologist correctly observes that *postmodernism is self-refuting*. This observation, once understood, is enough to prove that postmodernism or any other relativistic philosophy is false. However, some people simply are not moved by this argument. The fact that postmodernism is irrational will not bother someone who embraces irrationality as good and proper. The postmodernist may reply that rationality and consistency are abstract notions; what matters is that the belief in the objectivity and absoluteness of truth has run aground.

At this point the evidentialist makes another good point: *postmodernism is unrealistic*; it doesn't fit the facts. In the real world (and there is one) there are objective facts, many of which can be known to be such, some of which remain out of our sure grasp because of lack of information. We all expect the bank's records of our deposits, withdrawals, and fees to match our own—and we assume that someone is in error if there is a discrepancy and that a review will resolve the question definitively. We may disagree about what happens to a human being after death—whether humans have souls that exist as personal, incorporeal entities after physical death—but that does not mean that all answers are equally true. This line of response is quite sound. Again, though, the postmodernist may complain that the apologist is once again assuming what he claims to prove—that what is real to one person is always real to another. He may even charge the apologist with laboring under the modernist delusion of objective truth.

Here Reformed apologists can make some very helpful points. The “new Reformed epistemologist” may say, in response to the charge of modernism, that the belief in objective truth is not the peculiar notion of modernism, but is a properly basic belief. The person who believes in objective reality and objective truth can no more stop believing in them than he can stop believing that he had, say, orange juice for breakfast. The presuppositionalist will go even further and turn the charge around. *Postmodernism is itself an irrationalist development within modernism*. The problem with modernism was not that it was rational; it was that it undermined the very foundation of rationality by denying that truth and reason are grounded in God. It was a short step from the modernist claim that human beings impose the rational categories of their own mind on the world to the postmodernist claim that each community of human beings, and in the end each human being individually, imposes a distinct point of view on the world. The

presuppositionalist, then, shows the postmodernist that his supposed liberation from modernism is no such thing.

The evangelical fideist, while not necessarily disagreeing with the other three approaches, looks at postmodernism from the other end. Rather than looking for ways to refute it, he is more likely to ask what we can learn from it that will make our apologetic more viable. Fideists may even agree with postmodernists that some contemporary forms of apologetics operate under hidden modernist assumptions. The apologist should take this concern seriously. While we should not abandon our belief in absolute truth and the objectivity of reality, we ought to acknowledge that all human knowledge—even the knowledge that Christians have from reading the Bible—is partial, imperfect, and held from a limited point of view. In Scripture we have absolute truth presented to us, but we do not have absolute knowledge of that absolute truth.

The four responses to postmodernism described here are typical of the four basic apologetic approaches. Yet some apologists already use two or more of these strategies in their responses to postmodernism. Such ‘integration’ is already happening as apologists of differing methods interact with one another and learn from one another. What we are advocating here is not something radically new; we simply encourage apologists to do consciously and systematically what many if not most apologists already do.

Apologetics and Theology

To some extent the differences among the four approaches to apologetics reflect differing theological roots. Just as the four approaches are not neatly divided camps, though, apologists

advocating the four approaches do not fall neatly into four theological camps. That said, however, there is a pattern that confirms the distinctiveness of the four approaches.

Generally, classical apologetics has been most dominant in Catholic theology and among apologists influenced by Catholicism, including Anglicans of a more Catholic bent. This is what one would expect given the formative contribution to the classical model by Thomas Aquinas. Thus some of the leading classical apologists have been the Anglican writer C. S. Lewis, the Catholic philosopher Peter Kreeft, and Norman Geisler, who studied philosophy at Loyola University. Of course, classical apologetics has been widely influential among Christians of most theological traditions and denominations.

Evidentialists tend to be evangelicals who are non-Calvinist or “Arminian” in their theology. This was true of Joseph Butler and John Locke, and it is true of Clark Pinnock and Richard Swinburne. William Lane Craig, a classical apologist with strong evidential leanings, is staunchly Arminian in his theology. John Warwick Montgomery, our paradigm example of an evidentialist, is neither Calvinist nor Arminian, but a conservative Lutheran. It is surely no accident that theological traditions that downplay or deny human certainty about one’s salvation also downplay or deny the possibility of rational certainty in apologetic argument. Arminians and Lutherans believe that Christians should be reasonably confident of their salvation but should not expect to be absolutely certain of it; likewise, many apologists from these traditions believe that Christians can make a reasonable case for Christianity, but not one that achieves absolute or deductive certainty.

Reformed apologists, as the name implies, tend to be staunchly, even dogmatically, Reformed or Calvinist in theology. While not all Calvinists espouse Reformed apologetics (e.g., R. C. Sproul is a classical apologist), most if not all Reformed apologists are Calvinists or have

deep Calvinist theological roots. John Calvin's theology anticipated and inspired this approach. More specifically, what we have called Reformed apologetics has been dominant in Dutch Reformed circles: Abraham Kuyper, Herman Dooyeweerd, Cornelius Van Til, and Alvin Plantinga all had Dutch Reformed roots. Just as Reformed theology emphasizes personal assurance of salvation based on the certainty of God's sovereign purpose and his promise in Scripture, so also Reformed apologetics, especially of the presuppositional type, argues that God's sovereign word in Scripture should be regarded as the basis for certain knowledge.

We have traced the roots of fideism to Martin Luther. Again, not all Lutherans are fideists (Montgomery is Lutheran and the paradigm evidentialist), but most if not all modern fideists have roots in the Lutheran theological tradition. While Luther was the father of the Reformation, his theology was by far the most "Catholic" of the Reformers. The thinker who really laid the foundation for modern fideism was the Lutheran philosopher Søren Kierkegaard. In the twentieth century fideism emerged in developed form as the approach favored by Protestants seeking a middle way between liberalism and conservative evangelicalism, or fundamentalism. Karl Barth is the dominant figure; an American evangelical who favors a moderate fideism is Donald Bloesch. While all the major evangelical traditions affirm justification by faith alone (*sola fide*), in Luther's theology it was the primary principle. Fideists apply the doctrine to apologetics, arguing that a person's faith cannot be based on arguments without implicitly basing justification on one's having had the good sense to accept the arguments.

If integration is regarded as the unification of diverse strands of apologetic thought into one comprehensive system, the diverse theological systems from which the different apologetic approaches arise pose a roadblock to that ideal. Three factors need to be borne in mind here.

First, there is and will be no perfect theology this side of the Second Coming—and at that point theology, as a formal discipline, will give way to immediate knowledge (1 Corinthians 13:9-12). Likewise, the search for a perfect apologetic is the search for something that does not and will not exist. Second, in some cases the different theological systems are talking past one another, and it is possible to bridge such gaps. The same is true for the different apologetic approaches. Third, it is perfectly legitimate to maintain that some of the positions taken in a theological system are simply wrong. For example, most evangelicals will insist that Barth's rejection of biblical inerrancy was unnecessary and misguided. Likewise, criticism of specific positions taken in one or more apologetic approaches is to be expected.

Rather than seek a unified theological and apologetical system that assimilates all four approaches into one “super-approach,” it may be more realistic and fruitful to adopt one of the four and broaden it in light of the other three. Just as Calvinists should articulate Calvinist theology in such a way that it does full justice to the biblical truths emphasized by Arminians, so Reformed apologists should articulate their approach in such a way that it makes full use of the insights and sound arguments originating from the other approaches.

That brings us to the relationship between theology and apologetics. The classical apologist tends to view apologetics as *prolegomena* (establishing the foundations of theology); the evidentialist as *polemics* (defending debated aspects of theology); the Reformed apologist as *part of theology*; and the fideist as *persuasive theology*. We would suggest that there is truth in all these views. The end goal of apologetics is to persuade non-Christians to believe in Christ. What might be called the *science* of apologetics is the branch of theology that studies matters relating to apologetics and develops apologetic arguments. While all of theology can and should inform apologetics, there is a great deal of overlap between the science of apologetics and that of

prolegomena. The *art* or practice of apologetics applies what is learned in the science of apologetics. It seeks to present Christianity persuasively, and so implicitly accepts the entire range of Christian theology as its subject matter. However, in practice apologetics focuses on a limited range of issues—those necessary for a person to be persuaded to believe in Christ and begin his Christian life (including his theological development). In fact, apologetics really is necessary only where objections to Christianity or some aspect of its claims are challenged by the non-Christian.

Apologetics and Philosophy

The different views of philosophy characteristic of the four major approaches are to some extent a reflection of the fact that the meaning and scope of philosophy has changed over the centuries. In ancient and to some extent medieval usage, philosophy was understood largely in the speculative or constructive sense. It included logic, epistemology, ethics, metaphysics, theology, and even some of what is now studied in the natural sciences. This scope has narrowed in modern times with increased specialization, and many twentieth-century philosophers preferred to understand philosophy as a method of analysis and critique, not as a systematic view of reality.

Classical apologetics historically appealed to substantive ideas in ancient Greek philosophy, whether Aristotelian or Platonic, to support Christian ideas. Reformed apologetics, especially in the traditions of Dooyeweerd, Clark, and Van Til, has been extremely critical of classical apologetics for this very reason. The evidentialist attempt to use philosophical methods derived from non-Christian thought, but not the ideas, is likewise rejected because methods of knowing presuppose ideas about knowledge and reality. Reformed apologists urge Christians to

develop a distinctively Christian philosophy on the basis of a distinctively Christian epistemology as an antidote to non-Christian thought. Fideists, while agreeing that non-Christian philosophy should be critiqued rather than used, reject the idea of developing a Christian philosophy, at least as the word *philosophy* is commonly understood.

The problem with these four approaches to philosophy is that they all assume an all-or-nothing point of view. Some ideas in non-Christian philosophy happen to be true—here the classical approach can proceed on safe ground—but others are, of course, wrong, and Reformed apologists and fideists are right to criticize them. Some methods of reasoning may be useful and reliable; others may not be. And apologists of other approaches should be able to agree with fideists that Christianity should not be reduced to a philosophy. Christ calls us to a relationship with God, in which developing a philosophy can be a part of what we do; but the fideist is right in pointing out that no human philosophy can neatly answer all questions or avoid paradox.

Christianity and Science

Various philosophers of science have observed that there are four basic models of the relationship between science and religion, or science and theology. Ian Barbour describes them as conflict, independence, dialogue, and integration. Both scientific materialists and Christian fundamentalists illustrate the conflict model. Karl Barth is one of several thinkers mentioned who view science and religion as independent. Thomas F. Torrance is mentioned among a very diverse group that advocates some kind of dialogue model. Richard Swinburne is a noted Christian philosopher advocating integration of science and religion (or theology).¹ These four models clearly correspond to the Reformed, fideist, classical, and evidentialist approaches to apologetics.

Other philosophers have picked up Barbour's analysis. John Haught rearranged his last two categories somewhat and relabeled the four ways as conflict, contrast, contact, and confirmation.² In their book *Reason and Religious Belief*, Michael Peterson and three other philosophers discuss whether religion and science conflict, are independent, interact in dialogue, or can be integrated.³

In his article "Science and Religion: Towards a New Cartography," David N. Livingstone argues that, broadly speaking, there are "four maps of the science-religion landscape, four ways of thinking about how the 'encounter' can best be plotted."⁴ These four maps are conflict, competition, cooperation, and continuity. The competition map sees the conflict as one between scientists and theologians, not between science and theology (a position similar to classical apologetics). The cooperation map emphasizes the support theology has given to science historically (as in evidentialism). The conflict map sees the conflict as between secularized science and dogmatic theology (a view characteristic of Reformed apologetics). The continuity map sees the debate as really about the ground or basis of cultural values (as in fideism).

The all-or-nothing assumption characteristic in the debate over philosophy in apologetics is evident with science as well. Almost all the apparent conflicts between science and theology are really between what *some* scientists and *some* theologians say. That means, however, some scientific theories really do conflict with some Christian teachings. The fideist is right to suggest that *some* scientific theories deal with questions of a different type than in theology, but this way of handling apparent conflicts goes only so far. For example, the conflict between Genesis and modern science on the age of the universe may be only apparent, due perhaps to more being read into Genesis on the subject than is actually there. On the other hand, the theory that human beings evolved from nonhuman creatures is simply not reconcilable with Genesis.

Where there is real possibility of conflict, there is also real possibility of agreement and therefore of confirmation. The evidentialist is justified, then, in looking for support for the biblical teaching on creation from scientific evidence. But the classical apologist often is wise in exercising some caution in endorsing modern scientific theories as confirmation of Christianity. Indeed, in this respect we would suggest that the classical approach is in the strongest position from which to incorporate the legitimate perspectives of the other approaches.

Revelation and History

One of the clearest areas of disagreement among the four approaches is in their views of history. The classical apologist argues that a right view of history requires *the right worldview*, namely, theism. The evidentialist contends that it requires *the right method*, namely, an empirical method that makes minimal assumptions about what is historically possible. The Reformed apologist contends that it requires *the right revelation*, namely, God's word in Scripture. The fideist rejects the whole idea of faith being based on historical knowledge; Kierkegaard and Barth affirmed that God had acted in history but denied that historical study could lead to the knowledge of God's action in history.

A perspectival view of historical knowledge in relation to faith can surely see some validity in all four approaches. The miracle claims of the Bible ultimately make no sense unless the God of the Bible exists. In this respect both the classical and Reformed apologists are right. But it does not follow that a person must first accept a theistic worldview, or the Bible as God's revelation, to recognize the evidence for biblical miracles as persuasive. Some people are actually persuaded to believe in the God of the Bible on the basis of the historical evidence for the biblical miracles, especially the Resurrection. Such individuals typically are neither

convinced theists nor convinced atheists prior to examining the evidence. Admittedly, avowed atheists or dogmatic agnostics (those who maintain that no one can prove or know that God exists) will resist such evidence and discount it at every turn. But they are just as likely to resist theistic arguments or appeals to biblical authority as they are historical arguments for the biblical miracles.

Evidentialists often claim that the historical or legal evidence methods they use to defend the Resurrection and other miracles are neutral with respect to the theistic worldview. Apologists of other approaches are highly critical of this claim, and with some justice. In the end, any measure of the probability of a miraculous explanation, or any judgment that a miracle is the “best explanation,” must assume or include some assessment of the likelihood of a God who could and would do such a miracle. The evidentialist must therefore ask the nontheist to agree, for the sake of considering the historical argument, to regard the existence of God as a serious possibility—by assigning, say, a 0.5 probability to God’s existence. In other words, the evidentialist argument must run something like this: “The best explanation for this event, if God’s existence is granted as a serious possibility, is a miracle; therefore, this event constitutes evidence for God’s existence.”

Reformed apologists like Van Til also make a valid point when they observe that the methods of historical inquiry or legal evidence presuppose that certain things are so—things that can only be true because God exists. For example, the evidentialist methods assume that the universe is an orderly place in which the laws of probability have meaning and applicability from one situation to another. Such an assumption is true because God has created the universe as an orderly place. But the validity of the Reformed apologist’s point here does not invalidate the empirical argument. One can reason transcendently from the validity of sense perception,

logic, the order of nature, etc., to the existence of God as the One who makes such assumptions intelligible. But one can also reason inductively from the evidence for miracles to the likelihood of a supernatural Being who can do such things.

Finally, the fideist raises a legitimate concern when he observes that belief in the historicity of a miracle is not the same as faith in the God who did the miracle. But surely this point can be, not merely conceded, but wholeheartedly affirmed without abandoning arguments in support of belief in the miracle. The crucial point here is that belief in the historicity of, say, the Resurrection is a *necessary* but not *sufficient* condition for faith. A person who has faith in Jesus to save him from his sins must believe that Jesus really rose from the dead (Romans 10:9-10); a dead man cannot do anything for us. But of course, merely agreeing with this fact does not constitute faith; one must act on this belief by calling on Jesus for salvation (Romans 10:11-13).

Apologetics and Experience

Let us begin with the heart of the fideist perspective: Christian apologetics can be credible only when apologists are credible Christians. A hypocritical apologist does more damage to the reputation of the Christian faith than do hypocrites in most other positions in the church. But credibility includes both moral and intellectual dimensions. Without at all diminishing the importance of the personal side of evangelism and the apologetic value of demonstrating the truth of Christianity through actions and not mere arguments, the case for Christianity cannot be made to rest on Christians. After all, the message of the Christian apologist is that Christ *saves sinners*. Apologists need to be candid about their own failures, their own need for mercy and forgiveness, and at the same time show that faith in Christ makes a difference in their lives.

Presuppositionalists make a valuable point here: no Christian lives completely consistent with his Christian principles (because of the remaining sinful corruption of his human nature), but no non-Christian lives completely consistent with his non-Christian principles either (because of common grace). The atheist who expresses outrage at moral atrocities is acting inconsistently with his principles. Ultimately, experience cannot be the test of truth, although *relevance* to experience can be regarded as one way in which truth can be verified.

While moral failure reflects poorly on the church's message, so does intellectual failure. The anti-intellectual pietism that characterizes so much of evangelical and Pentecostal Christianity today does not serve the church's message well. The church's witness needs to include both piety and apology.

The classical apologist argues that the universality of the religious impulse, the universal desire for transcendence, proves that a transcendent God who can satisfy that desire exists. This argument is not undermined by the failures of Christians. If anything, such failures prove that what all people, including Christians, need is not mere religion, but *God*.

For Further Study

Boa, Kenneth D., and Robert M. Bowman, Jr. *An Unchanging Faith in a Changing World:*

Understanding and Responding to Critical Issues that Christians Face Today. Nashville:

Thomas Nelson, Oliver-Nelson, 1997. Includes chapters discussing how Christians should view science, postmodernism, and other contemporary challenges to the Christian faith.

Erickson, Millard J. *Postmodernizing the Faith: Evangelical Responses to the Challenge of*

Postmodernism. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998. After surveying the views of David Wells,

Thomas Oden, Francis Schaeffer, Stanley Grenz, and others, Erickson proposes that evangelicals responding to postmodernism take their cue largely from Schaeffer.

Groothuis, Douglas. *Truth Decay: Defending Christianity against the Challenge of Postmodernism*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2000. Forceful critique of postmodernism, especially indebted to Francis Schaeffer but also drawing on the thought of apologists of diverse approaches (e.g., C. S. Lewis, J. P. Moreland, and Blaise Pascal).

Pearcey, Nancy R. *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity*. Foreword by Phillip E. Johnson. Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2004. Pearcey, who studied under Schaeffer at L'Abri, is the Francis A. Schaeffer Scholar at the World Journalism Institute and a senior fellow at the Discovery Institute (which promotes Intelligent Design theory). Pearcey's book encourages Christians to foster a biblical worldview, especially in matters of science and culture.

¹Ian G. Barbour, *Religion and Science: Historical and Contemporary Issues* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1997), 77-105.

²John Haught, *Science and Religion: From Conflict to Conversation* (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist, 1995); cf. Barbour, *Religion and Science*, 338 n. 1.

³Michael Peterson, William Hasker, Bruce Reichenbach, and David Basinger, *Reason and Religious Belief: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, 3d ed. (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 246-66.

⁴David N. Livingstone, “Science and Religion: Towards a New Cartography,” *Christian Scholar’s Review* 26 (1997): 270-92 (quote on 271).