

## Part Three

# Evidentialist Apologetics:

## Just the Facts

## 8

### Apologists Who Emphasize Fact

In the modern period American evangelical apologetics has been dominated by the **evidentialist** approach. Its emphasis is on the presentation of Christianity as *factual*—as supportable or verifiable by the examination of evidence. This type of apologetic system, while acknowledging that indisputable and absolutely certain proof of Christianity lies beyond human reach, defends the truth claims of the faith as eminently reasonable. More specifically, evidentialist apologetics argues that these crucial truths can be shown to be highly probable. Rather than defending the faith in two stages, as does classical apologetics (first by defending theism, then by defending specifically Christian claims), evidentialism uses multiple lines of evidence to support Christian theism as a whole.

In this chapter we will examine the roots of evidentialist apologetics and consider briefly the thought of five modern evidentialists. We will give special attention to the apologetic system of the influential contemporary evidentialist John Warwick Montgomery.

### Historical Roots of Evidentialism

Evidentialist apologetics may from one perspective be viewed as a subtype of classical apologetics. Both approaches want to provide reasons for faith that are accessible to non-

Christians. However, the evidentialist approach has over the past two centuries gradually emerged as a significantly different model of apologetics.

## DEFENDING AGAINST DEISM

The impetus to the development of evidentialist apologetics was the rise of deism. By the early eighteenth century modern science seemed to be explaining more and more about the natural world, requiring God as an explanation for things less and less. Copernicus, Galileo, Kepler, Newton—these giants of science had completely changed the way modern people looked at the world. The enormous success of science encouraged many people to believe that eventually everything could be explained naturalistically, thus eliminating the need to appeal to the existence of a supernatural Creator to explain reality as we know it. Deism was, then, in effect a way station on the road to atheism: the deists allowed that God had created the world and initiated the processes governing it but denied that God was involved in the subsequent history of creation or of humanity.

To combat deism apologists began constructing arguments defending the supernaturalism of biblical Christianity that were modeled after the sciences. The idea was essentially to fight fire with fire—to show that a scientific approach to the Christian truth claims would vindicate their rationality. The dominant work of apologetics to appear in this context was Joseph Butler's *Analogy of Religion* (1736). We will return to Butler's apologetic in more detail shortly. Suffice it to say that the book was the most successful and popular work of apologetics for well over a century, and inspired a proliferation of apologetic works emphasizing inductive reasoning analogous to that used in science. Indeed, Butler can arguably be called the father of

evidentialism, even though, as we will see, his apologetic was only a precursor to the evidentialist approach.

## WILLIAM PALEY AND NATURAL THEOLOGY

Butler's approach quickly came to dominate conservative Protestant apologetics, especially in English-speaking countries. As deism flourished and contributed in turn to the skepticism of Kant and Hume, apologists increasingly mounted their defense of Christianity on two fronts. On one front they countered the philosophical objections to the traditional cosmological and ontological arguments for God's existence with detailed, empirically based versions of the teleological argument, or the argument from design. This line of argument was sometimes called physico-theology or, more commonly, **natural theology**.

**William Paley** (1743-1805) presented a classic statement of this theistic argument in his *Natural Theology*.<sup>1</sup> The book begins by introducing and elaborating on Paley's famous analogy of the watch providing evidence of a watchmaker. The bulk of the book consists of a detailed discussion of the arrangement and functions of the various components of the bodies of animals and humans. Evidence from plants, the elements, and astronomy is also adduced. Paley argues that from the "contrivances" evident in nature, one may infer that God is one, personal, intelligent, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, eternal, self-existent, spiritual, and good. In his conclusion he explains the purpose of this line of reasoning. Although he expects that most of his readers already believe in God, he suggests that when that belief is tested, it will be helpful "to find a support in argument for what we had taken upon authority."<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, studying nature in order to find evidence of God enhances our awareness of God's hand in everything around us. Finally Paley urges that the proof of God's existence furnished by natural theology should

encourage us to be open to receiving as true whatever revelation God may choose to impart.

“The true Theist will be the first to listen to *any* credible communication of divine knowledge.”

By “credible” Paley means a revelation “which gives reasonable proof of having proceeded from him.”<sup>3</sup>

For Paley, then, Christianity must prove itself to be based on an authentic revelation. This leads us to the second front of evidentialist apologetics: its appeal to history. Such proof is to be found, according to Paley and other likeminded apologists, especially in historical evidences for the central biblical events. Paley presented a classic statement of these evidences in his 1794 book, *A View of the Evidences of Christianity*.

## THE RISE OF THE LEGAL EVIDENCE MODEL

Paley’s argument in *View* was representative of a century-long trend of apologists developing historical, inductive arguments defending the biblical miracles, and especially the resurrection of Jesus Christ.<sup>4</sup> The epistemological basis for such apologetic arguments was the British empiricism pioneered by the philosopher **John Locke** (1632-1704).<sup>5</sup> Locke’s own approach to apologetics was classical in form,<sup>6</sup> but apologists after him often applied his empiricist approach to general knowledge to the defense of Christianity. Ironically, Locke’s own thought was in some respects appreciated by the deists, since he strongly insisted that revelation claims should be tested by reason. He himself, however, concluded that the miraculous claims of Christianity were true.

In any case, in the eighteenth century Christian apologists adopted and expanded on Locke’s strategy for defending the historical evidence for the resurrection of Jesus. **Thomas Sherlock**’s book *The Tryal of the Witnesses of the Resurrection of Jesus* (1729) set the tone for

what followed. As the title indicates, Sherlock argued for the historicity of the Resurrection on the model of a court trial. The thrust of the apologetic case was simple: an impartial jury, examining the evidence as one would in a court of law, would have to conclude that Jesus rose from the dead. Sherlock argued that the Resurrection was an historical event subject to verification by human investigation, “a thing to be judg’d of by men’s senses.”<sup>7</sup>

Numerous other apologetic writings in the eighteenth century argued in a similar fashion, emphasizing the evidences for Christianity. This legal-evidences apologetic tradition continued throughout the nineteenth century (and continues to this day). Another nineteenth-century advocate of this tradition was **Richard Whately**, an Irish theologian and churchman who sharpened the evidentialist approach in his famous book entitled *Historic Doubts Relative to Napoleon Bonaparte* (1849). The point of this book was that the skepticism of Hume regarding miracles such as the resurrection of Jesus, followed through consistently, would lead to skepticism regarding the existence of Napoleon (who had died in 1821). Whately also contributed a textbook on apologetics, *Introductory Lessons on Christian Evidences* (1850). A third figure of note was **Simon Greenleaf**, a Harvard professor of legal evidences who took Sherlock’s approach to the Resurrection to new heights in *The Testimony of the Evangelists* (1874). Greenleaf’s arguments continue to be read and cited by both scholarly and popular evidentialist apologists to this day, and his book was recently reprinted.

## **Joseph Butler**

The Christian apologist who pioneered the evidentialist approach was **Joseph Butler** (1692-1752). In 1736 Butler published *The Analogy of Religion, Natural and Revealed, to the*

*Constitution and Course of Nature*.<sup>8</sup> It was the most important work contributing to a radical shift in British apologetics away from metaphysical, rationalistic argumentation to a more scientific, empirical form of reasoning. Butler wrote it to refute the deistic claim that, while natural religion was valid, revealed religion—Christianity per se—was beset by various intellectual problems and could not be rationally believed. He argued that the problems raised for the Christian religion are analogous to problems in nature.

It is critical that Butler's argument be seen in its context. Butler used analogy not to prove Christianity true, and not to provide a foundation for revealed religion, but to answer the objection that revealed religion is irrational. In his introduction he explained that his argument deals with *probability*. He admitted that the imperfect character of probabilistic knowledge is irrelevant “to an infinite Intelligence. . . . But to us, probability is the very guide of life” (2). He then proposed to argue, by probabilistic reasoning, “that he who denies the Scripture to have been from God” because of its apparent difficulties might as well, “for the very same reason, deny the world to have been formed by him” (4). Thus Butler sought to show that the deist, who admits the creation of the world by God, is being irrational in denying the divine origin of the biblical revelation—or at the very least “to answer objections” against revelation.

Butler rejected the attempt, typified in French philosopher René Descartes, to develop a Christian worldview “without foundation for the principles which we assume,” a project Butler characterized as “building a world upon hypothesis” (4). Rather, he took for granted the existence of God as “an intelligent Author of Nature, and *natural* Governor of the world” (5), and used arguments from analogy to answer deistic objections against the revealed religion of Christianity (8).

Butler's book is divided into two major parts, dealing with natural religion and revealed religion respectively. The first division corresponds roughly to arguing for a position common to some forms of deism and Christianity, while the second division presents an argument for what is distinctive to Christianity itself. More specifically, Part I deals with life after death, arguing for the rationality of believing that rewards and punishments will be meted out by God based on our conduct in this life. Part II argues from analogies with nature that revelation, like nature, will contain things that seem problematic but are nevertheless true and should be accepted. Butler argued, for example, that the lack of universality in the Christian revelation—the fact that it is not known to all human beings—is not a valid objection against its truth.

Only in chapter 7 of Part II did Butler offer positive evidences and arguments for Christianity. He began by arguing that biblical history should be presumed accurate in the absence of evidence to the contrary. He pointed out that Paul's epistles offer substantial evidence for the gospel, independent of the other apostles. And he noted that Christianity appears fairly unique in having been founded on the belief in miracles (in contrast especially to Islam, which does not view Muhammad as a miraculous figure). While admitting that none of these arguments is a proof by itself, Butler averred that taken cumulatively, they form a strong proof. Another line of evidence for the truth of Christianity is the fact of fulfilled biblical prophecy. Butler anticipated and responded to the objection that we are presently unable to understand all of biblical prophecy, pointing out that our inability in this matter does not invalidate our conclusion that some biblical prophecies have been fulfilled.

Butler was therefore frank in admitting that problems face the Christian who wishes to understand everything in the Bible and in Christian faith. But in his estimation these problems are minor and do not undermine the truth of Christianity. Rather, he found it remarkable that the

Bible, written so long ago by so many writers over such a long period of time, is not viewed as more problematic than it is—that it has not been completely refuted and set aside.

Butler concluded *The Analogy of Religion* with a chapter emphasizing that he had been answering objections, not providing absolute proof. In fact, he wrote, “in this treatise I have argued upon the principles of others, not my own; and I have omitted what I think true, and of the utmost importance, because by others thought unintelligible, or not true” (249). By arguing on the principles of others Butler meant that, for the sake of argument, he had contended that even if the deists or other critics of Christianity were allowed certain principles or assumptions, their objections against the Christian revelation were still without force. He admitted that his positive arguments for Christian beliefs fell short of being demonstrative, but at the same time he thought they were “impossible . . . to be evaded, or answered” (251). “Those who believe will here find the scheme of Christianity cleared of objections, and the evidence of it in a peculiar manner strengthened: those who do not believe, will at least be shown the absurdity of all attempts to prove Christianity false” (251-252).

We conclude by emphasizing four points about Butler’s method. First, his approach was empirical, not rationalistic, and the character of his conclusions was that of probability, not certainty. His dictum that “probability is the very guide of life” (2) is a classic expression of the evidentialist perspective. Finite human beings cannot expect to gain absolutely certain knowledge of the past, of the course of nature, or of any empirical reality.

Second, Butler employed this empirical, inductive, and probabilistic approach in a *defensive* mode of apologetic reasoning. His goal was not to prove Christianity true, but to prove that deistic charges that Christianity was irrational were unfounded.

Third, Butler candidly stated that he was attempting to respond to the deists on their own ground—“I have argued upon the principles of others, not my own” (249). Thus, one should not conclude that Butler was claiming that Christianity requires an empirical defense or that its truth cannot be accepted on other grounds.

Fourth, Butler assumed the existence of a God, an assumption he could make because his opponents granted it. He was therefore not claiming to mount a defense of Christianity that would withstand the scrutiny of the hard-line atheist.

By contrast, the main opposing worldview for twentieth-century evidentialists was indeed atheism, or at least some form of agnosticism or skepticism. In the remainder of this chapter we will profile the apologetic thought of four leading evidentialists from the twentieth century.

## James Orr

James Orr (1844-1913)<sup>9</sup> was a Scottish pastor and scholar who eventually became a noted professor of apologetics and theology in Glasgow during the early part of the twentieth century. His books were highly successful and popular defenses of Christian belief among evangelicals in English-speaking countries around the world.<sup>10</sup>

In his classic apologetic book, *The Christian View of God and the World as Centering in the Incarnation*, Orr sought to defend the Christian worldview by appealing to the facts. Orr, who endorsed Butler’s argument in *The Analogy of Religion* (90),<sup>11</sup> emphasized that faith in Christ commits the believer to a whole theology and worldview that need to be defended: “He who with his whole heart believes in Jesus as the Son of God is thereby committed to much else

besides. He is committed to a view of God, to a view of man, to a view of sin, to a view of Redemption, to a view of the purpose of God in creation and history, to a view of human destiny, found only in Christianity” (4).

Orr proposes to defend the Christian view of all these matters by an appeal to history, for it brings “all the issues into court at once. The verdict of history is at once a judgment on the answers which have been given to the theological question; on their agreement with the sum-total of the facts of Christianity; on the methods of exegesis and New Testament criticism by which they have been supported; on their power to maintain themselves against rival views; on how far the existence of Christianity is dependent on them, or bound up with them” (43-44). Note Orr’s use of the courtroom metaphor popularized by apologists like Sherlock and Greenleaf; he speaks of bringing “issues into court” and of reaching a “verdict.” The imitation of legal argument is typical of the evidentialist approach.

Contrary to a common stereotype of the evidentialist approach, Orr did not maintain that Christianity was to be proved by an appeal to bare or brute facts. The facts support Christianity because they are set in a context that includes speech expressive of the meaning of the facts:

The gospel is no mere proclamation of “eternal truths,” but the discovery of a saving purpose of God for mankind, executed in time. But the doctrines are the interpretation of the facts. The facts do not stand blank and dumb before us, but have a voice given to them, and a meaning put into them. They are accompanied by living speech, which makes their meaning clear. . . . [T]he facts of Christianity, rightly understood and interpreted, not only yield special doctrines, but compel us to develop out of them a determinate “Weltanschauung.” (22-23)

In Orr's view, belief in God and belief in Christ "stand or fall together" (65). "A genuine Theism can never long remain a bare Theism" (76). To be complete and stable, theism, or belief in God, must be held in the context of "the entire Christian view" provided in the biblical revelation (77). This revelation is absolutely necessary, because reason on its own cannot arrive at a Christian worldview. Reason can, however, give "abundant corroboration and verification" to the truth of the Christian revelation. This verification, while perhaps not demonstrative, at least is sufficient to show "that the Christian view of God is not *unreasonable*" (111). Orr is confident that the facts, properly presented, can be used to show that objections to Christianity are without merit. "The reason why Christianity cannot be waved out of the world at the bidding of sceptics simply is, that the facts are too strong for the attempt. The theories which would explain Christianity away make shipwreck on the facts" (234).

## **Clark H. Pinnock**

Clark Pinnock is a well-known proponent of evidentialist apologetics whose approach to the defense of the Christian faith has been unusually diverse.<sup>12</sup> His *Set Forth Your Case* focuses on the philosophical and cultural movements that have shaped twentieth-century thought in order to expose the inadequacy of non-Christian worldviews. In this book he decries rationalism and mysticism and espouses the epistemological alternative of empirical verifiability. Thus his apologetic system centers on the historical resurrection of Christ and the historical reliability of the Bible. Pinnock challenges the non-Christian "to suspend his prejudice against Christianity for the time it takes to examine fairly the evidence for the Christian faith, to take up a proven method for ascertaining the truth, the empirical method, and apply it to the biblical records."<sup>13</sup>

Pinnock is confident that the person who does this will find a strong probable case for the truth of Christianity.

Pinnock's *Live Now, Brother* details the metaphysical and moral crisis in human values and offers as a solution the concept of grounding values in a supernatural revelation. He then presents the person and work of Christ, with special emphasis on the Resurrection as an historical fact to authenticate the Bible's revelatory claims. *A Case for Faith* offers a "comprehensive evidential picture" by developing five circles of evidence for the truth of the Christian faith: the pragmatic basis for faith (existential needs), the experiential basis (religious intuitions), the cosmic basis (rational scrutiny), the historical basis (historical evidence), and the community basis (moral necessities).

Like other evidentialists, Pinnock uses several lines of evidence as "reasonable probabilities" that combine together like "argumentative links in a legal brief" or strands in a rope.<sup>14</sup> He offers yet another metaphor: "Like legs of a table, each shaft of evidence does its part to support the weight of the case for Christianity. Because we are all culturally conditioned in different ways, it is inevitable that some of us will be more impressed with one evidential approach than another." Pinnock acknowledges that the knowledge gained through empiricism is only probable, but maintains that one cannot wait "until all uncertainty disappears before dealing with ultimate issues."<sup>15</sup> Probability, he writes, indeed falls short of the absolute certainty of mathematics, but "it is the sort of knowledge we are able to operate on in all the affairs of life, and it is adequate to provide us with a sound basis for the trustful certainty of faith."<sup>16</sup> Pinnock supports this position in contradistinction to presuppositionalism in "The Philosophy of Christian Evidences," a chapter in *Jerusalem and Athens*, where he writes that "a philosophy of Christian

evidences which employs theistic argument and historical evidence is needed, lest the gospel be discredited as a grand and unwarranted assumption.”<sup>17</sup>

Another major aspect of Pinnock’s apologetic approach is a defense of biblical revelation, inspiration, and hermeneutics in view of the challenges of modern theology and higher criticism. For Pinnock the defense of the Bible as revelation must be carried out inductively, by examining the evidences and building up a doctrine of Scripture from the empirical facts about the Bible, as well as from biblical statements about inspiration. In his earlier works he utilized this inductivist approach to defend the traditional evangelical doctrine of biblical inerrancy.<sup>18</sup> In his later works he moved away from this conservative position and argued for a view of Scripture as “inerrant” only in a very loose sense. According to Pinnock, the doctrine of strict biblical inerrancy is flawed because it is based on deductions from the doctrine of inspiration rather than on an inductive study of what the Bible says about itself and of the actual phenomena of the biblical text.<sup>19</sup>

## **John Warwick Montgomery**

John Warwick Montgomery’s numerous books and articles, years of teaching on the graduate level in the United States and France, and public debates with men like Bishop James Pike, Thomas J. Altizer, and Joseph Fletcher have earned him a prominent place as a Christian theologian, historian, lawyer, and apologist.<sup>20</sup> Montgomery influenced Josh McDowell, through whom evidentialist apologetics gained a wide popular audience. In the 1970s and 1980s Montgomery was the leading advocate of the evidentialist approach to apologetics.

Montgomery's apologetic system is strongly empirical, with an emphasis on the historical evidence for the resurrection of Jesus. He regards apologetics as a kind of evangelism designed to overcome objections to the saving message of the Gospels. He seeks to do this by grounding Christianity on historically verifiable truths beginning with a demonstration of the reliability of the Gospel records as primary historical documents. He calls historians to suspend disbelief and honestly examine the evidence without prejudging it on the basis of antisupernatural bias. This line of argumentation leads to the conclusion that Jesus' resurrection proves his divine claims to be true. Montgomery acknowledges that this kind of argument can provide only probable, not certain, conclusions, and that historical arguments, while they may provide objective grounding, do not necessarily produce subjective belief.

One of Montgomery's most recent articulations of his evidentialist apologetic was in an essay entitled "The Jury Returns: A Juridical Defense of Christianity."<sup>21</sup> He contrasts the appeals to self-validating faith experiences in Eastern religions with the factual verifiability of the Christian faith: "Christianity, on the other hand, declares that the truth of its absolute claims rests squarely on certain historical facts, open to ordinary investigation. These facts relate essentially to the man Jesus, His presentation of Himself as God in human flesh, and His resurrection from the dead as proof of His deity" (319).

Whereas elsewhere he employed "standard, accepted techniques of historical analysis" to argue for the truth of these facts, in this essay Montgomery urges the application of specifically "legal reasoning and the law of evidence" to the apologetic task (320). Recall the extensive use of the courtroom model in evidentialist apologetics going back to Thomas Sherlock and Simon Greenleaf and echoed by James Orr. Montgomery's case for Christianity begins with the reliability of the New Testament writings as historical documents. He quotes with approval

Greenleaf and other legal scholars in support of the conclusion that “the competence of the New Testament documents would be established in any court of law” (322).

Given the authenticity and competency of the New Testament documents, Montgomery then defends their testimony to Jesus Christ. He cites a fourfold test for exposing or determining perjury from a legal text: (a) internal defects in the witness himself, that is, anything about the witness that would undermine his credibility; (b) external defects in the witness himself, that is, motives or reasons why the witness may be lying in this instance; (c) internal defects in the testimony itself, that is, inconsistencies in the witness’s statements; and (d) external defects in the testimony itself, that is, inconsistencies between the witness’s statements and other facts or testimonies from other witnesses.<sup>22</sup>

Montgomery applies this fourfold test within an evidentialist approach, and presents four reasons for concluding that the New Testament documents cannot be impugned with providing false testimony. (a) There is no reason to regard the New Testament writers as untrustworthy. (b) They had no motive to lie about Jesus, and indeed suffered greatly for their testimony to Jesus. (c) The Gospel accounts differ enough to be regarded as independent yet are not inconsistent with one another. (d) The New Testament accounts have been abundantly confirmed by archaeological and historical study (324-326).

Montgomery extends the juridical model even further. Had the New Testament writers tried to lie about Jesus, Montgomery argues that they would not have gotten away with it. The Jewish religious leaders function as “hostile witnesses” because of their inability to answer the apostles’ claim that Jesus had risen from the dead (327, 330). Montgomery denies the charge that the New Testament writings are to be rejected as “hearsay”—secondhand information is often accepted in both civil and criminal cases, where that information can be evaluated in some way.

And he points out that the New Testament contains statements indicating that the writers are offering eyewitness testimony (330).

The next stage in Montgomery's apologetic is his argument for the resurrection of Jesus as an historical event. We will discuss the evidentialist argument for the Resurrection in some detail in chapter 10. Here we draw attention to certain key elements of Montgomery's presentation of that argument. The core is the "missing body" argument. If Jesus' body didn't rise from the dead, then someone must have stolen it (because an occupied tomb would have brought the Resurrection story to a grinding halt). But the Roman authorities would not steal the body because that might contribute to unrest; the Jewish authorities would not steal it because that would undermine their religious influence; and the disciples would not steal it and then lie about Jesus rising from the dead because that would get them into trouble with the Roman and Jewish authorities (precisely for the reasons just mentioned). By process of elimination, then, no one stole the body, and therefore the body must have been raised from the dead (331).

Admittedly such fantastic alternative explanations as Schonfield's *Passover Plot* (according to which Jesus arranged to be crucified and managed to survive the ordeal long enough to convince his disciples he had risen) are barely possible. "But legal reasoning operates on *probabilities*, not possibilities" (332). The fact that legal reasoning cannot produce absolute demonstrative proof is not a valid objection, even though if Jesus did rise from the dead we are expected to place absolute faith in him. In matters of fact, probability is unavoidable. "And the law in every land redistributes property and takes away liberty (if not life) by verdicts and judgments rooted in the examination of evidence and probabilistic standards of proof" (323).

Given that Jesus rose from the dead, can this fact alone establish the truth of Jesus' claims to deity? Montgomery stoutly answers in the affirmative, arguing that "the very nature of

legal argument (judgments rendered on the basis of factual verdicts) rests on the ability of facts to speak for themselves” (335). He points out that the Resurrection did not occur in a factual vacuum, but was accompanied by Jesus’ own explanation of its significance as the miraculous act of God.

Not only can Jesus’ resurrection alone establish his deity, it can establish the existence of the Deity in the first place. The existence of God “then becomes the proper inference from Jesus’ resurrection as he himself explained it—not a prior metaphysical hurdle to jump in order to arrive at the proper historical and evidential interpretation of that event” (336). This last comment is aimed at classical apologetics, which argues that the existence of God needs to be established before trying to show the truth and meaning of Jesus’ resurrection. Montgomery, in fact, was one of the first evidentialists to self-consciously distinguish his apologetic method from the classical approach.

Although Montgomery is best known for his historical evidentialism, he has written very widely in apologetics and theology. One aspect of his apologetics that is not often noticed is his interest in a “literary apologetic” for the Christian gospel. Such an apologetic, he has argued, can draw from such fiction as *The Lord of the Rings* as pointers “to the fulfillment of mankind’s longings in the factuality of the Gospel Story.”<sup>23</sup>

## **Richard Swinburne**

The diversity of evidentialist apologetics would not be well represented without some notice of the work of Richard Swinburne. From 1977 to 1981 Swinburne, a British philosopher, published a trilogy of books in defense of theism.<sup>24</sup> In 1989 he launched a four-book series

defending specifically Christian beliefs.<sup>25</sup> These seven books constitute the most sophisticated evidentialist defense of Christianity to appear so far. Swinburne's plan, as he has explained, was "to use the criteria of modern natural science, analysed with the careful rigour of modern philosophy, to show the meaningfulness and justification of Christian theology."<sup>26</sup> In 1996 he published *Is There a God?* in which he offered a more popular-level statement of his apologetic. Swinburne summarizes his argument at the beginning of this book:

Scientists, historians, and detectives observe data and proceed thence to some theory about what best explains the occurrence of these data. We can analyse the criteria which they use in reaching a conclusion that a certain theory is better supported by the data than a different theory—that is, more likely, on the basis of those data, to be true. Using those same criteria, we find that the view that there is a God explains everything we observe, not just some narrow range of data. It explains the fact that there is a universe at all, that scientific laws operate within it, that it contains conscious animals and humans with very complex intricately organized bodies, that we have abundant opportunities for developing ourselves and the world, as well as the more particular data that humans report miracles and have religious experiences. In so far as scientific causes and laws explain some of these things (and in part they do), these very causes and laws need explaining, and God's action explains them. The very same criteria which scientists use to reach their own theories lead us to move beyond those theories to a creator God who sustains everything in existence.<sup>27</sup>

Swinburne begins his case for Christianity with the question of the coherence of the Christian conception of God,<sup>28</sup> because if the notion of God is incoherent, there is no point in asking if there is enough evidence to justify belief in God's existence. His goal in this stage of his

apologetic is to defend theism from a priori objections that would disallow in advance the marshaling of evidence for God's existence.<sup>29</sup>

Although Swinburne defends a form of theism, he finds it necessary to reject certain aspects of traditional or classical theism that he finds incoherent. Most significantly, he argues that God knows only what it is logically possible to know, and hence that God does not know all future events that depend on the free decisions of creatures. In keeping with this view, he denies that God is a "timeless" being, preferring to view God as everlasting.<sup>30</sup>

The most important fact about God's nature for Swinburne's argument is that, if God exists, he is what he is necessarily or essentially; his existence and nature are not dependent on anyone or anything else. "If, as theism maintains, there is a God who is essentially and eternally omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly free, then he will be the ultimate brute fact which explains everything else."<sup>31</sup>

Swinburne's central apologetic argument is that the existence of this God is "significantly more probable than not."<sup>32</sup> He contends that the existence of God provides a simple, powerful explanation for what we already know.

It remains passing strange that there exists anything at all. But if there is to exist anything, it is far more likely to be something with the simplicity of God than something like the universe with all its characteristics crying out for explanation without there being God to explain it. . . . The experience of so many men in their moments of religious vision corroborates what nature and history shows to be quite likely—that there is a God who made and sustains man and the universe.<sup>33</sup>

Swinburne admits that it is always possible to challenge this or that element of his or any other theist's argument. He points out, though, that this is also true in science, history, and

politics. “But life is short and we have to act on the basis of what such evidence as we have had time to investigate shows on balance to be probably true.”<sup>34</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Although the five apologists profiled in this chapter are all identified with the evidential tradition pioneered by Joseph Butler, some distinct differences among them should not be overlooked. John Warwick Montgomery is perhaps the most thoroughly empiricist or inductivist of the five, by which we mean that inductive argument or factual investigation plays the most comprehensive role in his apologetic. He is also the only one of the five who is overtly critical of the classical apologetic tradition and its reliance on deductive argument. Yet even Montgomery rejects a pure empiricism.

James Orr, writing before the advent of distinctively Reformed apologetics, developed an approach that in some respects anticipated the presuppositionalist form of Reformed apologetics. Yet at its core, Orr’s method is evidentialist. We will discuss the relationship of Orr’s apologetic to Reformed apologetics in Part Four.

Evidentialism is, by its nature, rather eclectic. As Montgomery once remarked, “But just as there are numerous ways to skin a cat, so there are numerous ways to defend Christianity.”<sup>35</sup> Evidentialists freely combine multiple lines of reasoning, often from widely different disciplines, in support of the Christian faith. Thus they often recast arguments from other apologetic approaches as elements in an overall evidential case for the truth of Christianity. Each evidentialist also tends to emphasize certain types of evidences that are of special interest to him,

and some evidentialists are more eclectic than others. Thus Montgomery emphasizes historical evidences while Pinnock emphasizes the importance of a variety of types of evidences.

In the following chapters we will examine the evidential approach in greater detail, drawing on the writings of these five apologists and others who follow in the evidentialist tradition.

## For Further Study

Abraham, William J. “Cumulative Case Arguments for Christian Theism.” In *The Rationality of Religious Belief: Essays in Honour of Basil Mitchell*, ed. William J. Abraham and Steven W. Holtzer, 17-37. Oxford: Clarendon, 1987. Exposition of Basil Mitchell’s form of evidentialism, with some comparisons to Swinburne; for advanced readers.

Montgomery, John Warwick, ed. *Christianity for the Tough-Minded: Essays in Support of an Intellectually Defensible Religious Commitment*. Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1973. Essays by Montgomery, James R. Moore, Rod Rosenblatt, and others advocating an evidentialist apologetic and taking on such wide-ranging subjects as situation ethics, Buddhism, LSD, and the Resurrection.

Wainwright, William J. “The Nature of Reason: Locke, Swinburne, and Edwards.” In *Reason and the Christian Religion: Essays in Honour of Richard Swinburne*, edited by Alan G. Padgett, 91-118. Oxford: Clarendon, 1994. Fruitful comparison of Swinburne’s evidentialism with the thought of John Locke and Jonathan Edwards; for advanced readers.

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<sup>1</sup>Paley's work has been reprinted many times; we refer here to William Paley, *Natural Theology: or, Evidences of the Existence and Attributes of the Deity, Collected from the Appearances of Nature* (1802; reprint, Houston: St. Thomas Press, 1972).

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, 394.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 398.

<sup>4</sup>See especially William Lane Craig, *The Historical Argument for the Resurrection of Jesus During the Deist Controversy*, Texts and Studies in Religion 23 (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 1985).

<sup>5</sup>Locke's epistemology is developed in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689); a convenient edition is found in Great Books of the Western World, vol. 35 (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1952), 83-395. His chief apologetic work was *The Reasonableness of Christianity: As Delivered in the Scriptures* (1695); a recent edition is that edited by John C. Higgins-Biddle, Clarendon Edition of the Works of John Locke (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998). A valuable collection of Locke's religious thought is Victor Nuovo, ed., *John Locke: Writings on Religion* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

<sup>6</sup>For a brief summary of Locke's apologetics, see Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 22-23. Important studies and reference works include Richard Ashcraft, "Faith and Knowledge in Locke's Philosophy," in *John Locke: Problems and Perspectives*, ed. John W. Yolton (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1969); Vere Chappell, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Locke* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Nicholas Wolterstorff, *John Locke and the*

*Ethics of Belief*, Cambridge Studies in Religion and Critical Thought, vol. 2 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Alan P. F. Sell, *John Locke and the Eighteenth-Century Divines* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1997); John Dunn, *Locke: A Very Short Introduction*, updated ed. (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2003). A recent significant work on Locke's political philosophy with insight into his philosophy of religion is Jeremy Waldron, *God, Locke, and Equality: Christian Foundations in Locke's Political Thought* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

<sup>7</sup>Thomas Sherlock, *The Tryal of the Witnesses of the Resurrection of Jesus* (London: J. Roberts, 1729), 98. This book is reprinted in its entirety in John Warwick Montgomery, ed., *Jurisprudence: A Book of Readings* (Strasbourg, France: International Scholarly Publishers, 1974), 339-449 (the quote appears on 436).

<sup>8</sup>Quotations in this section are taken from Joseph Butler, *The Analogy of Religion*, Introduction by Ernest C. Mossner; *Milestones of Thought* (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1961). Butler's *Analogy* has gone through numerous editions. Works on Butler include Ernest Campbell Mossner, *Bishop Butler and the Age of Reason: A Study in the History of Thought* (New York: Macmillan, 1936); S. A. Grave, "Able and Fair Reasoning of Butler's *Analogy*," *Church History* 47 (1978): 298-307; James Rurak, "Butler's *Analogy*: A Still Interesting Synthesis of Reason and Revelation," *Anglican Theological Review* 62 (1980): 365-81; Ted Honderich, *Butler, Arguments of the Philosophers* (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986); Thomas M. Gregory, "Apologetics before and after Butler," in *Pressing Toward the Mark: Essays Commemorating Fifty Years of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, ed. Charles G. Dennison and Richard C. Gamble (Philadelphia: Committee for the Historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian

Church, 1986), 351-367; Christopher Cunliffe, ed., *Joseph Butler's Moral and Religious Thought: Tercentenary Essays* (Oxford: Clarendon; New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

<sup>9</sup>Works on James Orr include Glen G. Scorgie, "James Orr," in *Handbook of Evangelical Theologians*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 12-25; Scorgie, *A Call for Continuity: The Theological Contribution of James Orr* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1988); Robert D. Knudsen, "Apologetics and History," in *Life Is Religion: Essays in Honor of H. Evan Runner*, ed. Henry Vander Goot (Saint Catharines, Ont.: Paideia Press, 1981), 119-33.

Knudsen's essay analyzes Orr's thought from a Reformed apologetic perspective.

<sup>10</sup>His best-known book was originally entitled *The Christian View of God and the World as Centering in the Incarnation*. The standard edition is *The Christian View of God and the World*, corrected reprint of 3rd ed. (New York: Scribner, 1897; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948; Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1989). His other books include *The Faith of a Modern Christian* (New York: Hodder & Stoughton, 1910); *The Faith that Persuades* (reprint, New York: Harper & Row, 1977); *The Resurrection of Jesus* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1909; reprint, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1965); and *The Virgin Birth of Christ* (New York: Scribner, 1907).

<sup>11</sup>All parenthetical references in this section are to Orr, *Christian View of God and the World*.

<sup>12</sup>Pinnock's works include *A Defense of Biblical Infallibility*, International Library of Philosophy and Theology (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1967; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1972); *Set Forth Your Case* (Nutley, N.J.: Craig Press, 1968; reprint, Chicago: Moody, 1971); *Live Now, Brother* (Chicago: Moody, 1972), reprinted as *Are There Any Answers?* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1976); *A Case for Faith* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1987), previously published as *Reason Enough: A Case for the Christian Faith* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1980); *The*

*Scripture Principle* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984); and *Tracking the Maze: An Evangelical Perspective on Modern Theology* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990). One of his most important later articles related to apologetics was “Assessing Barth for Apologetics,” in *How Karl Barth Changed My Mind*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 162-165. Works about Pinnock include Peter J. Steen, review of *Set Forth Your Case*, in *Westminster Theological Journal* 31 (1968-1969): 101-109; Nicholas Wolterstorff, “Is Reason Enough? A Review Essay,” *Reformed Review* (April 1981): 20-24; Robert M. Price, “Clark H. Pinnock: Conservative and Contemporary,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 60 (1988): 157-83; and Robert V. Rakestraw, “Clark H. Pinnock,” in *Baptist Theologians*, ed. Timothy George and David S. Dockery (Nashville: Broadman, 1990), 660-84.

<sup>13</sup>Pinnock, *Set Forth Your Case*, 86.

<sup>14</sup>Pinnock, *A Case for Faith*, 18, 120.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>17</sup>Pinnock, “The Philosophy of Christian Evidences,” in *Jerusalem and Athens: Critical Discussions on the Philosophy and Apologetics of Cornelius Van Til*, ed. E. R. Geehan (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1971), 420-25, quote on 425.

<sup>18</sup>Notably *A Defense of Biblical Infallibility*; “The Inspiration of Scripture and the Authority of Jesus Christ,” in *God’s Inerrant Word: An International Symposium on the Trustworthiness of Scripture*, ed. John Warwick Montgomery (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1974), 201-218.

<sup>19</sup>Pinnock, *The Scripture Principle*, especially 57-59. On Pinnock’s views on inerrancy, see Rex A. Koivisto, “Clark Pinnock and Inerrancy: A Change in Truth Theory?” *Journal of the*

*Evangelical Theological Society* 24 (1981): 138-51; and Pinnock, “A Response to Rex Koivisto,” 153-55, in the same volume.

<sup>20</sup>Montgomery’s most important apologetics works are *The Shape of the Past: A Christian Response to Secular Philosophies of History* (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1962; reprint, 1975); *History and Christianity* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1971; reprint, Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1986); *Where Is History Going? Essays in Support of the Historical Truth of the Christian Revelation* (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1969); *The Suicide of Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1970); *How Do We Know There Is a God?* (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1973); and *Faith Founded on Fact: Essays in Evidential Apologetics* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1978). He is also the editor of *Christianity for the Tough-minded: Essays in Support of an Intellectually Defensible Religious Commitment* (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1973) and *Evidence for Faith: Deciding the God Question*, Cornell Symposium on Evidential Apologetics, 1986 (Dallas: Probe Books, 1991; distributed by Word Publishing).

<sup>21</sup>In *Evidence for Faith*, 319-41; parenthetical references in this section are to this essay.

<sup>22</sup>Patrick L. McCloskey and Ronald L. Schoenberg, *Criminal Law Advocacy*, vol. 5 (New York: Matthew Bender, 1984), section 12.01 (b).

<sup>23</sup>Montgomery, “Introduction: The Apologists of Eucatastrophe,” in *Myth, Allegory, and Gospel: An Interpretation of J. R. R. Tolkien/C. S. Lewis/G. K. Chesterton/Charles Williams*, ed. Montgomery (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1974), 28, 30.

<sup>24</sup>Richard Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism*, Clarendon Library of Logic and Philosophy (Oxford: Clarendon, 1977; rev. ed., 1993); *The Existence of God* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1979; rev. ed., 1991); and *Faith and Reason* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1981).

<sup>25</sup>Swinburne, *Responsibility and Atonement* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989); *Revelation: From Metaphor to Analogy* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992); *The Christian God* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994); and *Providence and the Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998).

<sup>26</sup>Swinburne, "Intellectual Autobiography," in *Reason and the Christian Religion: Essays in Honour of Richard Swinburne*, ed. Alan G. Padgett (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 8.

<sup>27</sup>Swinburne, *Is There a God?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 2.

<sup>28</sup>In *Is There a God*, chapter 1 (3-19), Swinburne summarizes the argument of his book *The Coherence of Theism*.

<sup>29</sup>Swinburne, *Coherence of Theism*, 295.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, 176, 220-221; cf. *Existence of God*, 91-92; *Is There a God*, 8-9.

<sup>31</sup>Swinburne, *Is There a God*, 19.

<sup>32</sup>Swinburne, "Intellectual Autobiography," 10.

<sup>33</sup>Swinburne, *Existence of God*, 288-289, 291.

<sup>34</sup>Swinburne, *Is There a God*, 140.

<sup>35</sup>Montgomery, "Introduction: The Apologists of Eucatastrophe," in *Myth, Allegory, and Gospel*, 17.